



Austria Fact Sheet on Social Care & Support Services Sector for Persons with Disabilities

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SUBSECTORS OF SOCIAL CARE & SUPPORT SERVICES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

The federal state of Austria, with its nine regions that are in charge of planning and budgeting services, is a complex landscape for people with disabilities to navigate. The decentralisation of services means that entitlements for persons with disabilities differ. For example, in healthcare matters, conditions are set at the federal level, but decisions are made in the regions. In employment matters, people with disabilities fall under different mechanisms depending on whether they had accumulated employment history. Employment is the most highly regulated at the federal level under the Federal Disability Employment Act. Personal assistance to students is also a federal competence, but assistance at schools and in the workplace are regional competences. Decentralisation also means that data collection is also uneven. A number of people with disabilities live in institutions, and there is a severe lack of data on their situation in terms of access to services and other matters.

Early Childhood Intervention

As with many sub-sectors (see below), early childhood intervention is regionalised in Austria. Much of the work in social affairs rests on a network of NGOs. According to Eurostat, only 0.6% of children aged below three years (even fewer in rural areas) received cost-free childcare, and only one in five benefited from childcare on a fee-paying basis, which suggests that families are expected to bear most of the burden of childcare for all children. In Vienna, a mobile (i.e. support team visits families at home) early intervention scheme covers children with disabilities below school age and provides individual support for families to meet the needs of their child. Specialised kindergartens are subject to financial contribution from the child's family. In other regions, the provision of such services depends on regional regulations and is not provided evenly across the regions. In Styria, mobile services for family support are provided and funded. Lack of fully funded services is partly compensated by charity, through NGOs like alpha nova and Förderinstitut Vinco (in Styria, the latter provides family repose services and parent training). Families are expected to be proactive in applying for and procuring any adjustments or support. Since this subsector is not related to employment, it is a regional competence and financed by regional authorities, subject to regional regulations.

Education Support

Austria follows an inclusive model of education, but special schools for people with complex learning needs exist as well. The provision of inclusive school settings differs strongly from region to region. Personal assistance for pupils and students is regulated at the federal level when a school or university falls under a federal competence. Some regions, e.g. Tyrol, may offer their own school assistance schemes. A case study by Brandstetter shows that regional differences translate into large gaps in the share of children with disabilities directed into special schools.

Vocational training takes one of two forms: classroom-based education and apprenticeship. Federal authorities are responsible for persons with disabilities who are deemed employable under the Federal Disability Employment Act, and for others, vocational schooling depends on the region. According to the employment expert interviewed, people with disabilities are provided with vocational training counselling services like others. Production schools, a measure previously offered to school-aged persons with disabilities exclusively as a stepping stone to prepare for mainstream education, is now extended to all young people. The type of vocational education is selected individually, as, for instance, psycho-social disorders are likely to demand more hours of preparatory work. So-called 'clearing' is a method for helping a person make a realistic decision about their future career after experiencing real-life work situations. A young person is entitled to education support up to the age of 24. Non-governmental entities offer services in this area, too, e.g. Atempo's projects to support people with learning difficulties, Context Impulse am Arbeitsmarkt support for labour market integration, or Humanisierte Arbeitsstaette - vocational training in Vienna. NGOs like Caritas, Jugend am Werk (focusing on mental disabilities) or Chance B offer additional opportunities for young people with disabilities to gain a qualification. As with other services, 'clearing' and career orientation depends on regional actors.

Employment Support

Employment is a federal competence and is financed by federal sources. Disability is assessed as a quantified incapacity to work, and workplace adaptation or career reorientation services depend on its severity. In addition, disability can be differently defined across the regulations of public sector entities. In addition, there is a quota for employing people with disabilities in larger enterprises, and businesses who fail to do so pay a financial contribution. There is an option of job coaching, offered by public employment services across the country (mediation services on the job). There are some non-governmental services which are strongly specialised (assistance to academics in Vienna). NGOs can receive funding from the federal authorities (ministry).

There are special funds from health, pension and work insurance institutions as well as the Federal Social Welfare Office for installing assistive technology or adaptations at a workplace; and people who develop a disability at work are at an advantage in this case. However, people who have had impairments since childhood, have difficulty obtaining such support. Sheltered workshops (Tagesstruktur) are offered up to retirement age for people who are labelled as unable to work and are not insured. In Tyrol, there is an individual support scheme for persons with psychosocial disabilities to help them with everyday life. Some regions may lack such subsidies altogether. The Austrian government's response to UN Human Rights High Commissioner mentions, instead, eight integrative enterprises, which provide full insurance coverage and collective agreements.

Day Care

NGOs like Habit offer day care (day centre and activities) for those with extensive care needs, including people with severe mental or physical disabilities in Vienna and Lower Austria: for free in Lower Austria and against a fee in Vienna. Caritas has presence in multiple regions in the country and provides leisure time support and so-called day structure, along with other services. The NGO, like other NGOs, is a service provider and as such receives funds from public entities, in this case regional authorities. Around 90% of the funding for Caritas activities comes from the public sector. In Vienna, day care services are also offered by Kinderfreunde Wien. Since this subsector is not related to employment, it is a regional competence and financed by regional authorities, subject to regional regulations.

Living Support

As stated in the ANED report and clear from various lists of service providers like help.gv.at, living support services are uneven across the nine regions. Benefits and services are not means-tested, but most are in-kind, except for Personal Assistance payments. In Vienna, there is a personal assistance scheme for people with a physical disability, with full self-administration capacity and living independently. This sub-sector is also regionalised. In Vienna, the local authority supports partial assisted living in the form of personal support for persons with intellectual or sensory impairments.

Subsidies for workplace adaptation are provided by regional authorities and hence depend on a region. Some regions offer a subsidy for the adaptation of one's living environment. Although data is scarce, a share of people with disabilities live in institutions, where, according to an ANED report on social protection, service fees are deducted from any income they receive (including benefits or assets). Importantly, there is an upper age limit to access many in-kind services, which exclude older persons. Various limitations, excess fees and red tape in access to adaptation services leads many people / families to opt to have their family member in segregated facilities, such as boarding schools or residential homes for elderly persons.

NGOs like Caritas (in multiple regions, providing people with mental and multiple disabilities a place to live and support for independent living), Assista in Upper Austria, Balance (integrated services: places to live, counselling, employment assistance), Das Band and Chance B, operate in this field in their regional chapters. Since this subsector is not related to employment, it is a regional competence and financed by regional authorities, subject to regional regulations.

Long-Term Institutional Care and Respite Care

Sheltered housing (residence with support in daily activities) is available depending on the region. In Vienna, it is offered by the public sector. Residential care across the country is often provided by religious organisations: Benedictines, Assista and Caritas. NGOs like Habit cater for those with extensive care needs, including people with severe mental or physical disabilities in Vienna and Lower Austria. In Lower Austria, the service is free of charge, and in Vienna it is provided against a fee. Since this subsector is not related to employment, it is a regional competence and financed by regional authorities, subject to regional regulations.

Leisure and Social-Life Support

The regional government of Tyrol covers a few hours per week of personal support in leisure time, subject to a financial contribution by the receiver, who can be from 16 years of age to retirement and with a physical, intellectual or psychiatric disability. There is also a family support scheme (help with daily activities) for minors with physical and intellectual disabilities. Since this subsector is not related to employment, it is a regional competence and financed by regional authorities, subject to regional regulations.

FUTURE TRENDS

The current system with mainstreamed vocational counselling is relatively new and is being developed. The idea is to bring young people with disabilities as close as possible to the mainstream labour market, which means that some mostly need physical adaptation of the workplace, while others require many contact hours to prepare for the psychosocial challenges of work. According to the employment expert interviewed, the services are also combatting a widespread disenfranchisement from education in Austria (parents' belief that education will not help their children's social mobility). After the elections in 2017, it is not clear whether the new government will change the policy, as it is formed by a coalition of very diverse political forces.

The ANED report identifies that there is a lack of a one-stop-shop for individuals with disabilities and families to receive all the information they need. According to an expert at the employment service, it has been identified that apprenticeship-type vocational training yields better results than classroom-based training and is likely to be further promoted, although its high cost discourages the method's more widespread application.

The ANED Europe 2020 report diagnoses a lack of disability mainstreaming in the Austrian National Reform Programme 2016. Coupled with a 'stalemate' resulting from the division between federal and regional responsibilities, this 'invisibility' of disabled persons leads to uneven and inefficient provision of services. This implies that major changes will have to wait for the next programming period. Lack of data impedes evaluation of existing measures. Regions could proactively seek EU support for education, vocational training and similar services, and the ANED Europe 2020 report mentions ESF co-financing for youth coaching and production schools, which ANED experts criticise as contributing to segregation, since both still often lead to sheltered workshops. In the future, under pressure from rights groups and EU/ UN authorities, using good practices available internationally, the system may move towards harmonisation. On the other hand, the criticism from various bodies, including the ombudsperson, have not resulted in setting up a clearer framework of responsibility at the federal and regional level.

CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS

Manfred Kendlbacher, Responsible for vocational rehabilitation at AMS Österreich. 30 January 2018.
Marlies Neumüller, Caritas Austria. 19 February 2018.

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