

## Disadvantaged Youth in Austria

The aim of this article is to analyse the problems and strategies of interventions concerning disadvantaged youth in Austria. At first the progression of important indicators associated with disadvantaged youth will be described and consequently an attempt of an explanation why Austria is in a comparatively privileged situation will be made in the second part of this article. Nevertheless there are also specific challenges for Austria, which are worked out in the third part following the previous mentioned topics. There are diverse intervention strategies and measures targeted towards this challenges. The intervention strategy is discussed and two examples of good-practice measures are described in the forth part. All this will lead to conclusions and recommendations in the fifth and last part of this article.

The results presented here on the one hand are built upon empirical and on structural analyses. Therefore a broad range of policy papers and evaluation studies was analysed and calculations were made using the Labour Force Survey and other labour market and educational statistics. On the other hand side an expert discussion with representatives of relevant institutions in the context of disadvantaged youth (1) forms an integral part in the methodological design of this study. Whenever the text refers to the 'actor's perspective' the results of this discussion covering the specific situation of and necessary policy measures for disadvantaged youth in Austria are meant.

**Key words:** disadvantaged youth, dual vocational training, assessment of reports and statistical information, policy measures, good practices

### 1. Problem situation in a macro perspective

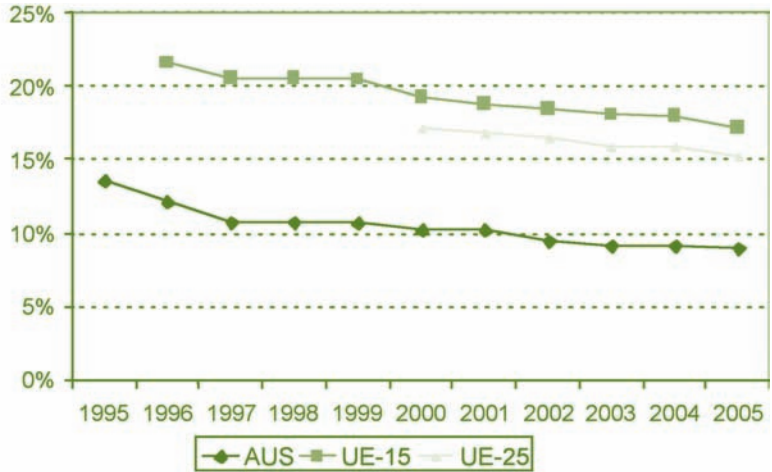
Concerning disadvantaged youth there are two EU key indicators, which demonstrate the extent of the problem, namely the ratio of early school leavers and the youth unemployment rate. Both will be discussed in this section and both will show a relatively privileged situation of Austria at a first glance.

Regarding the EU key indicator of early school leaving (ratio of population aged 18-24 years not in education and without graduation above ISCED-2-level) Austria has a ratio of 9% in the year 2005, which equals half of the European wide average (EU-15: 17,2%, EU-25: 15,2%) and less than a third compared to Spain (31% in 2005). Regarding the periodic change of this ratio there has been a remarkable decrease in the mid 1990s and nearly a stagnation of the ratio since the end of the 1990s. Whereas the Austrian ratio of early school leavers remains on a rather constant level since 1999 (-1,7%), the European ratio dropped from 20,5% in 1999 to 17,2% in 2005. Even though the Lisbon target of at most 10% early school leavers by 2010 has been reached yet in Austria, a rather constant amount of 8.000 young people are leaving the educational system without any adequate qualification every year.

(1) Austrian Chamber of Labour, Public Employment Service, Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations, Austrian Trade Union Federation, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, Educational Executive Board Vienna and Federation of Austrian Industry.

The development of this indicator over time is demonstrated in the following chart:

**Figure 1:**  
Ratio of 18-24 years old not in Education and without Graduation above ISCED 2 (Early School Leavers)

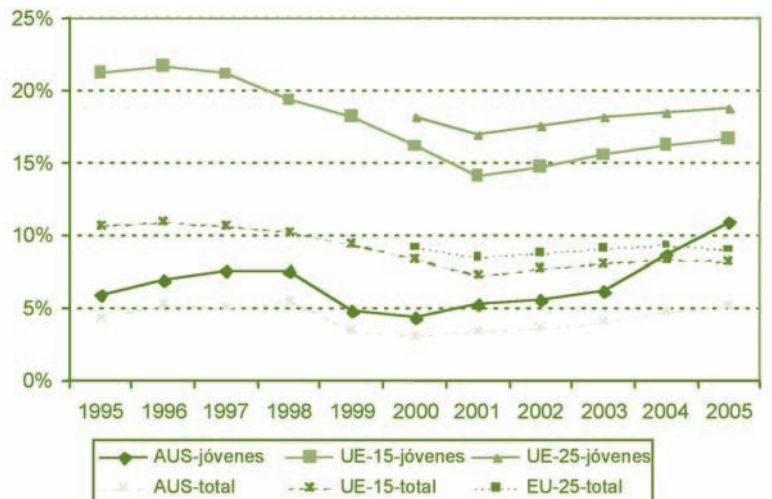


Source: EUROSTAT, Graphics: Steiner - IHS

The youth unemployment rate, which is the second indicator for analysing the scale of problems concerning disadvantaged youth, also implies the assumption that Austria is confronted with a lower level of problems. In 2005 the youth unemployment rate (15-24 years) in Austria reached 10,9%, while the average European rate is considerably higher (EU-15: 16,7%, EU-25: 18,7%). The following chart clarifies that also in Austria the youth is more effected by unemployment than the whole labour force, like it is typical for Europe the youth unemployment rate equals the double compared to the overall unemployment rate.

Looking at the periodic change there has been a more intensive increase of youth unemployment in Austria than in the European average, therefore the gap closes and the specific situation in Austria is minimised. One reason for that can be found in the under average weak economic

**Figure 2:**  
Youth Unemployment Rate in Comparison



ILO-Definitions. Source: EUROSTAT, Graphics: Steiner - IHS

development in Austria. The strong rise of youth unemployment in Austria from 2003 to 2004 compared to a rather moderate rise in EU-average can hardly be interpreted because the concept of the LFS data collection in Austria was changed in the meantime. (2) But as the closing of the gap continues from 2004 to 2005 it can be expected, that Austria might lose its rather privileged position concerning youth unemployment.

Despite of some indications of increasing problems concerning disadvantaged youth even in Austria, the extent of the problems is on a lower level compared to the European average. Therefore Austria in some respect can be seen as a comparatively successful country in Europe. Task of the following statements is to find an explanation for this positioning of Austria.

## 2. Explanation approach for Austria's position

Basic condition for a generally smooth transition from education to employment is doubtlessly a positive economic development in connection with an appropriate need for qualified labour force. Due to the fact that economic development in Austria is not that different to the European one the explanation for Austria's comparatively privileged position concerning disadvantaged youth has to be found in other domains.

Compared to the international level two aspects of the Austrian educational system seem to be relevant for the low ratio of early school leaving and the lower youth unemployment rate. This is the "dual system" – ergo the apprenticeship as a specific educational form – in connection with the demand-orientation of the vocational education and training system in Austria.

40% of the cohort choose an apprenticeship; therefore the apprenticeship is the most favoured educational form on post-compulsory level. This educational form has some interesting specifications, which are relevant in connection with early school leaving and youth unemployment:

First of all entrance requirements for this educational form are set on a low level at least in a formal perspective. The most important criteria to start an apprenticeship is the conclusion of a contract with a company providing an apprenticeship place, whereas there exist no educational entrance barriers like a positive compulsory school leaving certificate. However on the one hand companies select the apprentices on the basis of their qualification level and their productivity, but on the other hand the former educational success is not a definitive obstacle compared to other educational forms.

The apprenticeship system has a specific status within the educational system, because in contrast to other vocational education forms the "dual system" starts at the 10th level of education. Hence the "dual system" offers some kind of a safety net for those young people, who have chosen a secondary fulltime vocational school at the 9th level of education, but realize that this kind of vocational education and training does not fit them or is not what they expected. Instead of dropping out the educational system the apprenticeship offers them an alternative vocational education and training without any time loss in their career because of the delayed start.

(2)  
Kytir J., Stadler B. (2004).

Besides that the character of the vocational training in form of the “dual system” is completely different compared to the fulltime vocational schools. 80% of the educational time is spent on practical tasks and only a fifth in the context of the formal school system. Therefore this form of education is an attractive alternative compared to fulltime vocational schools for a considerable part of the young people. In addition they get the early possibility of having an own income.

These three specifications of the dual system have a positive effect on the dropout rate. In addition it is possible to point out some characteristics of the Austrian educational system in general as well as some characteristics of the apprenticeship system in specific with a positive influence particularly on the youth unemployment rate:

Above all the dual system but also increasingly other forms of vocational education and training are strongly oriented on the demand of the labour market needs. Concerning the apprenticeship the orientation on the demand is evident and an integral part of the training. The fact, that 80% of the training is performed within the companies providing an apprenticeship place, offers the employers the possibility of training those qualifications which are relevant for the company. This could be an explanation why e.g. multinational companies are willing to train apprentices though the apprenticeship system is not known in the national context they come from. A successful example in this respect is the training profession “Systemgastronom”, which was developed due to the demand of only a few multinational fast-food companies.

This demand-orientation of vocational training is built upon the strong integration of the economy concerning the development of curricula and the arrangement of training processes. This again culminates in the dual system, where the “Bundesberufsausbildungsbeirat” (Federal Vocational Training Advisory Board) built mainly by the social partners is responsible for the steering of the whole system. The involvement of the social partners in general and the economy in specific in vocational education and training is another possible explanation for the lower scale of youth unemployment in Austria.

Finally the “dual system” is an ideal example for the smooth transition from school to work for many young people. On the one hand the training is both, employment and qualification, on the other hand the apprenticeship offers the possibility for employers to observe potentially future employees over years to get an impression of their productivity. Therefore employers are often willing to offer an employment status after finishing apprenticeship.

Besides many advantages there are also some critical point associated with the “dual system”. So the number of apprenticeship places within the dual system heavily depends on the economic development. This means on the reverse that if the economic development gets worse there will be an increasing selection of the best whilst integration chances of disadvantaged youth will recede.

Besides the overall economic development that is relevant concerning the total number of apprenticeship places available the ongoing specialisation of companies is an obstacle providing apprenticeship places. If companies

specialise in a small segment they often are not able to cover a whole training profession. Therefore they are not allowed to train apprentices. Rather than a mismatch in training professions available and demanded there is evidence for a structural mismatch between the more broad educational requirements of an apprenticeship education and the fact that an increasing number of companies only can cover parts of the curriculum.

### 3. Specific challenges

Besides Austria's comparatively privileged position concerning early school leaving and youth unemployment the fact must not be ignored that there are also specific challenges and serious problems in Austria. In order to validate this hypothesis early school leaving and the youth unemployment have to be analysed more in detail. Therefore the focus in this section will lie on social inequalities concerning the risk of dropping out of the school system early and the risk of unemployment (Steiner 2006). (3)

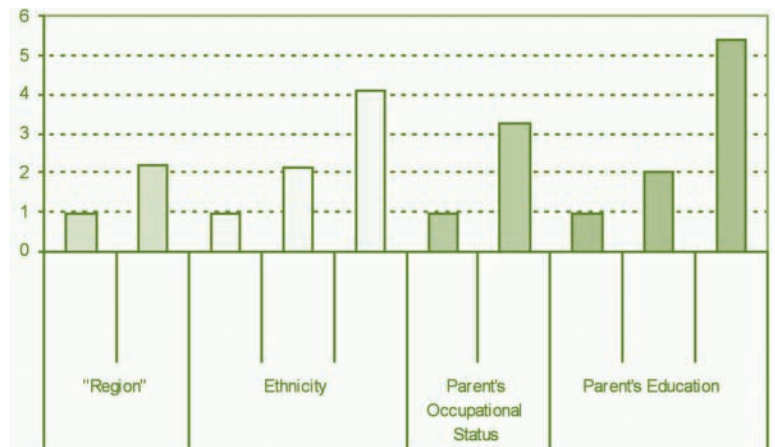
In order to visualize social inequalities concerning early school leaving 'risk-factors' have been calculated, which result when the ratio of dropouts in a specific subgroup (e.g. young people living in urban areas) is divided through the ratio of a corresponding reference group (e.g. young people living in rural areas). (4)

The results of this calculations presented in the following chart show that the social inequalities concerning the risk of early school dropout are remarkable high in Austria:

**Figure 3:**  
Distribution of Dropout-Risks in Austria 2004/05

(3)  
The source of the results concerning social inequalities which are presented here, is a research project of the Institute for Advanced Studies completed just recently: Steiner M., Steiner P. (2006).

(4)  
The risk-factor of the reference group is defined as 1. If the dropout-ratio in the specific subgroup, which is compared to the reference-group, would be the same, the result of the division (respectively the risk-factor for the specific subgroup) also would be 1. Therefore risk-factors higher than 1 are an indicator for discrimination of the specific subgroup (higher ratio of dropouts) compared to the reference group. If the risk-factor of the specific subgroup in comparison to the reference group would be e.g. 2, this means, that the specific subgroups risk of dropping out of the school system is double compared to the reference group.



Source: Statistic Austria, Calculations: Steiner-IHS

Young people living in urban areas are two times more likely to drop out of the school system early (dropout-ratio: 11,8%) than young people living in rural areas are (dropout-ratio: 5,4%). Compared to the equal educational opportunities discussion in the 1960ies and 70ies this result means that the situation seems to have changed completely. 30 years ago the rural youth was referred to as educational disadvantaged, nowadays it is the urban youth, which faces higher risks of leaving the educational system without sufficient qualifications.

Immigrants are much more likely to drop out the school-system than Austrian pupils are. The ratio of dropouts among immigrants without an EU-citizenship is four times higher (the dropout-ratio equals nearly 30%) than the ratio among young people with German mother tongue of the same age (dropout-ratio: 7,2%) and the risk of the 2nd/3rd generation pupils of former immigrants still is double compared to native Austrians.

Besides these inequalities among different socio demographic groups discussed before the focus now will lie on inequalities concerning the risk of early school dropout dependent on social origin. Therefore the dropout-risk now will be analysed according to the parent's occupational status and the parent's education.

Young people whose parents are unemployed face a risk of early school dropout that is three times higher (dropout-ratio: 21,1%) compared to young people whose parents are employed (dropout-ratio: 6,4%). At last the social inequalities concerning school-dropout are highest if differentiated according to the parent's education. Young people whose parent's are educated low (parents are dropouts themselves) leave the educational system without sufficient qualifications 5,5 times more likely (dropout-ratio: 16,8%) than young people whose parents are highly educated (dropout-ratio: 3,1%). The conclusion is, that the early school leaving of parents devolves upon their children.

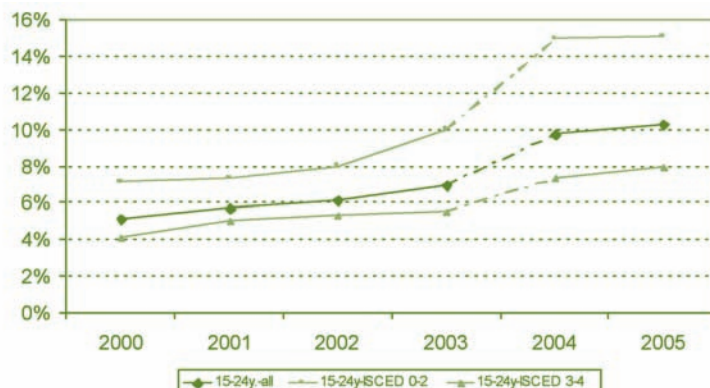
In the actors perspective these persons dropped out because of the very selective Austrian school system on the one hand and because of the hard competition situation on the apprenticeship market on the other hand. Another reason for dropping out is the short duration of compulsory schooling, which enforces the disadvantages of young people instead of reducing them.

If we summarize the findings, we can conclude that the social inequalities concerning the risk of leaving the educational system without sufficient qualifications are remarkable high in Austria. So we therefore face serious problems concerning disadvantaged youth although the average ratio of early school leavers is comparably low. The problem situation even could be worse, if school dropout leads to unemployment and a higher risk of permanent social exclusion. Therefore the task now will be to analyse the youth unemployment in Austria more in detail.

There is a risk of permanent social exclusion of young people who dropped out the educational system and who are confronted with difficulties entering the labour market particularly in systems with a lower level of problems. Comparing the constellations of disadvantage across Europe (Walther/Pohl 2005) a distinction can be made whether young people are disadvantaged, because they are unemployed or they are unemployed, because they are disadvantaged as a result of e.g. early school leaving. The combination named last fits for Austria. In many European countries unemployment is common status in the transition from school to work, therefore fluctuation from unemployment to the labour market is a common process after a while. But if a big majority of the cohort - like in Austria - has no problems concerning the transition from school to work, there is a tendency of negative selection of disadvantaged youth. Consequently these young people have to overbear great difficulties entering the labour market.

This presumption for Austria is approved reflecting the unemployment rate depending on the level of qualification like the following chart shows. In the year 2005 the unemployment rate of young people with at most a compulsory school-leaving certificate (ISCED 2) is 15,1% (according to the LFS-concept). The unemployment rate of this group is nearly double than the rate of young people having a school-leaving certificate on ISCED 3-4 level (8%). These relations of inequality got worse since 2001. The difference of the unemployment rates between both educational levels observed was 2,3 percent-points in 2001 and is 7,1 percent-points in 2005. Therefore the assumption of an intensified risk of exclusion gains ground particularly in periods of economically difficult developments.

**Figure 4:**  
Youth Unemployment Rate depending on Education in Austria



Source: EUROSTAT, ILO-Definitions, Graphics: Steiner-IHS

This results in mind it can be concluded, that early school dropouts face severe problems by entering the labour market. Because ethnicity has been one of the most discriminating factors concerning the risk of early school leaving, the question now is, if this is also true for youth unemployment.

The unemployment rate of young Austrian citizens in June 2005 is 8,9%. This is nearly half of the corresponding rate within EU-15, which reaches 15,6%. In comparison of these two figures the relatively privileged position of Austria, as discussed before can be seen once more. But if the figures for migrant young people are compared the situation in Austria is even worse than within the EU-15-countries in averaged. The unemployment rate of migrant young people in Austria reaches 27,3% whereas the corresponding rate within EU-15 is 4,6 percent-points lower. This empirical result strengthens the hypothesis that disadvantaged young people face a higher risk of social exclusion in Austria (where the overall unemployment rate is lower), than this is true for EU-15 (where the overall rate is higher).

**Table 1. Youth Unemployment Rate in Austria depending on Ethnicity**

	II/2005		
	15-24 years total	15-24 years males	15-24 years female
UE-15-total	16,7%	16,7%	16,6%
UE-15-national	15,6%	15,8%	15,4%
UE-15-non-UE	22,9%	23,1%	22,8%
AUS-total	10,9%	10,9%	10,8%
AUS-national	8,9%	8,9%	9,0%
AUS-non-UE	27,3%	27,3%	27,4%

Fuente: EUROSTAT, ILO-Definitions, LFS-concept



The empirical results point out that there is a particular problem concerning disadvantaged youth in Austria. Consequently specific intervention strategies and measures are needed, which focus on the qualification of young people and their integration in the educational or occupational system. These strategies and measures will be discussed in the last chapter.

## 4. Strategies of intervention and measures

In the first part of this chapter I now will develop a framework, which intervention strategies seem to be suitable for the specific Austrian situation, give an overview to the intervention as a whole, characterise them concerning their specific target groups and will work out where the blind spots are. In the second part of the chapter two concrete measures will be described more in detail.

### 4.1. Analytical Aspects

In order to point out which intervention strategies seem to be suitable for disadvantaged youth the specific Austrian situation has to be remembered at first. The assumption was made that because of the comparably low level of problems of early school dropout and youth unemployment in a macro perspective there is a high risk of negative selection and social exclusion of disadvantaged youth. This assumption was confirmed in chapter three of this article by analysing the big social inequalities concerning the risk of early school dropout and youth unemployment in Austria. As a result of these findings the priority of intervention strategies has to be laid on building bridges for disadvantaged youth to get back into the educational and occupational system. These bridges should guarantee that young people, who have dropped out of the system, could overcome the high entrance barriers. If otherwise the aim is to build bridges for disadvantaged youth to minimize their risk of a permanent exclusion, the measures and strategies will have to focus on the specific needs and requirements of the target group facing different integration barriers in a sensible way. This means that individual support and assistance is needed for integrating disadvantaged youth in Austria. The most disadvantaged young people in Austria are migrants and young people from a low-educated and unemployed family-background. The measures in favour of disadvantaged youth therefore primarily have to be designed to meet and overcome their specific needs and deficits. The answer to the question, if this is true, is one aspect in the context of analysing the Austrian intervention strategies which follows now.

In Austria most of the measures targeted on disadvantaged youth are included in European programmes such as the National Action Plan for Employment (NAP), the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAP-inclusion) or the ESF-Objective 3 interventions. There are no separated programs or policies for disadvantaged youth but the measures for this target group are part of the programs mentioned. This situation offers synergies because disadvantaged young people also can be found in measures, which have not been designed just for them but also in others. But this situation at the same time also can be seen as a contradiction to the requirements mentioned before because it undermines a demand tailored approach to the needs of disadvantaged youth in some of the



measures. All in all 250 Mio. € are spent annually and more than 50.000 young people are integrated in youth measures. These 50.000 young people equal 6% of the population aged 15-24 years. The spectrum and the intensity of the measures are very different and range from singular counselling and advice to intensive trainings.

It would go beyond the scope of declaring all measures, hence only some important measures concerning early school leaving and/or youth unemployment are described in the following scheme for illustrating the dimensions and bandwidths of the measures.

MEASURE	TARGET	Dur. of individual Participation	Participants (03/04)	Budget in € (03/04)	EVALUATION
Vocational Preparation Courses	Bridging apprenticeship training for unsuccessful apprenticeship seekers	12 months	6.800	71 Mio. €	67% in work 6 months after measure, 21% unemployed
Jobs4You(th)	Different qualification and occupational measures for young people	Diverse: some weeks to more than 1 year	9.500	47 Mio. €	Continuous monitoring, depending on measure 60-80% in work 6 months after measure.
Clearing	Assistance for disadvantaged youth on the transition from school to work	6 months	2.500	4,8 Mio. €	Continuous monitoring: 37,4% in job or school after measure (external evaluation report expected at the end of 2006).
Job Assistance	Assistance to integrate disabled or social handicapped persons into the labour market	12 months	6.500	n.a.	Continuous monitoring, external evaluation report expected at the end of 2006.
Integrative Training	Forms of apprenticeship for disadvantaged/disabled youth	1 to several years	500	n.a.	Continuous monitoring, external evaluation report expected at the end of 2006.
Teamteaching for Immigrants in Commercial Schools	Mother tongue instruction for immigrants by a second teacher	12 months	634	4 Mio. €	Continuous monitoring (for more detailed information see best practice description)
Preparatory Courses for ISCED-Level-2 school-leaving Certificate	Preparation for making up the compulsory school leaving certificate	12 months	1.200	2,1 Mio. €	68% reach ISCED-Level-2 school-leaving certificate, after measure: 88% in training or job.

Most of the labour market policies concerning young people are reactive to manifest problems and measures aiming at young people's employability are the dominant type. Preventative or opportunity-building measures form a small minority in the context of all measures targeted on early school leaving or youth unemployment. Nevertheless the focus of ESF-objective 3 under the priority of lifelong learning and some measures within the new 'National Reform Program for Growth and Employment' (Republic of Austria 2005) following the NAP is a more preventative one. Orientation-measures for girls, the establishment of new educational tracks oriented towards promising job-fields (e.g. IT), broader VET-curricula but also the combination of measures with corresponding train the trainer initiatives can be mentioned in this context.

Concerning anti-discrimination policies within the programs in discussion (NAP, NAP-Inclusion, ESF-objective 3) more attention is paid to gender-

aspects than to ethnic background. Within the programs mentioned several measures have been included targeting gender-discrimination but only a few can be found targeting problems of migrant youths. A target of all measures (and also realised in most cases) is a female participation of 50% at least. Concerning ethnic background no minimum requirement of participation has been defined, although 12,5% of the young people aged 19 years have a migrant background and although immigrants are much more effected by early school leaving and youth unemployment as shown before. For many measures no reliable data is available concerning the participation of migrant youth, but the labour market monitoring report 2004 (BMWA) states that 18% of the participants in the youth measures within the Austrian NAP had a migrant family background. This means that compared to their share of population they are over represented but at the same time this means that they are underrepresented if it is taken into account, that migrant youths are three to four times more affected by youth unemployment and early school leaving than non-migrant young people are. Because of that it can be concluded that there is a lack of measures in favour of and demand-tailored to the needs of disadvantaged young people who are endangered of permanent social exclusion most.

In contrast to the needs of disadvantaged youth a gap particularly in motivating measures turns out. Closing that gap seems to be urgent, because it can be assumed that due to the described mechanisms of selection disadvantaged youths have accumulated a range of disappointments trying to return or to stay in the system. Therefore they need specific assistance and motivation to start a new attempt of integration. From the actors point of view mentoring could be an option in this respect. In Austria mentoring has been established as an instrument in the context of gender mainstreaming. Transferring it to intervention strategies in favour of disadvantaged youth would be an innovative approach in the Austrian context. One could think of mentoring programmes integrating persons who faced the same problem situation in former times, but who improved their situation in the meantime. These persons know and understand the problems of the target group because of their own experience and therefore could find better access to the target group.

Besides these more critical aspects concerning the Austrian intervention policies for disadvantaged youths the aim of the following good-practice description is to discuss two measures in detail, which seem consistent with the specific problem situation. The main conceptual task of the 'Vocational preparation Courses' besides qualification is to building bridges back into the educational and occupational system. The second measure described 'Clearing' is a good example for a target-group-sensible approach. Both is essential within the specific Austrian situation of a low overall ratio of early school leaving and youth unemployment but a high risk of social exclusion.

## 4.2. Good Practice Examples

The aim of the following table is to give an comparative overview to the two good-practice examples before they are described in detail:

	Vocational Preparation Courses	Clearing
Framework	NAP	NAP-Inclusion
Policy Field	Labour Market Policy	Social Policy
Participants/ Funding	2003/04: 5.500 Participants, 2004/05: 6.800 Participants,	2002: 1.700, 2003: 2.500
Funding	2003/04: 57 Mio. € 2004/05: 71 Mio. €	2003: 2,5 Mio. € 2004: 4,8 Mio €
Pilot or Long-Term	Long term	Long term
Where?	All over the country	All over the country
Main objectives	Safety net for young people who did not find an apprenticeship place after compulsory education. Temporary bridging solution until a regular apprenticeship place is found.	Integration of young people with disabilities or social disadvantages into the educational/occupational system, accompanying the transition process after compulsory school.
Target Group	School leavers not successful on apprenticeship market, Participants of earlier courses, disabled persons	Young people with disabilities or special needs and social disadvantaged youth
Main Activities	Vocational training, counselling for girls, skills and knowledge, training in seeking apprenticeship places	Individual profile-creation, strengths/weakness analysis, career/development plan, training according to individual deficits/plans, reveal employment perspectives
Main actors	Educational institutions, Public Employment Service (AMS), Federal Ministry of Economic and Labour	Regions, municipalities, third sector organizations, NPO, Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations
Persons involved in routine	Clients, employees at the educational institutions and at the public employment service	Clients, "Clearers", teachers, parents, employment service, federal social welfare
Key activities	Courses, practical training (at least 60% of instruction), counseling and vocational guidance	Counseling, strengthens /weakness analysis followed by interventions according to individual action plans (training, education...)
Duration of Process	12 months are aspired, but if no apprenticeship place is found in this time, the measure can be extended.	6 months
Acquired Skills	First year of apprenticeship, personal stabilization and soft skills	Individually different according to career/development plans
Future Plans	Programme is constantly extended, 8.000 places in 2005/06	Because of its success it is planned to extend the programme.

### Good practice 1: Vocational Preparation Courses (Lehrausbildungsplätze)

The Vocational Preparation Courses have been chosen as good-practice example because their main aim is to build bridges back into the system, in a context where a rather small minority faces the danger of permanent exclusion. (5)

The Vocational Preparation Courses are Part of the programme of action under the Youth Training Consolidation Act, which is an essential part of the Austrian NAP programme. The Vocational Preparation Courses therefore are part of the labour market policy on national level. The Youth Training Consolidation Act (JASG) besides other tasks assigns to the Public Employment Service the responsibility of compensating for the shortage of apprenticeship places by providing a suitable safety net in form of additional

(5)  
For a description of the measure compare also: Republic of Austria (2003b: p.79f.).

apprenticeship training places in special institutions. The intention is to give a chance of training to all young persons who have not found a suitable apprenticeship place after completing their compulsory education. The prior aim of the measure is to provide a temporary bridging solution until a regular apprenticeship place can be taken up in an enterprise. The intervention starts with vocational guidance modules and leads to courses with a duration up to 12 months, where the participants are taught and can train the skills acquired in the first year of a regular apprenticeship. Besides offering training comparable to regular apprenticeships within the Vocational Preparation Courses particular attention should be drawn to scholastic deficits and personal disabilities of the participants.

In the year 2003/04 5.500 young people participated in the programme, 2004/05 the number of places available climbed up to 6.800 and for 2005/06 even 8.000 participants were planned. 48% of the participants in 2004/05 were female and 18% had a migrant background. The amount of funding constituted 57 Mio. € in the year 2003/04 and 71 Mio. € in the year after, whereas 53 Mio. € are funded by the Public Employment Service and 18 Mio. € are contributed by the federal states ('Länder').

The target groups of the Vocational Preparation Courses in general are school-leavers who were not successful in seeking apprenticeship places, but special attention should be drawn to disabled young persons as well as to those with special placement difficulties (long-term unemployed, persons with learning difficulties as well as school dropouts). The general prerequisite for participation is the registration at the Public Employment Service as seeking apprenticeship places and the evidence that they have made at least five unsuccessful applications for apprenticeship places.

The Vocational Preparation Courses consist of the following modules:

- Vocational guidance and/or vocational preparation: Clarification of individual occupational prospects,
- Counselling of girls seeking apprenticeship places with the primary counselling aim of expanding the range of occupational choices for girls, which is limited by gender-specific role patterns.
- 12-months courses in training institutions, to teach first-year apprenticeship skills and knowledge. It is aspired that during these 12 months the participants should change into a regular apprenticeship. If this aim is not obtained, another course could be attended and in single cases the participant is able to finish his apprenticeship within the programme (in average an apprenticeship ends after three years), but generally the transmission into a regular training place is striven. Practical training should cover at least 60% of the educational time. In addition the courses should also give training in procedures for seeking apprenticeship places or work and in job applications. The courses offered should be related to the actual demand on the relevant regional labour market. This should help to meet the overriding aim to place the participants in a regular apprenticeship.
- To support the aim of training, additional technical and educational help can be provided like personality-related training, coaching or regular group chat sessions.

Main actor is the public employment service, assigned by the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Labour. Task of the PES is to elevate the demand for vocational preparation courses nationwide and to control the implementation of the programme. The courses themselves are organised, provided and operated by educational institutions. In order to be commissioned to carry out Vocational Preparation Courses the educational institutions have to design a concept of the measure and make an application at the public employment service. In most cases there is no active involvement of the participants nor of the social environment in the planning and execution of the programme.

The public employment service also is responsible for the monitoring. The prior indicator of success is the number of direct transitions from the measure to an apprenticeship place. A second indicator is the distribution of graduates by relevant labour market positions like employment or unemployment. 12 months after participation in the measure 54% found an apprenticeship, 11% were employed and 12% were unemployed. (BMWA, 2004: 17f). Half a year before, that means 6 months after ending the measure 67% of the participants found an apprenticeship place. This means that 13% of the participants lost their apprenticeship again.

A survey among 300 participants, companies and representatives of the actors shows that another main effect of the programme is the personal stabilization and the extension of the soft skills of the participants. The experience of the companies with former participants is quite positive; therefore some of them had arranged additional apprenticeship places.

### **Good practice 2: Clearing**

The good-practice example 'Clearing' is part of the NAP-Inclusion programme. It is a measure on the national level and it is implemented all over the country. The programme exists since 2001, and for this reason it can be referred to as a long-term intervention yet. This measure was chosen as good practice example within the Austrian context, because it is a good example for demand and need tailored interventions. (6)

After finishing compulsory school it is often difficult for young people with special needs and disadvantaged youth to be integrated into the labour market. Therefore a huge proportion stays at home with their families without any perspectives for support or employment. Only some move to various institutions and measures but a comprehensive safety net or support system for the after-school phase of disabled schoolchildren did not exist until 2001. 'Clearing' is a new measure for integrating young people with special needs into employment, which is positioned directly at the interface between school and employment. The task of 'Clearing' is to determine together with those affected the best-suited individual package of measures for integration into employment in the final or penultimate school year.

1.700 young people participated in 'Clearing' in the school year 2001/02, in 2002/03 the number of participants rose to 2.500. The target group in the beginning primarily were young people with disabilities and special needs. In the meantime also social disadvantaged people at the age of 13-24 belong to the target group. In the year 2002/03 69% of the participants were persons with an emotional handicap, 20% of the young people had a mental disability.

(6)  
For a description of the measure compare also: Bundesministerium für Soziale Sicherheit und Generationen (2004b) and Republic of Austria (2003a).

The main activities within the measure are:

- Drawing up a interests and suitability profile
- Carrying out a strengths/weaknesses analysis
- Establishing or outlining any possible needs regarding extra training
- Revealing employment perspectives on the basis of the interests and suitability profile, and building on that
- Drawing up of a career/development plan.

“The idea is not to take existing problems away from young people and their parents, but that they should be offered the support necessary to solve issues which arise as independently as possible, according to the principle of “helping people to help themselves”. An essential factor for success is the active inclusion of the young people, their parents and teachers. As the work with the young people already begins in their last or penultimate school year, it is ensured that the transition into employment is as seamless as possible. Building on the support measures taken in school, an individually tailored “package of measures” for integration can be put together. The needs, possibilities and interests of the young people form the basis of the actions of the clearing offices.” (2nd NAP-inclusion 2003-2005, p.57)

The funding for the programme was 2,5 Mio. € in the year 2003 and 4,8 Mio. € in 2004. The state and the European Social Fund (ESF) finance the programme.

Actors implementing this programme can be regions, municipalities or third sector/non-profit organisations. Organisations interested in implementing ‘Clearing’ have to make an application at the Federal Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection. The applying institutions have to fulfil following aspects: experience with the clientele, good position in the region and a professional and service-based concept.

The persons working at the project, named “Clearers”, are social workers, psychologists or persons with a pedagogical background. The “Clearers” should be aware of the ability to communicate and to work in teams, they should have job experience over several years, knowledge in project working and basis knowledge of the regional infrastructure. One ‘Clearer’ working 40 hours a week has to advise around 50 clients per year, therefore there were 53 project workers engaged within the measure in 2003.

‘Clearing’ is based on high cooperation with the provincial education authority, the Public Employment Service, class teachers, parents, facilities for people with disabilities and the Federal Social Welfare Office, whereby the latter plays a managing role and is responsible for the current monitoring.

“According to the annual reports of the regional offices of the Federal Social Welfare Office, clearing was already offered almost everywhere in 2002. The clearing process was successfully completed with 1.450 young

people in 2002. As it was possible to provide suitable apprenticeships, employment contracts, public employment service measures or further school education for many young people with disabilities, the clearing measures are to be further extended.” (2nd NAP-incl. 2003-2005, p.57f.)

“Fact is that 21% of the participants extended their school attendance, 9% visited different subsequent measures. Nearly 15% of the support led into work assistance (“Arbeitsassistenz”), a measure for supporting disabled young people after they found a job. [...] 4% of the young people found a regular employment, 12% began an apprenticeship. 11% could be prepared to get a regular employment in form of lower-level apprenticeships (Vorlehre). Nearly 21% attended a measure of the public employment service or a further job orientation.” (Jahresbericht “Clearing” 2003, p.14)

The measure ‘Clearing’ was awarded “best practice” status in 2004 on European level.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Intervention strategies and measures focussing on disadvantaged youth as the ones discussed before doubtlessly are needed. But in order to minimize dropout rates it is more effective to implement measures in compulsory schooling institutions than designing reparation measures for people who dropped out the educational system yet. Therefore the high selectivity of the Austrian school system intensifying the disadvantages instead of supporting the disadvantaged youth has to be reconsidered. In this context deep structural changes like for example an obligatory preschool-year, a common form of education for pupils aged 10-14, an extension of compulsory schooling or the cancellation of barriers like the repetition of school years are proposed. For improving the situation of disadvantaged youth in the dual system the dropout rate in the corresponding vocational schools should be reduced. In the actors perspective this could be achieved for example by combining vocational education with support for personal development or the extension of the apprenticeship-training-assistance existing presently in specific measures to all apprentices.

So one answer to the problem of early school dropout is individualised support. Besides that individualised supporting structures could also help to achieve a better preparation of young people for working life. Weaknesses-/strengths analysis and socio-pedagogical support might be helpful in this context. Additionally occupational orientation should become an obligatory subject. Moreover not only the target group, but also parents, teachers and companies need intensified information and consultation.

Besides these recommendations concerning the educational system itself to prevent the problems of early school leaving and youth unemployment it is also possible to work out conclusions oriented towards intervention strategies and measures of active labour market policy that focus on disadvantaged youth. It is important for young people, who could not get an apprenticeship place or face problems entering the labour market not to loose time in ineffective short-term measures, but to get high-quality vocational education and training. Whenever possible approved and



recognised educational certificates compared to partially qualifications are the better solution for disadvantaged youths. Nevertheless modularised forms of education allowing certificates also for basic vocational qualifications are needed.

In the specific Austrian situation it was stated several times that the measures and interventions targeted on disadvantaged youth need enforced orientation on the target group. By analysing the intervention strategies it becomes obvious that this is realised only within a small number of measures and therefore has to be enforced. This recommendation could be realised by participating the target group in the designing of the measures. A target group orientation also means that new didactical concepts in educational forms focussing not the deficits but the potentials of the young people are needed, means investment also into the qualification of teachers, trainers and advisers as well as the inclusion of social work assistance.

Concluding all the analyses the transferability of the findings to other national contexts should be discussed. Measures and intervention strategies in most cases are tailored to the specific national situation and can be expected to be successful within a specific framework of institutions and national preconditions. Therefore single measures cannot easily be transferred from one country to another. In Austria where the level of problems concerning disadvantaged youth is comparably low measures building bridges back to the system are essential. This is the level of recommendations useful for an international discussion and should be the level of discussion about transferability. The Vocational Preparation Courses are good practice in Austria but this measure cannot be transferred unless there is an apprenticeship system established. Also the apprenticeship system itself can be seen as good practice but its transfer will fail if there is no tradition of employer's engagement in the education and training of young people and employees. Therefore the lessons that can be learned from the Austrian situation concerning disadvantaged youth mostly are the necessity of building bridges back into the system and the need of demand-tailored measures. Besides that individualised supporting structures will be relevant also in other national contexts.

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