

Youth work in the context of integration of young refugees and migrants in Austria

Policy recommendations

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Background

The following policy recommendations have been developed within the framework of the project “Youth work in the context of integration”, which has been funded by the “Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP)” of the European Commission and coordinated by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). The project was carried out between December 2018 and November 2020.

The project’s aim was to improve the coordination of integration and youth work and thus supporting the integration process of young migrants and refugees.

One of the main results of the project was the establishment of a Board of Experts, which accompanied the project activities and was comprised of the most important federal ministries and authorities as well as the responsible youth and integration departments of the four federal provinces (Upper Austria, Salzburg, Vorarlberg, Vienna). This made it possible to create awareness for the topic among the key actors in the fields of youth work and integration and to promote cooperation among them.

As the analyses of the project activities showed, the cooperation between youth and integration work in the federal states is well developed in some areas, but it requires increased networking with other central areas, especially the education sector. An intensified dialogue between youth workers, pedagogues, integration workers and other relevant actors requires a stable institutional basis and mutual recognition of approaches and methods – requirements that are not always given. In addition to structured networking, it is also necessary to engage in a regular exchange over content and methodology in a stable framework, as well as to improve the documentation of project experiences and examples of good practice.

Coordinated by the ICMPD, the Board of Experts developed in consultation with the project partners from the four participating federal provinces and based on the findings of the project activities, a series of recommendations that identify the core areas of a holistic cooperation between youth and integration work and suggest concrete steps for its implementation. The policy recommendations are addressed to the responsible ministries and state authorities and will be handed over to them at the closing event of the project on 13 November 2020.

Objective: In order to support young migrants and refugees in their social and societal integration in the way possible, a holistic approach is needed which focuses on the needs and requirements of children and young people. This requires the cooperation of school, youth work and the labour market within a legally binding and adequately financed institutional framework that ensures regular exchange.

In order to establish such a cross-sectoral structure, a focus on the following aspects is needed:



Institutional level

Establishing an intersectoral cooperation platform with clearly defined common objectives and a clear division of responsibilities. The platform needs to be adequately supported and should have decision-making powers with regards to cooperation between the sectors mentioned.

The responsible school authorities, youth institutions, youth welfare, the health sector, labour market-related institutions and integration institutions at federal and state level should be obliged to participate in the platform. It should be possible to call in external experts and civil society organizations, such as migrant organizations or European bodies.

Proposals for the structure of the platform:

- A permanent body, which convenes on a regular basis, will steer the work of the platform. This steering group includes representatives with decision-making competences from the relevant public bodies in the education sector, the extracurricular youth sector, the labour market sector and the integration sector at federal and regional level. The steering group decides upon the further involvement of expert and civil society organisations.
- The operational activities of the platform are organisationally and financially secured and are taken care of by one of the participating institutions of the steering group from the youth or integration sector or another relevant institution and serves as a contact point for practitioners of various fields.
- In order to work on specific topics, the platform can set-up cross-sectoral "task forces", which bring together state institutions and civil society organisations, develop proposals for dealing with current challenges, organise an exchange of knowledge and experience and prepare demand-oriented calls for projects. The young people affected are to be involved, where it makes sense, by the work of the "task forces" with the help of trained and tested participation instruments of youth work.

Funding

The currently existing, scattered funding programmes in the fields of youth work and integration should be better coordinated and merged. In particular, European funding should be used to also promote cooperation between the main actors in the fields of youth work, integration and labour market and other relevant institutions and to develop joint and intersectoral programmes.

In the project area, too, intersectoral projects should be given preference in line with the proposals of the Austrian government programme 2020-2024. The cooperation between youth work, the integration sector and other relevant institutions should be positively assessed in the awarding of



projects. In order to facilitate a better exchange of project experiences and challenges, regular exchange formats should be established between funding bodies and project applicants.

To be put more concretely, the following is proposed:

a) Structural level:

- Provision of resources for the cooperation work carried out by the participating institutions within the framework of the platform.
- Coordination of funding agencies and pooling of budget funds from the areas of education, youth work, labour market and integration to design long-term intersectoral programmes using European funds (e.g. ESF, ERDF, Erasmus +, etc.).
- Regular information and advisory events for relevant actors at the regional level with the participation of the funding institutions to provide information on ongoing projects, to identify regional needs and to advice on submission procedures and procedures.

b) Project funding:

- Long-term design of cross-sectoral cooperation through the implementation of multi-year funding programmes.
- Special consideration and financial compensation for projects that are jointly developed and implemented by institutions from the integration area and youth work and that involve other relevant institutions as well as the young people themselves and their parents.
- Project budgets should include a dedicated contribution to the financing of transfer work.
- Increased involvement of the private sector through proactive involvement of foundations and companies.
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Linking schools, youth work and other areas

Youth work, school and integration face common challenges that require intensive cooperation from all relevant social institutions. A deeper cross-sectoral cooperation should therefore also contribute to better interlinking of content. In addition, there should also be a stronger structural link between forms of formal and informal learning, so that school and youth work, in the sense of "all-day education", support the individual learning process of children and young people as best as possible through their offers. A broad institutional link is to be ensured through the involvement of institutions related to the labour market, the security executive and the various civil society organizations.



An improved interlinking of content should also improve knowledge about the other sectors and their actors and convey the respective perspectives and approaches on an equal footing. This requires appropriate exchange formats for training and further education.

The following steps are proposed:

- In the sense of “all-day education”, explicit placement of pupils into extracurricular youth work and youth work into schools, e.g. by visiting youth centres and youth information points during class, organizing participation in youth work institutions, or integrating youth work into school operations.
- Establishment of a coordination point in each school to bundle school and extracurricular offers, e.g. through the expansion of the tasks of liaison teachers or school social workers.
- Regular exchange between the local school and extracurricular educational institutions, youth welfare and other relevant institutions, with a focus on inter-institutional cooperative development work. A special focus should be placed on the cooperation with the AMS, the various offers of labour market-related youth work at the local level and the private sector.
- Conclusion of formal agreements between schools and those involved in youth work on regular cooperation, joint projects and the possibility of sharing rooms.
- Interlinking of the training of teachers, pedagogues, youth workers, social workers and other educational actors by means of obligatory work shadowing programmes, which are laid out in the curriculum.
- Expansion of low-threshold support programmes with the aim of enabling people with a migration or refugee background to receive training in the educational programmes relevant to youth and integration work in the fields of education, youth work, social work, sociology or psychology.
- Dedicated communication of approaches and methods of youth work in the training and further education of other educational actors, for volunteers and parents, e.g. through the (compulsory) advanced training of teachers on diversity and youth issues and the provision of low-threshold offers to reach parents.
- Promotion of the opening of existing associations to include young people with a migration background.



Improved documentation of project experiences and information about good-practice examples

In order to be able to learn from the project experiences of the various funding agencies across the federal provinces, the platform to be established should set-up a digital, internet-based documentation of project results which facilitates the transfer of good practice examples.

Project documentation and the transfer of good practices are often uncoordinated and are usually not covered by project budgets. In order to achieve a good documentation culture in the medium term, a number of accompanying measures are needed.

- Twinning projects with other EU member states should promote the exchange of project experiences across Europe.
- Existing programmes should be regularly evaluated by accompanying scientific research and externally assessed in order to ensure that they keep up with the state of the art.
- Improved dissemination of European good practice projects and promotion of synergies between different EU funding programmes through regular events with representatives of European institutions.
- In order to make models of good practice in the field of cross-sectoral cooperation between youth work and schools or labour market more visible, the creation of a prize for cross-sectoral cooperation between the areas should be envisaged.