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Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth

INFORMATION SHEET

PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Austria



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1. Youth participation in Austria

Due to the federal structure of Austria and the fact that “youth” is by constitution in the concern of the 9 federal countries, the same holds for youth participation. But there are national dimensions for that too.

In Austria participation in society is a right for young people defined on the national level by the Federal law of youth representation. In the Federal Law on Representation of Youth (NR: GP XXI IA 270/A AB 351 S. 46. BR: 6253 and 6254 AB 6264 S. 670.) from the year 2001 the representation of the concerns of youth (= young people up to 30) in Austria observe the policy makers on national level is granted. In this law it is defined that the Austrian youth forum (Bundesjugendvertretung) as the umbrella organisation of Austrian youth (work) organisations represents and lobby for young people in policy development. The BJV is consulted in youth concerning affairs by the ministry in charge of youth.

Austria is the first country in Europe that enables voting on national level for all citizens from the age of 16.

On the level of the nine federal states there are regional laws that [regeln] the youth participation and the representation of young people (via regional youth organisations umbrella structures) in policy making.

In these laws on regional and national level respectively participation is understood as involvement of the young people in policy making via representative bodies.

Furthermore special groups of young people do have the right to participate in their special surroundings:

Following the Federal Law on Representation of pupils (*Schülervertretungengesetz*, BGBl. Nr. 284/1990) in all Austrian federal states exist a representation of pupils on regional level, as well as for Austria a national representation exists.

The Austrian National Union of Students (*Österreichische HochschülerInnenschaft ÖH*) is based on a federal law - the *HochschülerInnenschaftsgesetz* (HSG). It is the recognised representation of all students at Austrian universities and *Pädagogische Akademien* (Teacher Training Academies).

Definition of youth participation

From these laws one can deduce that youth participation is understood as involvement of (elected) bodies representing a special group of young people in the decision making and policy preparation processes.

Participation of young people is furthermore a working method that is suggested to be used in all areas that effect the live of young people.

Participation of children and youth implies that they can influence all decisions affecting their life by getting their voices heard, and by active creating the surrounding. By participation young people's engagement in society can be fostered since they experience the effects of active involvement.

Measures for promotion of participation

One of the most influential methods to foster participation in projects on all levels of youth work is the connection of financial support with the application of participatory elements.

In Austria a platform for children and youth participation was founded already in the year 1991. The *ARGE Partizipation* has the task to foster and promote participation of young people on all levels of society. They provide information and examples of good practise as well as knowledge exchange and support of ideas. The platform was constructed by the *Landesjugendreferate*, the departments in charge for youth policy in the nine federal countries, and is supported by the ministry in charge of youth.

Following the initiative of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management a strategy group dealing with the topic of participation was created. This expert group is - among other activities - developing a guideline for participation that should help people in the administration to fulfil the requirements of participation.

Voting with 16 is an important means to get all young people involved in the decision making process at least on the level of the representative democracy. Therefore before the first national elections when voting at the age of 16 was established, a special information campaign was launched – targeting on all groups of young people.

- Do any of the above mentioned measures target specific groups? (please tick)

- females
- males
- migrants
- young people with fewer opportunities
- young people in specific regions
- minorities (which):
- certain age groups within the age range 13-30(which):
- other:

2. Youth participation in representative democracy in Austria

Voting is not compulsory in Austria on any level.

- *What is the legal minimum age to vote in elections?*

European:	16	National:	16	Regional:	16	Local:	16
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- *What are the legal requirements for voting in local, regional, national and European elections?*

All Austrian citizens who have turned 16 on the Election Day are entitled to vote. Since 2007 it is possible to do postal vote.

Austrians living abroad and Austrians who are not at their permanent residence at the time of elections can submit their votes by polling card. Voting is not compulsory. Citizens lose their right to vote and passive right to vote only if they have been convicted of criminal offences.

On regional level all Austrian citizens, who have turned 16 on the Election Day and have their permanent residence at the time of the election in that federal state, are entitled to vote.

According to EU law, citizens of EU countries who have turned 16 on the Election Day can vote in elections on the local and on European level.

- *What are the legal requirements for being a candidate in elections?*

All Austrian citizens who have turned 18 on the day of the election have the passive right to vote, i.e. the right to be elected.

2.1. Participation in elections

	Participation in European elections in % of people with the right to vote			Participation in national elections in % of people with the right to vote		
	Total	female	male	total	female	male
% of total population	46,4% ¹	n.a.	n.a.	78.81% ²	n.a.	n.a.
13 – 30 year olds	~ 47% ³	n.a.	n.a.	~80% ⁴	n.a.	n.a.

The participation of any subgroup in elections in Austria can only be described for reasons of data protection. The federal Ministry of the Interior provides only data for the over all outcome of any election. Further information can only be obtained by market research institutes. But all research conducted in the last years show that participation of young people in elections is some points higher than the average participation. It can furthermore be detected that young men show a higher level of participation than young women – parallel to the over all participation in Austria.

¹ [Federal Ministry of the Interior](#)

² [Federal Ministry of the Interior](#),

³ Estimations following various social and market research companies like Fessel-GfK, Sora, tfactory or jugendkultur.at

⁴ Estimations following various social and market research companies like Fessel-GfK, Sora, tfactory or jugendkultur.at

2.2. Young people elected into representative bodies

Please provide the number (in total and by gender) of young people under the age of 30 who are members of the national parliament. Please provide the total number of parliamentarians on national level.

	MP ≤ 30		All MP	
	Number	%	Number	%
Women	3	1.64 %	50	27.32 %
Men	1	0.55 %	133	72.67 %
Total	4	2.19 %	183	100 %

All of the mentioned MP under the age of 30 turn 30 in the year 2011.

3. Youth participation in civil society

3.1. Membership in NGOs

Please give the percentage of young people aged 13 to 30 (if possible in total and gender) who are members in non-governmental organisations (including political and youth NGOs) and if possible for youth NGOs. Please provide the same data for political parties as well. For comparison, please provide the same data for the whole population.

	NGOs, including political NGOs and youth NGOs			Youth NGOs			Political parties		
	Total	female	male	Total	female	male	total	female	male
% of total population	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
13 – 30 year olds	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

3.2 Youth participation structures on local, regional or national level

Please give a picture of how young people can/do participate in formally recognized ways in civic society/policy in your country by answering to the following questions:

which types of youth participation structures exist in your country and which group of young people these structure do represent

In Austria representative bodies for youth participation exist on local, regional and national level. These youth forums have different legal status concerning their involvement in political decision making processes.

The Austrian youth forum (*Bundesjugendvertretung*) is the umbrella organisation of the youth organisations and has to be consulted in policy decision with direct impacts on young people.

In following Austrian federal states regional youth councils exist:

- Burgenland - Landesjugendforum Burgenland
- Lower Austria - Landesjugendbeirat Niederösterreich
- Salzburg - Landesjugendbeirat Salzburg
- Styria - Landesjugendbeirat Steiermark
- Upper Austria – Landesjugendbeirat Oberösterreich
- Vienna - Landesjugendbeirat Wien
- Vorarlberg - Landesjugendbeirat Vorarlberg

In these youth councils regional youth organisations are represented, in some are also other structures, which are dealing with youth, involved. All regional youth council are consulted by the federal youth departments in youth connected affairs; they also comment on laws in regard of youth compatible participation.

what is the degree of participation to decision making allowed by these structures (please fill in the table below):

Type of youth participation	% of local structures		% of regional structures		national	
Youth forums Umbrella organisation of youth organisations	There is no obligations for municipalities to have youth forums, but the number is increasing		7 out of 9 federal countries do have youth forums		National youth forum Bundesjugendvertretung http://jugendvertretung.at	
Share of power	Consultation	Information	Consultation: n.a.	Information: yes	Consultation: Yes	Information: yes
Pupils representations			In all federal states		BundesschülerInnenvertretung http://www.bsv.at/	
Share of power	Consultation	Information	Consultation: yes	Information: yes	Consultation yes	Information: yes
Students representation					Österreichische HochschülerInnenschaft http://www.oeh.ac.at	
Share of power	Consultation	Information	Consultation	Information	Consultation: yes	Information: yes
Unions (youth organisations)			In all federal countries		Österreichische Gewerkschaftsjugend http://www.oegj.at	
Share of power	Consultation	Information	Consultation	Information: yes	Consultation: yes	Information: yes

4. Learning to participate

4.1. The formal education system

In Austrian schools exists due to the decree GZ 33.464/6-19a/78 the educational principal "political education". Curricula on this topic exist for every kind of Austrian school with the aim to enable young people to understand and perceive the different forms of democratic participation in Austria. Additionally for secondary higher school (AHS) political education is part of the curriculum of the topic "history".

Teachers for history in the higher secondary schools have a special curriculum for political education. Furthermore many web resources (e.g. forum politische bildung <http://www.politischebildung.com>; Zentrum polis <http://www.politik-lernen.at>) offer possibilities for downloading material for the educational principle "political education".

One mechanism of citizens' education in schools is the direct democracy in the institution. In schools representatives of classes and representatives of the school are elected. The representatives of the schools elect on a regional level their representatives. The regional representatives elect the representatives on national level.

Pupils are also involved in the decision finding process in their school through the SGA – *Schulgemeinschaftsausschuss*. This body consists of three representatives of the teachers, the parents and the pupils each.

The "Donau Universität Krems" established a master study course (<http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/de/studium/politischebildung/index.php>) for political education, affecting both the formal and the non-formal curriculum.

The democracy centre (<http://www.demokratiezentrum.org/en/index.html> *Demokratie Zentrum Wien*) provides detailed information and educational material like articles, videos and audio files on the section "knowledge" on their website for download (<http://www.demokratiezentrum.org/en/cms/knowledge/index.html>).

The "*Forum politische Bildung Steiermark*" (<http://www.gesellschaftspolitik.at>) offers trainings and seminars for the non-formal education.

4.2. Non formal education

Please describe five to ten existing examples of actions/programmes/activities at national or regional level, outside the formal education system, aiming at developing and deepening learning to participate in your country.

Federal and national administration support youth organisations, youth initiatives and projects that aim for learning and promoting of participation of young people.

The main approach is to fund projects that deal with participation of young people. In some federal states of Austria local structures of youth participation and representation are legally established and are supported by the federal governments.

Examples

Information on politics with a close connection to elections can be found in the internet on specially designed websites for young people. These webpages do also aim at providing political education in non formal and informal education.

The initiative youth project "refresh politics" in lower Austria aims at political education outside of school: 4 young people designed a brochure to inform other young people about the political system in Austria and the way how democracy works with a special focus on the situation in lower

Austria, were the regional elections took place in the year 2009. Furthermore a webpage was set up for information as well as user generated content and exchange.

Also the information platform www.entscheidend-bist-du.at provides information and offers opportunities for exchange.

The page www.wahlkabine.at offers informal education about parties via providing help for the decision for which party to vote in the respectively following elections. Thus the political programmes of all parties are made visible.

5. Youth information in Austria

5.1. The structure of youth information

Please describe how youth information is organised in your country answering the following questions.

- Do youth information points / centres exist?

Yes, in Austria exist in all nine federal countries regional youth information centres. Furthermore also on the national level a youth information centre exists.

- Does youth information coordinated at the national level exist?

Yes, the network of youth information centres in Austria jugendinfo.cc coordinates the actions and activities of youth information in Austria. Jugendinfo.cc is also the representative of Austria concerning youth information on European level.

- Does youth information coordinated at the regional level exist? Y/N. If yes, where?

Youth information offices and centres exist in all nine federal states in Austria. In some of these countries also youth information services are provided in smaller regions.

- Is youth information in your country member of any European network (ERYICA, EYCA, Eurodesk)? If yes, name the network.

Jugendinfo.cc is the Austrian member of the European networks ERYICA, EYCA, and Eurodesk.

5.2. The youth information services

Please provide the percentage of municipalities with a youth information point/centre.

Youth information points or centres exist in some of the Austrian municipalities. But youth information is organised on the regional level. The Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth manages a youth information point in Vienna. The nine Federal States offer altogether 31 information centres and information points in the respective capital of the Federal State and in other important cities.

Is there an online national youth information system? Y/N. If yes, please provide the links to the relevant webpage(s), state if the portal provides youth information only on a specific topic.

National youth portals: www.jugendinfo.at; www.infoup.at

Are there any online regional youth information systems? Y/N If yes, please provide the links to the relevant webpage(s), state if the portal provides youth information only on a specific topic.

Regional youth portals are run by the regional youth information centres:

Vorarlberg: www.aha.or.at;

Tyrol: www.infoeck.at;

Salzburg: www.akzente.net;

Upper Austria: www.jugendservice.at;

Lower Austria: www.jugendinfo-noe.at;

Vienna: www.jugendinfowien.at;

Burgenland: www.ljr.at;

Styria: www.logo.at;

Carinthia: <http://www.jugend.ktn.gv.at/>

Please describe existing national or regional (federal states) print publications for information of young people in your country (e.g. magazines, folders/brochures).

In Austria the youth information centres offer some national and some regional print information
National:

auf und davon (information on travel),
global experience (information on exchange, and international work experiences),
the cash - on tour (information on money and debts),
Ferien- und Nebenjobsuche (information on jobs)
and a yearly schedule and information on concerts and festivals.

On the regional level almost all federal states provide a newsletter and information-folders for different topics

5.3. Topics of youth information

In relation to the structures of youth information you mentioned above, what are the main contents of information delivered to young people?

- career guidance
- studies and scholarships
- jobs and training
- general health matters
- relationships and sexuality
- social security benefits
- rights of young people
- consumer rights
- European opportunities for young people
- youth activities and exchanges
- Other (please explain)

5.4. Young people's involvement in youth information

How do young people participate in the national/regional system of youth information?

Young people are invited to contribute to the print magazine "a.way" with articles and photos. Here they can publish stories and impressions about their experiences during EVS-assignments, Youth in Action projects and other occurrences in foreign countries as well as holiday travels. In addition to that the online youth portals offer communication platforms like forums. Furthermore there is peer to peer information system in Vorarlberg: Info-Peers give information on the action lines of the EU-Programme YOUTH in action in their own schools twice the month.

6. Informal ways of young people's participation

Please describe informal ways used by young people to make their voices heard in society in your country.

Please describe alternative ways of youth participation connected to the use of online technologies answering the following questions:

- Top down approach (e.g. online consultations): in which occasion?

The Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth use the method of consultations for various topics. On the one hand it is forwarding the European Union approaches in this regard over its own homepage, the national youth portal, the youth information portals and the federal states youth department's homepages. Furthermore it is sending out invitations to these consultations using the database of existing e-mail contacts.

In direct consultations with young people the structured dialogue is implemented. A think tank of non organised young people exists that meets in irregular periods with members of the department for youth policy in the Federal Ministry in charge for youth.

- Bottom up approach (e.g. organised actions through social networks and the internet): in which occasion?

In the last years new forms of participation in society became more and more important. Memberships in organisations is not longer seen as the one and only way to influence political decisions.

In the year 2009 a big students demonstrations independent of organisations like political parties or student's participation forums took place. This demonstration was organised almost entirely with new media like twitter and facebook. The demonstrations lead to the occupation of the biggest auditorium of the University Vienna, and eventually to direct talks with representatives of the Federal Ministry for Science.

Similar approaches of direct democracy could be seen in local decision making processes.

7. Sources of information

Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Familie und Jugend, www.bmwfj.gv.at, (Federal Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth)

Bundesministerium für Inneres: Wahlen; www.bmi.gv.at, (Federal Ministry of the Interior)

Statistik Austria: Statistisches Handbuch; www.statistik.at

SORA – Institute for Social Research and Consulting, www.sora.at

tfactory-Trendagentur, newsletter

Jugendkultur.at – Institute for Youth Culture Research, www.jugendkultur.at

www.infoup.at

www.jugendinfo.at

www.jugendinfo.cc

www.parlament.gv.at