

Generalist Youth Information Services in Austria in 1997

The attached pages constitute the chapter concerning **Austria** which is part of a 17-country study completed in 1997. Each chapter provides a summary of the situation in the country at the end of 1997 concerning generalist youth information and counselling, and the methods and structures involved in its organisation and distribution.

This study was conducted by the **European Youth Information and Counselling Agency** (ERYICA), to which all the author organisations belong as “Member Organisations” or as “Co-operating Organisations”. Accordingly, the study is limited to those countries where in 1996-97 there existed functioning networks of generalist youth information centres and services which were co-operating with ERYICA.

The 17 chapters of this study, in separate English and French versions, can be consulted on the ERYICA Internet site (“www.eryica.org” - see the section “Documents”, then “1997 Study”). Each file, which is in Word 2.0 for Windows / PC (varying between 4 and 20 pages in length), can also be downloaded from the site.

More recent information about each ERYICA national partner, its activities and its network can also be found on the ERYICA Internet site:

- a) **current addresses of national partners**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”
- b) **links to Internet sites of national partners**: under “Discover SERVICES”, then “Web-sites of ERYICA Partners”
- c) (when the organisation co-ordinates a network) **links to a list of addresses of regional or local centre**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”.

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AUSTRIA

INTRODUCTION

The first Youth Information Centre in Austria was set up in Vienna by the *Bundes-ministerium für Jugend und Familie* (Federal Ministry for Youth and Family Affairs) and opened in 1986 under the name *Mobile Jugendinfo* (Mobile Youth Information). The reason behind this initiative was not only the desire to help young people in an active way to organise their leisure-time, but also to transmit their requests and wishes to people in positions of political responsibility.

Today, there are altogether eight Youth Information Centres ("*Jugendinfos*") in Austria (in Vienna, Burgenland, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, Upper Austria and Vorarlberg). The latest centre to be inaugurated was in Graz in September 1995. This means that Youth Information Centres are now present in all the *länder* (federal states), with the exception of Lower Austria and Carinthia. Vienna has two Youth Information Centres, as the Centre run by the Federal Ministry is also located there.

Besides these Youth Information Centres, which essentially distribute youth information, there are also Youth Counselling Centres which deal in depth with different problems that young people can encounter.

Some Youth Information Centres also provide a certain amount of "advice".

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

The purpose of the Youth Information Centres is to give young people information on issues which interest them, and to help them to enter into contact with other services which are relevant to their needs. Counselling activities, however, vary among the *länder* according to regional needs.

The main topics on which information and services are available in all Youth Information Centres include: travel and holidays, European Union exchange programmes for youth groups (such as Youth for Europe), language schools and courses abroad, holiday programmes and opportunities, work-camps, year-long social service or other forms of voluntary service, *au pair* programmes, leisure activities, the legal protection of minors, sex education, and specialised legal advice on the rights of minors.

The information for this text has been provided by the Working Group of Austrian Youth Information Centres (ARGE):

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GOVERNMENT POLICY

Since the *Jugendgesetz* (law relating to young people) comes under the scope of regional legislation, the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Youth and Family Affairs has only a co-ordinating role. The federal government has no decision-making power over the setting up of local or regional Youth Information Centres, which is a responsibility of the regional government authority. At a meeting on 3 March 1994, the Permanent Conference of *Länder* Experts on Youth Affairs proposed that a Youth Information Centre should be established in each of the *Länder*.

LEGAL STATUS AND FINANCING OF CENTRES

Most of the Youth Information Centres have been set up as associations, which are largely financed by the government of the *Land* in which they are located. Some Youth Information Centres are partly funded by third parties (regions or municipalities) and are obliged to raise the rest of their funds themselves (acting as independent economic units). Other Youth Information Centres, however, constitute an integral part of the local structure of the *Land's* Ministry for Youth Affairs.

The Youth Information Centres in Austria employ a total of around 45 salaried staff. The staff of Youth Information Centres do not include people doing their civil or voluntary service, since Austrian law allows only very limited employment opportunities to people with this status.

NATIONAL CO-OPERATION

All Youth Information Centres in Austria have joined an informal association, the **Working Group of Austrian Youth Information Centres** (*ARGE - Arbeitsgemeinschaft Österreichischer Jugendinfos*). All *ARGE* members have equal

rights. The association does not have a national office but the "aha" - Tips and Info for Young People" in Voralberg acts as the contact-point. It became the Austrian member of ERYICA in 1996. *ARGE* meets two or three times a year to exchange experience and information.

The following common elements serve as criteria for *ARGE* membership:

- a single 1799 telephone number (preceded by the appropriate area code)
- a single logo
- an annual joint further-education event or visit
- 13 topics on which all Youth Information Centres provide information.

Profile of Austrian Network

National Association:

ARGE - Arbeitsgemeinschaft Österreichischer Jugendinfos

Network:

- 8 regional Youth Information Centres
- 1 Centre in Federal Ministry dealing with youth matters

Legal Status:

Most regional centres are non-profit associations; others are part of the Youth Ministry of their region.

Number of Information Workers Employed in Network:

45 salaried employees

Responsible Governmental Bodies:

- Youth Ministry (at *länder* level)
- Federal Ministry for Youth and Family Affairs (at federal level)

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND YOUTH INFORMATION CENTRES

Most of the Youth Information Centres are encouraged to act as 'seismographs' for the respective ministries of the individual *länder*. Beyond that, the demands made on the Youth Information Centres by their 'clients' are as varied as the structures which support the Centres. In most cases, there is a high level of exchange of information and opinions between civil servants from the Ministries for Youth Affairs and the Youth Information Centres. Administrative activities are transferred to the Centres as and when this seems meaningful for the target group.

As far as the independence of the Youth Information Centres is concerned, all Youth Information Centres in Austria globally adhere to the European Youth Information Charter. Certain limitations may intervene depending on the structures that support the Centres.

WHY YOUTH INFORMATION CENTRES?

Most Youth Information Centres were first created because the distribution of official information (youth exchange programmes, youth identity cards, etc.) through administrative channels came to be impossible. Survey findings also showed that specific Youth Information Centres had become necessary.

ASSESSING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Each Youth Information Centre assesses these information needs independently. Regular assessments are carried out, whilst other assessments are in the planning stage. All Centres generally keep more or less detailed daily attendance lists.

HOW PLURALISM AND QUALITY ARE GUARANTEED

A single common career / job definition for people working in the youth information sector does not exist in Austria. A common factor shared by youth information workers is that they have all completed vocational training (apprenticeship, university degree, etc.), and have subsequently taken up this profession as their second vocational career path. The required training or further education is supplied locally or regionally. National-level training for the whole of Austria is currently not planned.

***Note:** This text describes youth information in Austria in the period since 1986. It does not cover the experience of the generalist Youth Information and Counselling Centres which functioned in Vienna and other cities between 1971 and 1985.*