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Austria

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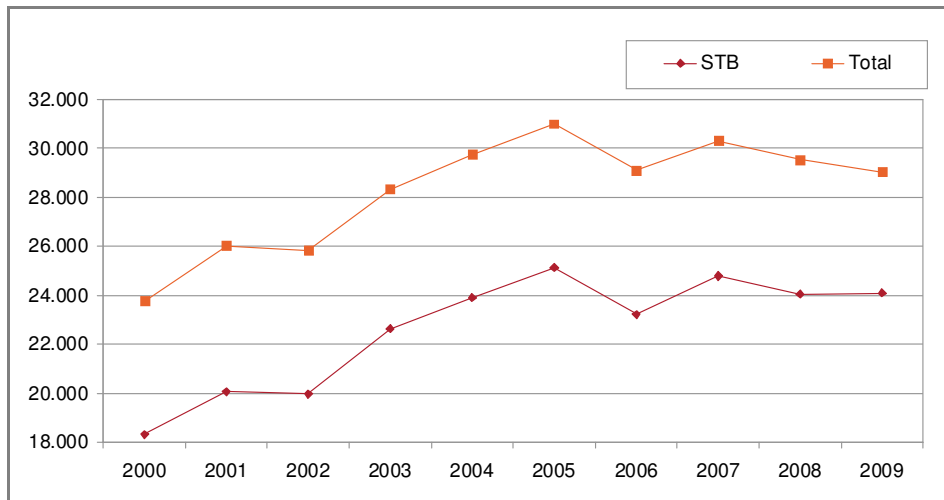
1. Introduction

In Austria it is necessary to distinguish between different categories among the self-employed: Gewerbetreibende (people engaged in trade and businesses), members of businesses that do not require a license, professionals (e.g. journalists, artists), Neue Selbstständige (quasi self-employed) and farmers. Data for the past few years show that from 2006 to 2007 a slight increase in self-employment can be observed (cf. Annex). The following years were characterised by a slight decrease in self-employment (both as an absolute figure and as a percentage of the labour force) and in 2009, the share of self-employed persons came to 11 % of the total labour force. Self-employment is more common among men than women (13 % of the male labour force are self-employed compared to 8 % of the female labour force). Taking age into account, the data indicate that self-employment is more widespread among the 35 years and older age group and that self-employed persons tend to work longer than employees, which leads to a steadily higher share of self-employed persons in the labour force the greater the age. As far as the importance of self-employment for different sectors is concerned, there has been a reduction in the agricultural sector. While the self-employed accounted for 62 % of the labour force in agriculture in 2006, this share dropped to around 50 % in 2009. But in spite of this, self-employment is still very important in the agricultural sector. In contrast, the share is around 5 % in industry and 10% in the services sector (in the latter a slight increase in total numbers of self-employed persons can be observed).

A growing group of self-employed people have no employees. Meanwhile, more than half of the members of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (54 % in December 2009) are sole trader businesses (STB) (cf. WKÖ, 2010). With a share of 63 % of all STBs, 'information and consultancy services' is the most important category. Compared to the above presented figures, the share of women in the group of sole trader businesses is higher than in the total group of self-employed people (42 % versus 35 %).

From 2002 until the end of 2005, start-up activities by sole trader businesses (STB) and business in general exhibited high growth rates (cf. Figure 1). After a decline in activity in the year 2006 (STB: -7.6 %, all businesses: -6.1 %), growth rates reached a level of +6.7 % for STB and 4.1 % for businesses overall in 2007. Data for 2008 and preliminary data for 2009 suggest that the economic crisis had a negative influence on start up activities overall, with negative growth rates of -2.5 % in 2008 and -2.6 % in 2009. Start-up activities of sole trader businesses seem to have recovered faster, with -2.9 % in 2008 but a slightly positive growth rate of +0.2 % in 2009. The available statistics from the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber differentiate start-up activities of STB by gender. Since 2005, start-up activities by women have had higher positive, respectively less negative, growth rates than for men. In the year 2007, women STB start-ups had a growth of over 14 %, while start-ups of STBs led by men only grew by 2.3 % (of course starting from a different level). In 2008, start up activities of STBs declined by -1.5 % for women and almost -4 % for men. In 2009, STB start-up activities turned slightly positive again for women (+0.6 %) and stagnated for men (-0.07 %).

Figure 1: Start Up Activities in Austria, Sole Trader Businesses (STB) and All Businesses



Source: Chamber of Commerce, 2009. Internet: <http://wko.at/statistik/jahrbuch/ng-sparten.pdf> and <http://wko.at/statistik/jahrbuch/ng-geschlecht.pdf>

Policies and Measures Supporting Business Creation

In Austria, a great variety of actors support business development and promotion. For the purposes of simplification, one can differentiate between four different types of actors. The first group consists of the municipalities, federal states and federal authorities (Gebietskörperschaften). Secondly, there are funding bodies which have been removed from the federal administration, such as the Austrian Economic Service (AWSG) and the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG). Thirdly, there are entities which, in contrast to those mentioned above, have legal autonomy and manage public funds (e.g. ERP Funds). Lastly, there is also a 'contracting out' of business promotion, for example, with the help of the Kommunalkredit Public Consulting GmbH (KPC) or the Austrian Hospitality and Tourism Bank (ÖHT).

The following section will consider policies that support business creation and have led to the actors mentioned above becoming active. Other kinds of support measures that support entrepreneurs after their start up are not considered here (for more information see for example internet: <http://www.aba.gv.at/EN>).

The first field of policy concerns **administrative entry barriers** that make setting up a new business difficult. Lowering administrative costs will have positive effects on business creation in the start-up phase, especially on small and medium sized enterprises. The Neugründungs- Förderungsgesetz, NeuFög (Start-up Promotion Law), which came into force in 1999, relieves newly-founded businesses from a number of administrative costs (stamp duties, federal administration charges, conveyance duty, fees for entry in the commercial- and cadastral register and the company tax). For the first year, newly set up businesses are also exempted from ancillary wage costs.

Bankruptcy regulation has an important effect on entrepreneurship as it helps to overcome the stigma of business failure, as emphasised in the Small Business Act. Through the reform

of the bankruptcy law in Austria, the recapitalisation of a company should be easier (cf. section 3).

There are measures in Austria which concern **access to financing** for newly founded businesses. One strand of access to financing consists of state-guarantees through which firms can double their equity. For example, guarantees are granted by the Austrian Economic Service (AWSG) for 'innovative projects' which are not older than five years. Another strand of access to financing is the so called Gründerbonus (Start-up Bonus), which consists of a one-off benefit for start-ups and amounts to a maximum of 14 % (or EUR 8 400) of their own savings, granted by the Chamber of Commerce.

Creating and adopting new knowledge is a fundamental source of entrepreneurial opportunities. These new ideas are partly generated in academic research, and policy measures for start-ups should therefore aim at increasing knowledge generation and the exploitation and commercialisation of new knowledge. The Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG), which is the national funding institution for applied industrial research, supports through the programme AplusB the start-up of new businesses stemming from the academic sector. The support offered consists of professional consultancy services for these potential future entrepreneurs. In general, there is quite some offer of consultancy services for future entrepreneurs, e.g. consultancy for future export-businesses in the course of the Go International programme of the Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry of Economics. FFG and AWSG also offer consultancy services for businesses in the technology/science sectors.

From a market-efficiency point of view, **subsidies** can only be justified if they are used as a tool to balance the opportunities for economic activity, which would point to a discriminatory policy for disadvantaged groups. By and large, the support scheme in Austria follows these principles with the entrepreneur programme for the long term unemployed (cf. section 2) and special support schemes for increasing self-employment among women and migrants (cf. below, for the above mentioned fields of policy compare Hölzl et al.).

2. Assessment of national LM policies and recovery measures

The main programme to stimulate self-employment as an alternative to inactivity and unemployment is the Unternehmensgründungsprogramm – UGP (business start-up programme) of the Public Employment Office (PES). Launched in 1998, the programme is targeted towards unemployed people who intend to become self-employed. The programme comprises business advice and counselling from external business consultants, training programmes and, under certain conditions, financial support to cover the costs of living. All participants go through four stages:

- clearing phase (duration: eight weeks) - elaboration and assessment of the business plan and selection of appropriate candidates for the next step;
- preparation phase - entry into the programme and continuous counselling and training;
- implementation phase (both phases together are six to nine months maximum);
- follow-up counselling phase (within two years after foundation) - company check-up by the business consultants.

The conditions for support have been constantly improved. In the preparation phase, participants receive a subsistence allowance (Beihilfe zur Deckung des Lebensunterhalts –

DLU). The allowance has been introduced in order to ease the access for the unemployed without any unemployment benefit claims. In the implementation phase, a Gründungsbeihilfe (business start-up subsidy) is granted if needed. About 65 % of the participants receive the business start-up subsidy. The minimum duration of granting the business start-up subsidy has been extended up to two months. The subsidy aims at safeguarding people's livelihood during the initial months of self-employment in order to guarantee the permanent success of a business start-up on the labour market.

Since 1998, the programme has showed a continuous increase in the number of participants. While in 2001 about 3 500 unemployed people entered the programme, the number of participants reached 8 500 in the year 2009. The annual increase in 2009 from the previous year's level stood at +6.8 %. In contrast to a general decline in business foundation in Austria in 2009, the UGP shows the opposite trend. Nevertheless, self-employment cannot be seen as a general alternative to unemployment, as only 3 % of the unemployed participated in the programme. On the whole, a very small fraction (4.6 %), of all start-ups in 2009, was set up by former unemployed persons (cf. WKÖ. Internet: <http://gruenderservice.at>).

The UGP programme also includes special elements for women and migrant communities. Women are eligible for a 50 % higher allowance for training costs when attending special training courses targeted to women. Women and migrants are entitled to return to additional counselling during the clearing phase.

The participation rate of women in the programme is about 40 %; despite the incentives offered the aim to have female participants at least according to their share in the number of unemployed has failed. Also, foreigners or people with a migration background form a very low proportion of business founders.

In order for the UGP programme to succeed, a relatively high qualification level of participants is an important factor. In the reference year of the evaluation (2004), the proportion of unemployed with a compulsory school degree stood at 45 %. By comparison, the proportion of this group in the UGP participation group was only 3 %. However, the rate of participants with an academic degree was five times higher than the rate amongst unemployed.

In 2009, the annual costs for counselling and guidance carried out by external business consultants amounted to EUR 5.8 million. The budget for the business start-up subsidy was EUR 11.1 million.

An evaluation of the UGP in the period 1999-2005 showed positive results. About three out of four participants set up their own businesses. Most notable is the stability and growth of the businesses established under the programme. Five years after start-up, 73 % of all business founders were still running their own businesses, 6 % were also in other forms of employment. The survival rate of the UGP start-ups is as high as that of non-UGP set-ups. The evaluation showed that "obviously it is essential to overcome the high-risk, labour intensive and often personally demanding set-up phase" (Dornmayr/ Lenger 2006, p.15f.) for the sustainable survival of these businesses.

Another positive aspect is the job creation effect of UGP set-ups. After five years, every business founder created an average of 1.26 full jobs, which means that after five years the new jobs had doubled by virtue of the secondary jobs created by new businesses. The job

satisfaction of founders turned out to be relatively high: nearly four fifths of the interviewed founders (1 013) are highly or rather satisfied with UGP's impact on their current professional careers. Despite no major gender differences in satisfaction, the survey showed differences in the business foundation process. One difference is the orientation and motivation for business foundation. Flexible working time and self fulfilment are the main aspects for women, whereas men strive for higher income and success. The different goals are linked to the different living conditions of men and women. The results also indicate that women have access to less money than men, which is another reason why women tend to plan their business start-ups more carefully and on a smaller scale than men.

To increase the job creation impact of business foundation in general, in 2009 the Ministry of Labour established a subsidy for sole trader businesses (STBs) who are willing to hire an employee. STBs which hire a registered unemployed or a person in vocational training or a university graduate to a maximum age of 30 years receive a subsidy from the public employment service (AMS). The subsidy, which makes up a quarter of the gross wage, is granted for up to one year. For 2010, a budget was planned for the amount of EUR 5 million. By mid April 2010, only EUR 0.22 million had been spent. According to these figures, the planned budget will not be exhausted this year. Apart from this initiative which was part of an economic stimulus package during the crisis, no additional crisis-recovery measure with self-employment as its focus has been launched.

As a complementary programme to the UGP, the Ministry for Labour has recently launched a microcredit pilot programme in Vienna and Styria. The main target groups are unemployed or atypically employed persons who intend to set up their own businesses. To support the foundation process, a maximum loan of EUR 12 500 for single persons and EUR 25 000 (for a business partnership) is provided by the Ministry. This should help to cover the initial costs for founding a small business, takeover or extension. The background to the pilot programme has to be seen in the context of difficulties for the unemployed to receive bank loans without providing security. The implementation of the programme is supported by counselling and training offers for company founders. In total, the budget for the pilot microcredit programme amounts to EUR 1.4 million. During the crisis, banks became very defensive against granting loans to persons or business partnerships. They demanded a high level of security, which was nearly impossible for the unemployed to provide. In this situation the microcredit programme might be an important substitute for bank loans to which unemployed do not have access.

This programme helps a certain group of business founders to evade the bottlenecks on the money and credit market. On the other hand it might help to exhaust the potential of unemployed who are interested in self-employment.

3. Quality of self-employment jobs

Quality of work can be assessed along different dimensions, such as adequacy of earnings, skills and career development or work life balance. Addressing these dimensions, the following section will outline some key facts and measures, taking into account gender specific aspects.

The latest data available from the Income Report of the Austrian Court of Audit is from 2005. It is noticeable that – as in the past – there were significant differences between different economic branches. The highest incomes were recorded by self-employed persons in the

health sector (due to the medical profession), with a mean gross annual income of EUR 31 319. The lowest income levels can be found for self-employed persons in the agriculture sector (EUR 7 242) or in the field of carrying out public or personal services (EUR 8 229). One has to bear in mind that the documentation of income for self-employed persons is rather inaccurate, due to tax reasons. According to EU-SILC data (cf. STATISTIK AUSTRIA 2009), which allows for a comparison of the income of self-employed persons and employees, the net-equivalised household income in 2008 for self-employed persons (main source of household income: freelance activities) is around EUR 23 500 on average. This is slightly higher than in households where the main source of income is dependent work (EUR 22 400). The income distribution of self-employed persons is more unequal than in the case of wage earners: 11 % of self-employed persons belong to the lowest income decile, compared to 5 % in the case of dependent work. The highest income decile applies to 16 % of self-employed versus 11 % for employees.

EU-SILC data indicates that self-employed persons (main source of household income: freelance activities) are more affected by risk-of-poverty (after social transfers) (13 %) than wage earners (7 %). Compared to the total population, the risk-of-poverty rate of self-employed people is on average 13 % versus 12 % in total.

Different reforms and newly introduced measures in the past few years – also in the context of the flexicurity agenda – aim at improving the situation. In the course of the latest tax reform, the tax allowance has been rising from 10 % up to 13 % for profits. Another key issue in this context is the social security of self-employed people. Especially for Neue Selbstständige (quasi self-employed) and sole trader businesses (STB), surveys in the past have shown that women and men see the given fragmentary inclusion into the social security system as a great burden (cf. e.g.: Fink et al. 2005; Kaupa et al. 2006). Since 1 January 2009, self-employed business persons may voluntarily contract into unemployment insurance (cf. for more information see internet: http://esv-sva.sozvers.at/mediaDB/650414_B%201%20englisch.pdf). Critics argue that the model is not well enough adjusted to the situation of self-employed persons. The actual claim rate is not published, but data from the first month of implementation indicated restrained demand. Furthermore, since 2008 a specific provision model based on the model of employees' severance payment schemes has been introduced for self-employed persons.

Due to the traditional gender specific share of work and household responsibilities, several studies show that one main problem of self-employed women is work-life-balance. For example, in a survey from 2005 nearly half of the women interviewed stated that they suffer from the double burden of paid work and household work. Also, 76 % of the respondents say that they are in need of support in the context of reconciling work and family life. A special problem in this context is the lack of flexible childcare facilities in Austria. A quantitative and qualitative extension of child care possibilities is essential for improving the situation of women. For this purpose, recent reforms in the field of kindergartens should help improve the situation (e.g. a free of charge kindergarten year for children aged five years for as much as 20 hours per week; see internet: <http://www.bmwfj.gv.at/Familie/Kinderbetreuung>). Besides this, women entrepreneurs especially, amongst others, have claimed for tax deductibility of childcare costs, which was also implemented in the course of the latest tax reform.

Studies have identified different specific barriers for a successful start-up and running a business (cf. Buchinger 2002, Schiffbänker et al. 2007, Heckl et al. 2005 and 2010, see also above). For example, due to gender-specific socialisation, education and professional development, female founders are often risk-averse; they lack relevant knowledge in technical and business management areas (marketing, fiscal and legal matters), experience in negotiations or within the specific business areas, as well as management- and leadership experience. Female business managers are partly less accepted than their male colleagues in the male-dominated world economy – this is true for negotiating loans as well as for taking over businesses, especially if women are not able to demonstrate long-time experience within a specific business area or management experience. Most resistance is experienced in technology orientated business areas.

There are just a few special policy initiatives to improve the situation of self-employed women, and most of the programmes aim at improving the situation of self-employed women as well as men (see for example Schiffbänker et al. for the Research and Technology Sector). Good Practice initiatives are implemented, for example, through ‘*Frau in der Wirtschaft*’ (Women in businesses; internet: http://portal.wko.at/wk/format_detail.wk?angid=1&stid=164220&dstid=281&opennavid=) of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce. They offer a service centre, take over the representation of interests and run a network for businesswomen on the federal level as well as in the nine provincial organisations. The so-called Academy for Small Businesses of Women (internet: http://portal.wko.at/wk/format_detail.wk?AngID=1&StID=217642&DstID=281) offers special training programmes for female STBs. Key topics, amongst others, are general business know-how, marketing, cooperation, networking and self-management.

Minority ethnic business is an issue that has gained more attention in the past few years. For example, a study on Vienna has suggested that nearly one third of all individual based enterprises are run by migrants (Enzenhofer et al. 2007). Amongst other things, the authors of this study recommended better access to micro credits and improved counselling offers (e.g. through diversity competent consultants).

‘Pseudo-self-employment’ is to some degree a problem in the non-regulated crafts, especially in construction-related trades. To circumvent the temporary arrangement for the free movement of labour, new Member State nationals working on construction sites opt for a self-employed status but are actually regular employees. As they are formally self-employed, payment is not bound by collective agreements and in addition they bear the whole risk of their economic activities.

For another group of employees - primarily female foreign care workers - the Austrian legislator a few years ago legalised the opportunity for them to work as self-employed. There is the opportunity to receive government grants for care, dependent on the income and care level of the person in need of care. Again, as in the case of pseudo-self-employed persons in construction-related trades, payment of these self-employed caretakers is not bound by collective agreements. There is some small control over the income, as the government subsidy of EUR 550 per month is only granted if the contribution base for the social insurance for two care workers is at least EUR 537 each per month (cf. BMASK_a and BMASK_b).

Last but not least, negative expectations about bankruptcy rates due to the economic crisis have not turned out to be true. In the year 2009, there was an increase in business bankruptcy

by 9.3 % to 6 902 cases and this remained behind the 2005 rate with 7 000 bankruptcies (cf. KSV). Despite this, the Austrian government decided to ease the recapitalisation of companies by merging bankruptcy and composition proceedings into one single insolvency proceeding. The aim is to motivate the debtor to bring forward the notion of an insolvency procedure at an earlier stage, because the procedure is not in every case a bankruptcy proceeding and thus the stigma of bankruptcy is moderated. The changes to bankruptcy laws were passed in parliament on 21 April 2010.

4. Conclusions

Since the year 2000, a steady increase in the number of business start-ups can be observed. During the economic crisis, the dynamic of business start-ups lost momentum. Analysis of the social and economic situation of self-employed persons shows a differentiated picture depending on the type of self-employment. Work-life-balance is a key problem especially for self-employed women. This situation requires targeted and tailor-made support for different types of self-employed persons. This support should refer to access to financing, relief of private burden by offering subsidised support (e.g. child care provision, temporary staff during periods of illness etc.) or flexible social security schemes.

The high rate of sole trader businesses (STBs) indicates that there is an unused potential for job creation. New forms of networking between STBs are required, which pool together business services required and which are paid for by different STBs.

It should be considered that for the vast majority of unemployed people self-employment is not an alternative to unemployment. Low and medium skilled unemployed people especially are hardly reached by the business set-up programme for unemployed. Future efforts must be targeted to improve the accessibility of the UGP to these skills-groups. There is also a need for increased support of minority ethnic businesses, which in different ethnic communities play an important role in employment.

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Annex

Table 1: Self-Employment in Austria: 2006 to 2009

Self-employment total (and as % of total labour force per category)	2006	2007	2008	2009
Women and men	437,300	487,400	471,800	463,100
Women	165,300 (9%)	174,400 (9%)	166,300 (9%)	161,300 (8%)
Men	308,000	314,900	305,500	301,900

Sources: Statistic Austria, Mikrozensus; Labour Force-Konzept.

Table 2: Self-Employment in Austria in Different Age Groups and Sectors (figures 2006 and 2009)

Self-employment total (and as % of total labour force per category)	Women and men		Women		Men	
	2006	2009	2006	2009	2006	2009
Self-employment by age						
20 - 24 years	6,400 (1%)	6,700 (2%)	-	-	4,400 (3%)	4,700 (2%)
25 - 29 years	23,900 (5%)	25,000 (5%)	8,100 (4%)	8,300 (4%)	15,800 (7%)	16,700 (7%)
30 - 34 years	41,400 (8%)	39,200 (8%)	14,400 (7%)	13,900 (6%)	27,000 (10%)	25,300 (10%)
35 - 39 years	76,000 (13%)	60,300 (11%)	23,300 (11%)	22,100 (8%)	52,800 (17%)	38,200 (13%)
40 - 44 years	81,800 (13%)	80,900 (13%)	31,300 (11%)	28,800 (9%)	50,500 (15%)	52,100 (15%)
45 - 49 years	83,000 (16%)	85,200 (14%)	29,400 (12%)	30,600 (11%)	53,600 (19%)	54,600 (17%)
50 - 54 years	71,800 (17%)	66,900 (14%)	26,600 (14%)	25,600 (12%)	45,200 (21%)	41,300 (17%)
55 - 59 years	50,300 (19%)	47,800 (16%)	17,700 (17%)	14,500 (12%)	32,600 (20%)	33,300 (19%)
60 - 64 years	19,000 (29%)	23,500 (25%)	6,400 (29%)	7,600 (24%)	12,600 (29%)	15,800 (25%)
65 years and more	18,700 (40%)	21,000 (28%)	5,600 (33%)	6,000 (22%)	13,100 (44%)	15,100 (31%)
Self-employment by sectors						
agriculture	134,300	111,900	59,000 (59%)	48,000 (47%)	75,400 (65%)	64,000 (52%)
industry	67,500 (6%)	54,600 (5%)	9,800 (4%)	3,700 (2%)	57,700 (7%)	49,500 (6%)
services	271,500	290,500	96,600 (7%)	106,700 (7%)	174,900	183,800

Sources: Statistic Austria, Mikrozensus; Labour Force-Concept and Eurostat; Note: Possible variations in the number of self-employed by age and sector compared to the total number of self-employed are caused by undeclared data. This is the case if the total number in subgroups is below 3000.