



OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

AUSTRIA

2018 COUNTRY FACT SHEET

Despite a well-developed social welfare system and a 30-year-long history of transition towards community-based approach and family-like settings, challenges still exist in Austria. For example, 35,463 children from at-risk families were referred to social protection services in 2017¹; that shows a 4,14% increase since 2016 when 34,053 children received child welfare intervention. There is a considerable number of children living in the alternative care system (13,617 children in 2017). Lack of the nationwide quality standards of residential care, coupled with limited financial resources, missing structures and resources for the aftercare support are some of the common obstacles for child welfare and child protection professionals in Austria. Furthermore, the Austrian child protection system has been recently challenged by the great influx of unaccompanied migrant children arriving to Austria (1,751 children in 2017)². Although living conditions of unaccompanied migrant children have improved, children are still being discriminated against due to their status.

The most important development in the sector of child and youth welfare in Austria last year was the legislative proposals regarding children in out-of-home care and care leavers, planned to be adopted by the new government in December 2018. According to the new law, known as the "Agreement 15a", the federal child and youth welfare act will be terminated on a federal basis and integrated in the legislation nationwide. The proposal has been strongly criticized by the national experts, civil society and the majority of stakeholders in the field of child and youth welfare. The proposed "Agreement 15a" does not correspond with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child due to the lack of centralised national management of child and youth welfare. Moreover, national planning of an impact-oriented child and youth welfare system requires conclusive, countrywide federal statistics and their respective evaluation. No impact assessment was conducted and the occurrence and continuity of the agreement is uncertain. There are concerns over increasing disparities in the quality and nature of child and youth welfare >>

¹ http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/menschen_und_gesellschaft/soziales/sozialleistungen_auf_landesebene/kinder_und_jugendhilfe/110531.html

² <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/austria/statistics>

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



STANDARDIZE THE ASYLUM PROCEDURES FOR UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN SO THAT THEY GET THE SAME CARE AND PROTECTION AS THEIR PEERS. THE EU FUNDS SHOULD BE USED TO HELP WITH THE INTEGRATION OF UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN AT NATIONAL LEVEL.

>> services between the counties due to greater leeway for counties to design their respective child and youth welfare systems. National civil society organisations are concerned that this may result in the unclear division of responsibilities between child and youth care providers, which may also complicate continuity of services when families or young people in care change their residence to a different county. The adaptation of child protection systems to social developments might become difficult. The proposed changes might also complicate the process of international and European exchange.

In 2017, there were 13,617 children and young people in alternative care in Austria: 8,307 children in residential care (the so-called social pedagogical facilities) and 5,310 children in foster care. The quality of services in social pedagogical facilities has been constantly improving. There are more and more facilities that use specialised services such as psychotherapy, trauma-related pedagogy or other services aimed to address individual needs of each child in the best possible way.

However, quality standards regarding care processes (participation, bonding, etc) and the definition of unitary standards still need to be implemented.

In 2017, there were 12,138 migrant children and 1,751 unaccompanied migrant children living in Austria³. Several organisations have launched projects to support these children with financial support from the EU. Specifically, the Opening Doors national coordinator, FICE Austria, has been implementing the “FORUM” project which aims to raise awareness about the benefits of foster care as alternative to reception centres for the care of unaccompanied migrant children and to build capacity of professionals working with unaccompanied migrant children in participating countries.

The International Organization of Migration is implementing the “FAB - Fostering Across Borders” project which aims to improve the quality and access to family-based care for unaccompanied migrant children. To this end, the project conducted a mapping analysis of current training programmes for foster families looking after unaccompanied migrant children and relevant authorities and institutions responsible for the recruitment, training and support of the foster families. Based on the findings of the mapping, the project is currently adapting training materials to build the capacity of relevant institutions to ensure safe and effective family-based care for unaccompanied migrant children. Trainings of trainers will be followed by cascade training where trained trainers will train foster families in order to support and accompany them, or to recruit new foster parents. The project takes into consideration voices of unaccompanied and separated migrant children: focus group discussions have been held with children with migrant background living in family-based care; they have been invited to participate in the production of an information and awareness raising video. This will ensure that the trainings contents, as well as foster care arrangements, will meet their needs. In addition to the training elements, the project will also carry out awareness raising activities aiming at gaining new potential foster carers and supporting existing ones.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



ENSURE THAT NATIONAL QUALITY CARE STANDARDS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PROTECT CHILD AND YOUTH WELFARE SYSTEM FROM PERMANENT EXPOSURE TO FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES. CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THEIR OWN CARE LEAVING PROCESS AND HAVE A SAY IN WHAT HAS TO BE DONE.

³ <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/austria/statistics>



OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN AUSTRIA

FICE Austria, founded 1968, is the national section of FICE International (International Federation of Educative Communities) which is an international worldwide network of professionals working with and for “out of home” children, children at risk and children with special needs. FICE Austria promotes high-quality standards in alternative child and youth care, as well as it actively supports exchange of knowledge, expertise and good practice among respective stakeholders at national, European and international level. To find out more visit www.fice.at

The Opening Doors for Europe’s Children campaign supports national efforts to develop child protection systems that strengthen families and ensure high-quality family and community-based alternative care for children, by leveraging EU funding and policy and building capacity in civil society.

It is a partnership between 5 international organisations and civil society across 16 European countries. For more information go to www.openingdoors.eu