



OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

WWW.OPENINGDOORS.EU

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

AUSTRIA

COUNTRY FACT SHEET

The process of transition from institutional care towards family and community-based solutions has started in Austria in the mid-1980s and by now has almost completed. Despite positive reforms, challenges still remain for vulnerable families and children in alternative care. Lack of the nationwide quality standards of residential care, limited financial resources, missing structures and resources for the aftercare support are some of the most common obstacles. Furthermore, over the recent years Austrian child protection system has been challenged by the great influx of unaccompanied, migrant and refugee children arriving to the country. Despite improved living conditions for the unaccompanied children, they continue to be discriminated against due to their status. Especially for children above the age of 14, the main alternative care option is special homes for unaccompanied minors which are not directly subordinated to the child and youth protection system but to the basic and often under-resourced welfare system for foreigners (“Grundversorgung”).

In 2016, 34,053 children (2.3% of total population of children) received child welfare intervention, including various support, prevention and alternative care services. Early intervention services have started to be implemented, but are not yet available nationwide. A number of further prevention services such as parental advice and guidance or parental education and support aim to contribute to the well-being of children in their families of origin. In addition, access to the mobile family services have improved across various regions. There are improvements in statistical data, and in all provinces, independent ombudspersons for children and youth have been introduced. Yet, much remains to be done to enhance the capacity of all employees working in the child protection sector in Austria.

KEY DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS CHILD PROTECTION REFORM



FOSTER AND GUEST FAMILIES HAVE BEEN RECENTLY INTRODUCED FOR UNACCOMPANIED

MIGRANT CHILDREN IN AUSTRIA; HOWEVER, THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN THESE FAMILIES IS STILL RELATIVELY LOW.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT ASYLUM MIGRATION INTEGRATION FUND IS AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE REFORMS ON THE GROUND. THIS WILL ENABLE ACCESS TO THE MAINSTREAM SERVICES AND EARLY INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES IN AUSTRIA.

In 2016, there were 13,646 children and youth in full alternative care in Austria: 8,423 children in residential care (the so-called social pedagogical facilities) and 5,162 children in foster care. The quality of services provided in the social pedagogical facilities in the country 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 the needs of every child in the best possible way. However, quality standards regarding care processes (participation, bonding, etc) and definition of the unitary standards still need to be implemented. This specifically concerns homes for unaccompanied migrant and refugee children.

Although children deprived of parental care grow up in the family-based care and small group homes, there are no legislative or administrative

measures in Austria which make obligatory care for the young people above the age of 18. The law only stipulates that support to the care leavers may be provided until they reach 21 years of age when this support is necessary to reach certain goals which were previously defined with the responsible social worker. The aftercare for young adults is, therefore, mostly conducted on a voluntary basis by the residential care providers and/or foster parents where the young adult was in care before reaching the age of 18.

In 2016, 3,900 unaccompanied migrant and refugee children sought asylum in Austria (in 2015, their number was 8,277 children). Unaccompanied children above the age of 16 usually stay in reception centers until their asylum request is taken into consideration. These reception centers are usually not adequately equipped for minors (e.g. access to education is limited) and there is no comprehensive guardianship during the admission procedure. The duration of stay in these centers depends on the admission process and the available places in the homes for unaccompanied migrant and refugee children which may vary between several days to several months. Children above the age of 14 are mostly placed in the above-mentioned social pedagogical facilities within the specific welfare system for foreigners ("Grundversorgung"). Unaccompanied children under the age of 14 are usually accommodated in social pedagogical facilities within the system of the public child and youth care services. Foster families or guest families programmes have been implemented in the last two years, but nationwide data are not available yet and the number of children living in these families still seems to be very small.

EU funds (e.g. Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)) are used in Austria to support a broad scope of services with special focus on language acquisition and education, preparation for workplace integration, starting support and orientation. Yet, services oriented to support the whole families and parents in a broad, resource-oriented way (i.e. through participation in the educational paths of their children, health promotion etc.) are still rare. In addition, it is essential to keep a stronger focus on transitional phases, including services for unaccompanied children and families transitioning from institutional care to independent living, in order to avoid ruptures in their education processes, existing networks and relationships. Finally, one of the most urgent problems for unaccompanied minors coming of age and families leaving institutional care is access to the affordable housing, particularly in urban areas. Additional services that provide living spaces combined with ambulant support services and gender-sensitive approach are needed to support their education, integration to the labour market and general orientation in the new environment.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN MIGRATION UNDER THE AUSTRIAN CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM ENSURING THAT THEY RECEIVE THE SAME LEVEL OF PROTECTION AS THEIR PEERS. QUALITY STANDARDS FOR THE ACCOMMODATION AND CARE OF REFUGEES SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED NATIONWIDE.

Although children deprived of parental care grow up in the family-based care and small group homes, there are no legislative or administrative



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