



MEDITERRANEAN CITY-TO-CITY MIGRATION

## CITY CASE STUDY VIENNA

THE “JUGENDCOLLEGE”:  
TRAINING AND EDUCATION FOR YOUNG MIGRANTS IN VIENNA



Implemented by



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*project has sought to nurture a peer-to-peer dialogue and mutual learning on specific urban challenges such as social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, employment and provision of basic services for migrants, among others. This case study was selected by the Municipality of Vienna in order to showcase a practice that contributes to social inclusion of migrants at the local level.*

## **THE “JUGENDCOLLEGE”/YOUTH COLLEGE IS A FREE EDUCATION, TRAINING AND MENTORING PROGRAMME FOR YOUNG MIGRANTS AGED BETWEEN 15 AND 21 IN VIENNA**

### **ABSTRACT**

The Youth College is a free education, training and mentoring programme for young migrants (mostly asylum-seekers) aged between 15 and 21 in Vienna. As part of the city's broader “Start Wien” integration initiative, the aim of the Youth College is to help young migrants lead an independent life as quickly as possible by preparing them for further education, vocational training or the workplace. This is achieved through a series of modules in German language, cultural orientation and personal career development, alongside social integration initiatives such as excursions.

With the view that education is crucial to social participation, the programme sup-

ports young migrants in accessing their rights to education and employment and contributes to social cohesion through the reinforcement of common values surrounding gender roles, leisure time, customs and traditions, and mutual learning. The Youth College is currently run from two locations in Vienna and has a total capacity of up to 1000 places. Since its initiation in August 2016, 1270 young migrants have taken part, with 160 having already completed the programme and moved onto further training or employment.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wien.gv.at/menschen/integration/neuzugewandert/info-module-fluechtlinge.html>

## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Vienna is the capital city of Austria and has a population of over 1.8 million. It is also the cultural, economic and political centre of Austria and is the seat of many international organisations including the UN. Vienna is a long-established city of migration, having experienced high migration levels from Austria's neighbouring Eastern European countries since the 1950s. The city has seen many "waves" of migration over the years, including the inflow of Hungarian refugees in 1956, the arrival of migrants from Germany and 'new' Eastern European countries in the early 1990s. Since 2013/14, there has been a growing influx of refugees from Afghanistan, Iran and Syria. At the peak of this influx in 2015, 65% of the 118,517 net-migrants came from outside of the EU with 2/3 of this number coming from these Middle Eastern countries. These numbers have since declined, with net migration standing at approximately 64,600 in 2017.

The government of Austria is a signatory of a number of international laws relating to migrants, including the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Migration is generally regulated at the national level, however as a federal state, Austria's provincial governments also have their own regulatory rights and access to resources through shares in tax revenues, making them important stakeholders in the field of integration.

The City of Vienna forms one of Austria's nine federal provinces. This has allowed it to develop and implement its own integration initiatives through the Executive City Councillor for Integration and the Department for Integration and Diversity (MA 17). These departments also fund integration projects implemented by NGOs and local associations.

One of Vienna's integration initiatives is the Youth College, which was developed in 2015 and initiated in August 2016, following a growing influx of refugees. The majority of the programme's participants are indeed asylum-seekers and refugees from Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia. The overall objective of the programme is to give recently-arrived young migrants the best possible opportunity to join the Austrian education and training system for a long-term career, with the conviction that this will form the foundation of a strong and united society. In this sense, German language proficiency and cultural knowledge are crucial to empowering the young migrants and facilitating social cohesion.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The initial concept was first discussed in Autumn 2015 with the involvement of the Department for Integration and Diversity (MA 17) and various important educational institutions in Vienna. Following this, the programme's funding agencies (MA 17, AMS Wien and Social Funds Vienna (FSW)) came together to develop a call for further funding from the European Social Fund

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.integrationsfonds.at/fileadmin/content/AT/Downloads/Publikationen/Statistisches\\_Jahrbuch\\_migration\\_integration\\_2017.pdf](https://www.integrationsfonds.at/fileadmin/content/AT/Downloads/Publikationen/Statistisches_Jahrbuch_migration_integration_2017.pdf)

(ESF) which was managed and settled by the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (WAFF). After the call was accepted, applications for the programme were received and a jury consisting of the funding agencies decided on the most convincing concept. Finally, the concept was developed and approved by sponsors and the project was finally initiated in August 2016.

As part of Vienna's wider "Start Wien" integration initiative, the Youth College aims to prepare young migrants to lead an independent life as quickly as possible. This means that even those who have not completed the asylum process can participate, in line with the initiative's motto: "integration from day one". Education is viewed as the key to social participation as it allows the migrants to advance their careers and contribute to a functioning society through work. The programme considers the particular needs of the young migrants as individuals in order to give them an equal chance to access the rights to education and employment in Vienna.

There are two main ways of applying for the Youth College programme. Young migrants can apply through their mentors at the Public Employment Service (AMS Wien) or through an education platform (Bildungsdrehscheibe). Either way, all applicants must firstly complete "clearing", a 1-2 day assessment in which their proficiencies in German and other subjects are tested and an interview with a social-worker is conducted. The most important criteria for acceptance are the motivation of the individual.

The Youth College is a modular programme which can be tailored according to every migrants' existing knowledge, experiences and career goals. Through a total of 20 ½ hours of training and weekly ½ hour mentoring sessions, they are taught a series of compulsory and optional modules and receive personal development and career advice. The structure of the programme is very flexible, allowing the young migrants to complete the programme in their own time and around other responsibilities. The maximum stay at the Youth College is 9 months, although this can be prolonged under special circumstances.

Core modules in Maths, English, ICT and German provide the young migrants with the basic skills required in the Austrian education system and enable them to leave with a compulsory school leaving certificate. Proficiency in the German language is especially important as it facilitates their integration with the "host" society. Optional modules are selected with the help of a mentor depending on the individual's professional ambitions and include various training workshops.

"Critical participation" is a compulsory module for all participants, teaching issues relating to political and social coexistence in Austria such as family life, gender roles, racism and discrimination. Participants can also attend further social integration activities such as excursions and they are supported if they wish to develop their own courses in different subjects (language courses, cooking classes, sports, art, etc.) which are accessible to the public at the open school. The school acts as a meeting

place, facilitating interaction between the migrants and the host population, encouraging mutual recognition of otherness as an asset.

Upon completion of the Youth College, the young migrants can attend taster days in local schools or businesses and make contact with potential future mentors or employers, before continuing into further education, vocational training or the workplace. After their next phase of development, they have the possibility of attending a follow-up session at the Youth College in order to discuss their progress.

All of the programme's members of staff have the requisite training to support the young migrants. They are trained in how to deal with young migrants who may have experienced trauma; conflict-management and general pedagogical issues. Special support is also given to staff who do not have German as a first language. The mentors act as career advisors, social workers and cultural advisers.

## FINANCING AND RESOURCES

The Youth College is financed with €6 million yearly - €4.5 million of external funds and €1.5 million of internal resources. Externally, the European Social Fund (ESF) provides €3 million and the Public Employment Service Vienna (AMS Wien) provides €1.5 million.

Internally, the Department of Integration and Diversity (MA 17) provided €800,000

and Vienna Social Funds (FSW) provided €700,000. Since the late 1990s, the City of Vienna has outsourced many previously managed issues to newly established funds like the FSW. This fund receives €1.71 billion annually to deliver social and welfare services on behalf of the City of Vienna.

## RESULTS AND IMPACTS

The first project evaluation is scheduled for 2018, therefore it is not yet possible to indicate the exact results and impacts of the Youth College programme. Nevertheless, since its initiation in August 2016, 1270 young migrants have taken part, with 160 having already completed the programme and moved onto further training or employment. These participants are supported by the Youth College to access their basic rights and become active and included citizens in Vienna in at least three aspects.

Firstly, the young migrants are supported in gaining the training and qualifications they need in order to access the right to work and the right to education in Vienna without discrimination. As the modular programme and mentoring they receive is tailored to every individual's knowledge, experience and career aspirations, they are provided with the skills they require to gain their desired job so that they can participate in the work force and contribute to society.

Secondly, participants of the programme are taught about everyday life in Vienna

and values surrounding family life, gender roles and racism. This is especially important for migrants who are unfamiliar with European culture as it also helps to prepare them for social life in the city.

This understanding of the “other” does not just operate in one direction however. The Youth College thirdly, encourages mutual learning between the migrants and the “host” society. This is especially important as it is through the meeting of these groups and a mutual understanding between them that social cohesion is fostered. The programme aims to achieve this through mentoring from local Viennese people, excursions to other towns and cities in Austria and through the open school. The school allows the young migrants to develop their own courses which members of the public can attend, creating a platform for local people to learn from the young migrants too.

## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

One of the challenges which the Youth College programme seeks to confront is the lack of recognition of migrants’ existing qualifications and professional experiences once they reach Vienna. While some of the young migrants may already have professional qualifications awarded by their country-of-origin, these may not be internationally recognised or accepted by Austrian employers. The Youth College directly confronts this problem through its personalised modular programme which allows the young migrants to build on their exist-

ing skills and knowledge and to continue their careers in Vienna if they so wish.

Although the Youth College programme is a huge source of support in helping young migrants access their right to education and right to work, as well as their understanding of, and inclusion in, Viennese social life, a continued challenge is their inability to participate in its formal political life. In fact, the lack of voting rights of migrants at both the district and municipal levels has been described as one of the largest obstacles to their political participation in Vienna by all stakeholders of the Youth College.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Overall, the Youth College programme plays a crucial role in helping young migrants’ access to employment rights, education rights and social life from the outset of their arrival in Vienna. They are supported “from day one”, in line with the municipality’s motto on integration. Every young person is treated as an individual with their own educational and training needs and career aspirations taken on board. The programme therefore helps to empower its participants while aiding them in entering the work force and becoming active citizens in Vienna as quickly as possible.

The Youth College also helps to foster social cohesion between the young migrants and Vienna’s “host” society by facilitating meetings between these groups. The open school in particular allows local Viennese

people to learn from the migrants, providing a platform for mutual learning of the other, between groups of people from different backgrounds who might not otherwise have the chance to meet and get to know each other in the city.

The decision-making powers and resources that the Vienna Municipality possesses has undoubtedly made such an inclusive rights-based project for migrants at the local level possible and contributed to its success. Especially during the height of the refugee crisis in 2015 when Vienna saw a large influx of refugees from Syria and the Middle East, the municipality's strong autonomy allowed it to respond with much-needed inclusive and rights-based programmes.

## REFERENCES

**Main interviewee:** Mag. Aydin Tunc  
(Project Coordinator, Vienna Municipality)

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This case study has been prepared by Anya Cardwell under the coordination of Barbara Lipietz and Tim Wickson from the Bartlett's Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College of London (UCL) and the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, in the framework of the MC2CM Project.



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