



Introduction of compulsory education and training up to the age of 18 in Austria

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Description

In Austria, compulsory schooling ends at the age of 15. Yet, a reform which came into force in June 2016 introduces compulsory education and training up to the age of 18. The objective of the reform is to prevent young people from achieving only very low levels of education, which often results in poor job prospects.

In June 2016 the National Assembly of Austria (Nationalrat) passed a new “Law on Compulsory Training” (Ausbildungspflichtgesetz [APFIG]).

The new law does not change compulsory schooling, which still ends at the age of 15. But it stipulates that parents must ensure that young people between the age of 15 and 18 participate in further education and training or in measures preparing for further education and training if they have not completed secondary school. “Education and training” is defined in a broad sense, including further school attendance, apprenticeships or other training, like e.g. internship or training organised by the Public Employment Service.

Parents who disregard this new obligation may be fined between €100 and €1,000. However, this possibility of fining parents will only be implemented as from July 2018. In the meantime, the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection will further develop relevant institutions and training measures for young people.

Regarding procedural aspects, the law stipulates that a so-called “individual plan on prospects and support” (Perspektiven- und Betreuungsplan) has to be developed if young people between the age of 15 and 18 have not completed secondary school and are not in regular education or training (school attendance or apprenticeship). The plan on prospects and support will be provided

and administered by (or on behalf of) institutions affiliated to the Social Ministry Service (SMS) and the Public Employment Service (PES/ AMS). Parents are obliged to show a positive commitment to the offers provided by the SMS and PES and have to support the further education and training of their children.

If a person younger than 18 is in employment, the SMS/PES can investigate if this kind of employment runs counter to the “plan on prospects and support”. Here, the aim is to prevent young people from starting unskilled work, requiring no or very low qualification.

Regarding additional offers for training and education, the SMS and PES will, besides other measures, increase the number of places in so-called production schools (i.e. special schools organised by the SMS for young people with low skills) and for supra-company apprenticeship training (i.e. apprentices at training centres).

The services and measures related to “compulsory education and training up to the age of 18” will be funded by the Federal Budget for Active Labour Market Policy. The direct costs are estimated to amount to ca. €8 million in 2016, and to €65 million in 2020, when all measures etc. will be fully established.

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This reform was voted in Parliament with the votes of the two parties governing in a coalition government, the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the conservative Austrian Peoples' Party (ÖVP), and with the votes of the opposition Green Party. Other opposition parties, including the right-wing Freedom Party (FPÖ), criticised the reform, at first instance arguing that it is insufficient for handling structural problems of the educational system within the 9 years of compulsory education.

Outlook & Commentary

Austria shows, by international standards, a comparatively low rate of "early leavers from education and training" (ELET) (2015: 7.3% at the age 18-24; EU-28 average: 11%). The share of young people aged 15-24 not in education, employment and training (NEET) is also quite low compared to many other EU member states (2015: 7.5% versus 12% for the EU-28 average).

Nevertheless, out of each yearly cohort ca. 5,000 young people leave the system of education and training without a qualification above compulsory schooling level. At the same time, compulsory education is short in Austria by international standards (cf. Steiner 2015), and persons with

low qualifications face substantially increased risks of becoming unemployed or receiving only a low remuneration from employment.

Although the above described reform will not increase the time of compulsory schooling, it will, if properly implemented, substantially decrease the number of early leavers from education and training and, hopefully, help to strengthen the notion that education beyond compulsory schooling should be the norm. Groups which are supposed to especially benefit from the reform are young people with a migration background and children of parents with low educational attainment (both groups show substantially above average ELET).

One problematic point is that "compulsory education and training up to the age of 18" only applies for young people "not only temporarily living in Austria" (§3 APFIG). This implies that young refugees with subsidiary protection status and young people granted political asylum are subject to the APFIG, but not young asylum seekers. This was criticised especially by the Green party, which nonetheless supported the draft bill in order to reach a two thirds majority for an amendment of the Federal Constitutional Law which was necessary for the adoption of this reform.

Further reading

Law on Compulsory Training:
https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/I/I_01178/fname_537582.pdf

Explanatory remarks on the legislation:

https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/I/I_01178/fname_537585.pdf

Steiner, M. et al. (2015). Ausbildung bis 18; IHS research report, https://www.sozialministerium.at/cms/site/attachments/8/3/9/CH3434/CMS_1454667224496/ausbildung_bis_18_endbericht.pdf

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