



Co-designing Citizen Social Science for Collective Action

#4.1

Report on Knowledge Coalition Building

Youth Employment



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List of Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSS	Citizen Social Science
ESL	Early School Leavers
E&T up to 18	Education and Training up to 18
KC	Knowledge Coalition
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
R&I Action	Research and Innovation Action



Executive Summary

The R&I Action #2 “Youth Employment” of the Horizon 2020 project CoAct (Co-designing Citizen Social Science for Collective Action) is a Citizen Social Science project with young Early School Leavers (ESL) aged mainly between 15 and 18 years, who take part in educational measures to fulfil their legal obligation of remaining in education or training until the age of 18 (“Education and Training up to 18”). By employing a participatory research approach, R&I Action #2 aims to develop new and adapt existing measures organised under the “Education and Training Act” through the insights gained by doing collaborative research with young people affected by these measures. To communicate and implement research results, a Knowledge Coalition is organised concurrent to the research, with the aim to bring together young people and their ideas with those responsible for developing educational measures for ESL and NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth.

The present document constitutes Deliverable 4.1 “Report on Knowledge Coalition Building” (Work Package 4) and describes how the Knowledge Coalition was constituted as a platform of different stakeholders to stimulate knowledge sharing and eventually discuss the data and results of the research project conducted with young people. The Knowledge Coalition is an integral part of the R&I Action #2, combining a diverse range of representatives from the federal and regional level as well as social workers, people from the grassroots level and youth organisations. The members of the Knowledge Coalition assist the research project with their expertise on how “Education and Training up to 18” is implemented in practice and provide the researchers with insights on the recent developments and challenges in this area. In the course of the research, the members become addressees for research results and are invited to directly discuss possible developments of new measures or adaptations of existing ones based on the needs and insights of young Early School Leavers.

This report covers how “Education and Training up to 18” is organised in Austria and lays out who is taking part in the Knowledge Coalition. Furthermore, it describes the content of the first round of knowledge sharing which was accomplished through conversations and focused on the experiences of day-to-day practices within the diverse institutions and organisations connected to “Education and Training up to 18”. As it happened, Covid-19 was a decisive factor in the recent challenges and will be



addressed accordingly. The key outcomes and concluding reflections give an idea of the challenges encountered during this phase of the research project and give an outline of the next steps taken in the near future.

1. Introduction

1.1 CoAct General Concept

CoAct (Co-designing Citizen Social Science for Collective Action) is proposing a new understanding of Citizen Social Science as a participatory research co-designed and directly driven by citizens and citizen groups sharing a social concern (See Figure 1). CoAct proposes to face four “wicked” social global issues by engaging citizens in a vulnerable situation. The approach represents a new understanding of the underexplored field of Citizen Social Science (CSS), understood here as participatory research co-designed with citizen groups sharing a social concern. The joint effort will result in the implementation of new or improved science-related policies and the advancement of the CSS approach with regards to its applicability in concrete fields or research.



Figure 1: Citizen Social Science in Action, with citizen groups, a specific concern, and with the support of the Knowledge Coalition

In all CoAct R&I Actions (Mental Health Care, Youth Employment and Environmental Justice), citizens in a vulnerable situation are placed at the centre of the research and their role and dedication conceptually



recognize them as **Co-Researchers**. In parallel, the **Knowledge Coalition** is a network of stakeholders who are informed about the R&I Actions' goals, and plays an active role, either participating in or co-designing different actions, to harness Co-Researchers' efforts and implement policies and measures based on scientific evidence.

1.2 Definition of the Knowledge Coalition

Knowledge Coalitions are formed by representatives of Public Administrations, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), educative organisations and Co-Researchers – to name a few. All R&I Actions involve people from different areas of the political, academic/scientific and social realm, according to their field of research. They strive to assure that the composition of the Knowledge Coalition reflects the diversity of actors within their field and is sensitive to gender balance and other socio-structural categories that might become relevant such as ethnicity or age. The involvement and collaboration of the Knowledge Coalition members varies according to the specific R&I Action and different actors may participate in different activities according to their expertise, interest and expectations regarding synergies with their own activities associated to the social concern. The participation of the individual parties of the Knowledge Coalition can take place in various forms and in different moments of the R&I cycle: creating a structural framework for research, participating in the actual research process, informing on corresponding issues, implementing and discussing possible solutions or getting involved in the dissemination of the project and the transformation of research results into actions according to its acting potential. Regardless of the role, each R&I Action facilitates spaces for dialogue and action with different actors promoting the creation of a dynamic network and promotes an exchange between them and building from synergies among different initiatives adding therefore to the collective effort towards transformation. In order to coordinate the network and open up spaces for deliberation, the R&I Actions use different methods and approaches, from joint discussions, workshops, expert talks and digital tools to strategy meetings, which aim at a diversity of on- and offline participation possibilities.



1.3 R&I Action Scope

1.3.1 Introduction

The R&I Action #2 Youth Employment is doing participatory research with youths and young adults that are taking part in training measures within the legal framework of “Education and Training up to 18” (E&T up to 18)¹ that prescribes compulsory participation in the educational landscape until young people are of age at 18. The measures offered to youths are designed to enable young people to enter school or vocational training, acquire social and technical skills and increase their employability.

The main objective of this R&I Action is to involve young people affected by “E&T up to 18” in the conceptualisation and improvement of measures, with the aim of developing offers that are better adapted to their needs and circumstances. By linking common policy indicators to individual life courses the Action is critically approaching the development of welfare measures and assessing their impact. The research will be conducted according to the principles of Citizen Science methodologically reconfigured with Participatory Action Research inputs.

1.3.2 The Legal Framework in Austria - Education and Training Obligation Act

In Austria, the obligation to take part in education or training up to the age of 18 is regulated in the Ausbildungspflichtgesetz (APfIG), roughly translated as Education and Training Obligation Act. The first version of this law has been in force since 2016. The duty to attend training can be fulfilled by apprenticeship, school attendance, preparatory courses for individual training or school qualification via evening classes, participation in labour market measures or measures for young people with assistance needs.

Attendance of these measures must be accompanied by a perspective plan. A regular employment does only count as fulfilment of the training obligation if it is the subject of a perspective plan. If this requirement is violated, young people and parents or guardians will be invited to a counselling interview,

¹ There are several translation and abbreviation versions for "AusBildung bis 18". Following the Institute for Advanced Studies (Steiner et al., 2016) we chose "E&T up to 18" because it represents school education as well as vocational training.



which is obligatory. If the requirements are not met, parents or legal guardians face administrative penalties.



Further Information

The **“Ausbildungspflichtgesetz”** is the main legal framework and includes the responsible institutions as well as essential conditions of the “E&T up to 18”

<https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20009604>

Other laws are also of relevance for the target group, for example the **“Berufsausbildungsgesetz”** (Vocational Training Act), which regulates the conditions for apprenticeships

<https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10006276>

or the **“Bundesrichtlinie zu Aus- und Weiterbildungsbeihilfen (BEMO)”** which states what financial support young people are eligible for when participating in measures to fulfil their obligation for education or training

https://www.ams.at/content/dam/download/ams-richtlinien/001_bemo_RILI.pdf

1.3.3 Early School Leavers and NEET

The target group of “E&T up to 18” are Early School Leavers (ESL) and young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), two indicators that are used to describe the exclusion of young people in the field of education or training. The more accurate definition of the target group of “E&T up to 18” is provided by the concept of Early School Leavers, which includes young people aged 18 to 24 “whose highest level of education or training attained is at most lower secondary education. At most lower secondary education refers to ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) 2011 level 0-2” (Eurostat, 2020a). Nevertheless, they might currently participate in preparatory courses, such as measures to reach compulsory education, language courses, coaching etc. In the Austrian context the definition is slightly changed in regard to age: “Frühe Schulabbrecher (FABA)” are defined as ESL, but include young people aged 15 to 24 (Statistik Austria, 2016). NEET youth are defined as young people between 16 and 24 of age, who are not in education, training or employment at all, but might have



graduated from upper secondary school before (Bacher et al., 2014; Eurostat, 2020b; Cambridge Dictionary, 2020).

In 2017, 7,6% of young people in Austria between 15 and 17 years old were Early School Leavers (Statistik Austria, 2019). The reasons for early school leaving are manifold and encompass individual skills, the socioeconomic situation and familial environment, institutional conditions and systemic structures, as well as social values that all might contribute to young people's dropout or educational success (Steiner et al., 2015, 178).

1.3.4 Current Challenges of “E&T up to 18”

“E&T up to 18” deals with diverse societal problems at the intersection of the school system, the labour market and alternative educational tracks available for young people. Although the strength of “E&T up to 18” lies in the diversity of measures offered to young people, some challenges remain. In its accompanying study on the implementation of “E&T up to 18”, the Institute for Advanced Studies has identified three gaps in the existing range of services. First, there is a lack of low threshold measures such as day to day activities that would enable easier entry into the existing support system. Open Youth Work is hardly recognised as an important player in this regard but could be a resource that offers highly accessible approaches to connect to Early School Leavers and NEET youth. Second, the familial system, i.e., parents or guardians, needs to be further included as cooperation partners for it has a prominent influence on the decisions of young people regarding their educational pathways. Third, the report advises to increase offers that partly work with gender segregated groups, to be able to respond to this phase of life as an important orientation phase (Litschel, 2019, 350-353). Finally, it is important to point out that the political measures responding to Covid-19 have resulted in the labour market becoming even more strained, which places an additional burden on young people as well as the system of “E&T up to 18”.

1.3.5 Research Approach and Goals

To align the measures of “E&T up to 18” with the needs of young people and take into consideration the multiple factors that lead to early school leaving and NEET status as well as the already mentioned shortcomings within the existing system, the R&I Action #2 is developing several short research projects



with young people currently involved in training measures within the framework of “E&T up to 18”. By doing this in a participatory way, the youths are able to co-decide the course of the research. By collaboratively choosing the topics, the methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the distribution of the results, the adolescent Co-Researchers are able to centre the issues they are affected by most and communicate them to relevant stakeholders in the field of “E&T up to 18”. The research framework is influenced by Citizen Social Science approaches and relies on a broad spectrum of participatory methods of Participatory Action Research and Participatory Youth Research. The project is supported by the establishment of a Knowledge Coalition which consists of different stakeholders of the research field. The Knowledge Coalition includes experts who know the recent developments and challenges of the “E&T up to 18” system and who have a lot of experience in working with young people within this system. To enable a collaborative improvement of measures, the Knowledge Coalition discusses ideas and research results throughout the whole research process.

2. Knowledge Coalition Formation

2.1 Local Context Mapping

The following chapter describes how the expertise gained in previous research projects influences R&I Action #2 and what preparatory measures were taken in order to build a Knowledge Coalition. For a better understanding of the concrete formation of the Knowledge Coalition, the field of “E&T up to 18” is illustrated based on relevant players and institutions.

2.1.1 Previous Research Projects

As a foundation for R&I Action #2, the project team at the University of Vienna draws on a number of previous projects focusing on participatory research with young people as well as researching the challenges of young people when it comes to education and training.

“Tricks of the Trade” (2008-2010) and “Transgressing Borders. Fieldwork with Pupils” (2013-2016) were two Participatory Action Research projects within the framework of „Sparkling Science“, an Austrian national programme to connect pupils and science funded by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science



and Research. Both projects have resulted in collaborative research projects about the life-worlds of young people, using social science methods and methodologies. In the course of these projects, a number of methods have been developed for research with young people who are normally attested a poor academic performance. In this context, research has been re-defined and further elaborated as an emancipatory tool for young people.

Another foundation for the R&I Action #2 is the project “Pathways to the Future” by the Department of Sociology of the University of Vienna. The project started in 2016 as a longitudinal study on the social integration of young people in Vienna. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, the project analyses the lives of young people regarding their social environment, educational paths and labour market opportunities, as well as their visions of future possibilities and desires.

R&I Action #2 aims to apply and combine the insights gained from these projects to improve the educational and training landscape for youths with challenging educational paths through the participation of young people in the definition of needs and appropriate support within “E&T up to 18”.

2.1.2 Preparatory Actions

The preparation of the Knowledge Coalition involved getting an overview of the relevant stakeholders in the field of “E&T up to 18” as well as a preparatory meeting with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection in 2019². The first steps in the Knowledge Coalition followed a top-down approach, since official cooperation with the relevant Ministry paved the way to contact other institutions and organisations in the field and to access relevant communication channels of the Ministry of Social Affairs Service³. In an initial meeting, the team of CoAct Vienna and two representatives of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Family and Youth discussed the scope of the project and possible support in the future. Furthermore, existing resources and contacts that were established in previous research projects, such as the study “Pathways to the Future” discussed above, could be used to attract

² At the end of January 2020, the Ministry was restructured: The former Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection transferred all labour market agenda to the Federal Ministry of Labour, Family and Youth and became the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection.

³ The Ministry of Social Affairs Service is an authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection with the focus on people in need of assistance. See also 3.1.3 Structure of the Local Context.



participants to the Knowledge Coalition. Our main cooperation partners are “AusbildungsFit” institutions (translatable as “Fit for Education and Training”). Using the communication channels of the Ministry of Social Affairs Service, a brochure with essential information about the project on a local level, namely the participatory research project with young people including the framework of a possible cooperation agreement, was sent out to target the specific institutions.

The preparatory actions also included setting up Informed Consent forms for the planned talks as well as a participation document. The Informed Consent needed to be approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna, a procedure that was elongated due to the difficult working conditions during the peak period of Covid-19 in Vienna and Austria, as well as discussions about the use of media in a participatory research project. Contacting the Knowledge Coalition therefore started in the form of preparatory measures consisting of talks with relevant stakeholders as well as building a network with different institutions. The first actual meeting of the Knowledge Coalition as a whole, however, was postponed to January 2021.

2.1.3 Structure of the Local Context

The structure of “E&T up to 18” is organised vertically on a federal and a regional level, with both determining the level of implementation, including the actual measures young people take part in. As the following graphic illustrates, there are numerous actors that shape the realisation of “E&T up to 18”. With this graphic we provide an overview of the involved actors in the field, without going into detail on the complex relations between them.



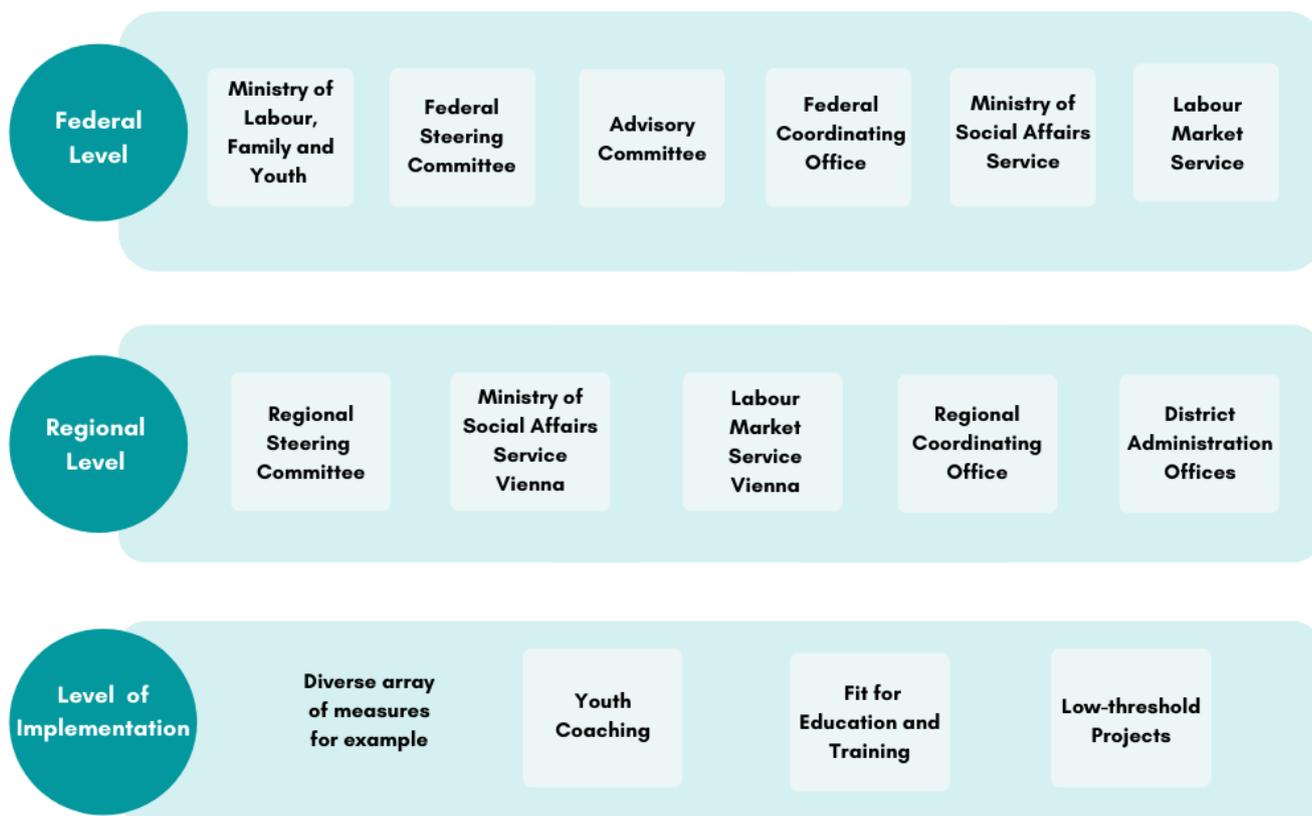


Figure 2: Overview: Structure of “E&T up to 18”

Federal Level

“E&T up to 18” is an initiative of the Austrian federal government. With its implementation in 2016, a complex structure of multidimensional co-operations between various institutions has emerged. In order to assure quality management and advancement, two federal committees have been established. First, the steering committee consists of members of different federal ministries, with the presidency at the Ministry of Labour, Family and Youth. Second, the advisory committee consists of members from federal ministries as well as a wide range of representatives, with its presidency at the Ministry of Social Affairs Service. The advisory committee’s main task is the consultation in decision-making processes. The Ministry of Social Affairs Service is an authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection with the focus on people in need of assistance. In “E&T up to 18”, they, among



other things, monitor whether the obligation of training and education is fulfilled (Ausbildungspflichtgesetz, 2020). Another stakeholder on the federal level is the Labour Market Service which is a service provider on the labour market. In general, unemployed people need to register as such in order to receive financial support. Through counselling, providing information and supporting measures for job seekers they aim to contribute to reduction of unemployment in Austria. The Federal Coordinating Office is also located on the federal level (although there are regional equivalents) and has three main tasks: 1) monitoring processes and measures within the frame of “E&T up to 18”, 2) data processing and dissemination, and 3) organising the cooperative network with relevant stakeholders on the federal level.

Regional Level

The field of “E&T up to 18” is structured regionally, which means that in each Federal State (“Bundesland”), regional offices respond to the specific contexts. Namely, the Ministry of Social Affairs Service, the Labour Market Service and the Federal Coordinating Office are structured in each case in nine regional offices. Furthermore, a regional steering committee has been established in which a diverse range of stakeholders come together for exchange on the Viennese context. The overall aim is to build a regional network between relevant stakeholders, discuss current developments and further advancements with partners, and make information on supportive measures accessible. Additionally, the Viennese Coordinating Office provides support and information to young people, their parents or guardians, schools, and other relevant organisations. Young people and their parents or guardians can also contact them with questions. If the obligation of education or training is not fulfilled, and the office is not contacted after four months, the office in turn contacts the concerned young adult in order to offer information and recommends them to appropriate obligatory counselling services. In the case of young people not complying with their obligation of educational training, a fine can be imposed on legal guardians by the respective District Administration Office. However, this is intended as a last resort (Ausbildungspflichtgesetz, 2020).



Level of Implementation

There are several measures and projects in Austria which aim to support youths who are not in education or training. Youth Coaching (“Jugendcoaching”) is integrated in schools and provides professional advice and support for further education and job opportunities. Additionally, Youth Coaching institutions provide support for the target groups outside of schools. The service they provide is adapted to the individual needs of the young people. The youths can decide on the extend of the counselling, whether to obtain general information in an initial consultation or to take part in longer periods between six months and a year. Youth Coaching does not only focus on education and job pathways; rather, the coaching is intended to make a significant contribution to the overall stabilisation of the life situation of young people. However, the overall aim is to help adolescents access the labour market or re-enter education. Together with a coach, young people agree on a general goal as well as milestones to reach this goal and decide on appropriate measures to achieve this end. This can for instance be an inter-company vocational training (“Überbetriebliche Lehre”⁴) that lasts up to three years, a low-threshold project with attendance on a day-by-day basis, or a yearlong measure such as “Fit for Education and Training”. For taking part in the latter, Youth Coaching needs to be successfully completed and the young person needs to be registered at the Labour Market Service. The target group of “Fit for Education and Training” are young people between 15 and 21 years. In case of disabilities, young people can attend this measure until the age of 24. The general structure of “Fit for Education and Training” institutions is based on four different modules: practical training in companies, coaching, sport activities and “Wissenswerkstatt” (these “Knowledge Workshops” entail modules with an emphasis on educational knowledge, such as German, Maths, English, concentration training, and so on). Another low-threshold measure is the “Vormodul AusbildungsFit”, roughly translated as “pre-module for Fit for Education and Training”. Structured in five steps, it enables young people to obtain information, observe other young people at work in the institution, try out new things, and find out more about their work-related pathway.

⁴ Young people who are not able to find an apprenticeship place in a regular company can apply for an inter-company vocational training in a training facility. There they can do an apprenticeship for a specific profession until they have found a regular place or, if that is not the case, can complete the entire apprenticeship at the facility.





Further Information

Official list of measures that fulfil the criteria of the education and training obligation

https://ausbildungbis18.at/wp-content/themes/Divi-Child/downloads/Ausbildung_bis_18_Stand_17-05-2019_neu.pdf

The "Koordinationsstelle – Jugend, Bildung, Beschäftigung" provides a search engine for measures and projects in Vienna

<https://www.koordinationsstelle.at/projektsuche/>

Visual overview of all Youth Coaching offers in Vienna

https://www.koordinationsstelle.at/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/verteilung_juco_wien_gesamt_2020.pdf

Fit for Education and Training offers in Vienna

https://www.koordinationsstelle.at/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AFIT_Trainingsmodule_Uebersicht_2020.pdf

2.2 Knowledge Coalition Constitution Process

The Knowledge Coalition is a fluid and dynamic construct with several specificities. First of all, it is continuously growing and expanding with people being able to join in later stages of the project. Second, the Knowledge Coalition is adaptable to the specific needs of both the stakeholders and the young people participating in the R&I Action. The Knowledge Coalition formation aims to include organisations and individuals from all levels of “E&T up to 18”. As illustrated above, the systemic structure behind the programme is quite hierarchical, leading to financial and content-related dependencies as well as to competitive relations between actors competing for limited funding. Therefore, a well-balanced approach to forming the Knowledge Coalition is crucial. We aimed at including stakeholders and practitioners who are involved on a conceptual and legal level (such as the Ministry of Social Affairs Service), institutions that work with young people at the grassroots level, as well as organisations that



represent young people. Additionally, we involved actors who deal with the topic of work and training of young people on a more general level, such as labour unions and scientific researchers. At a later stage, young Co-Researchers will eventually join the Knowledge Coalition to present and discuss their results of the participatory research actions.

The principles according to which the KC is formed are as follows:

- involving as many levels of “E&T up to 18” as possible
- involving policy makers and public administration
- involving Co-Researchers and affected adolescents
- involving academic researchers
- involving youth organisations as strong representatives for young people
- allowing for dynamic participation

At the time of the report, the KC consists of members of the following institutions and organisations:

- Ministry of Social Affairs Service
- Federal Ministry of Labour, Family and Youth
- A coordinating institution
- Youth Coaching
- Fit for Education and Training
- Low threshold institution for entering the educational system after dropping out
- A national youth organisation
- An institution for work and education
- Youth organisation of a labour union
- Scientists working in the research field

All in all, 15 people (10 women and 5 men) and 13 Organisations are part of the Knowledge Coalition, of which 4 are CSOs, 3 are Public Administration Organisations, 3 are Policy Institutions and 3 are from the area of research. At this stage, the Knowledge Coalition is not very balanced in terms of age or ethnic background, which corresponds to the characteristics of the persons working in the field at large. Gender might be of more concern when it comes to activities organised by and with the members. Furthermore,



young people will eventually become part of the Knowledge Coalition, and a balance of gender as well as age, ethnic background, and interests will become more important. One hypothesis that can be shared already concerns the discrepancy between positionalities, meaning that those designing and implementing measures mostly have a different educational, socioeconomic and language history and background than the youth who actively use the measures. In further activities, these issues need to be observed carefully and addressed in response to potential power imbalances.

All members of the Knowledge Coalition can choose in which ways they want to participate in the R&I Action:

- Co-organisation of the Knowledge Coalition
- Receiving general information about activities
- Interviews with the CoAct project team
- Discussion rounds with the CoAct project team
- Discussion rounds with the Knowledge Coalition
- Discussion rounds with young Co-Researchers
- Interviews with young Co-Researchers
- Events with young Co-Researchers
- Tours with researching young people in their institution
- Getting informed about (interim) results
- Final event of the project.

For easier access, an online form was published on the homepage (<https://coactproject.univie.ac.at/wien-par/knowledge-coalition/>) so people can register for Knowledge Coalition activities as well as a mailing list specific to these activities independently throughout the entire project period. This option also aims to compensate for the current lack of opportunity to network in person at events or meetings.

2.3 Informed Consent and Data Management

All members of the Knowledge Coalition agreed to participate in different activities as listed above. For each activity, such as interviews or meetings, Knowledge Coalition members sign specific consent forms



which are set up according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and approved by the Data Protection Office at the University of Vienna. Data collected within KC activities is processed in a pseudonymised form and saved on secured servers at the University of Vienna with restricted access to original data allowed only to project members from the University. All in all, the Informed Consent process posed no challenges because the Knowledge Coalition members we talked to are used to the procedure or even have to apply it themselves.

3. Knowledge Coalition in Action

3.1 Knowledge Coalition Activities

We invited 9 different stakeholders to conversations using a semi-standardised format. In each conversation we prepared some questions tailored to their specific role within “E&T up to 18”, to better understand the network and the distribution of tasks between the actors. Other questions were targeting the participants’ experiences of challenges and chances for young people in their working field as well as opinions about measures and necessary improvements of “E&T up to 18”. The following figure provides an overview of the main topics that were discussed in the conversations.



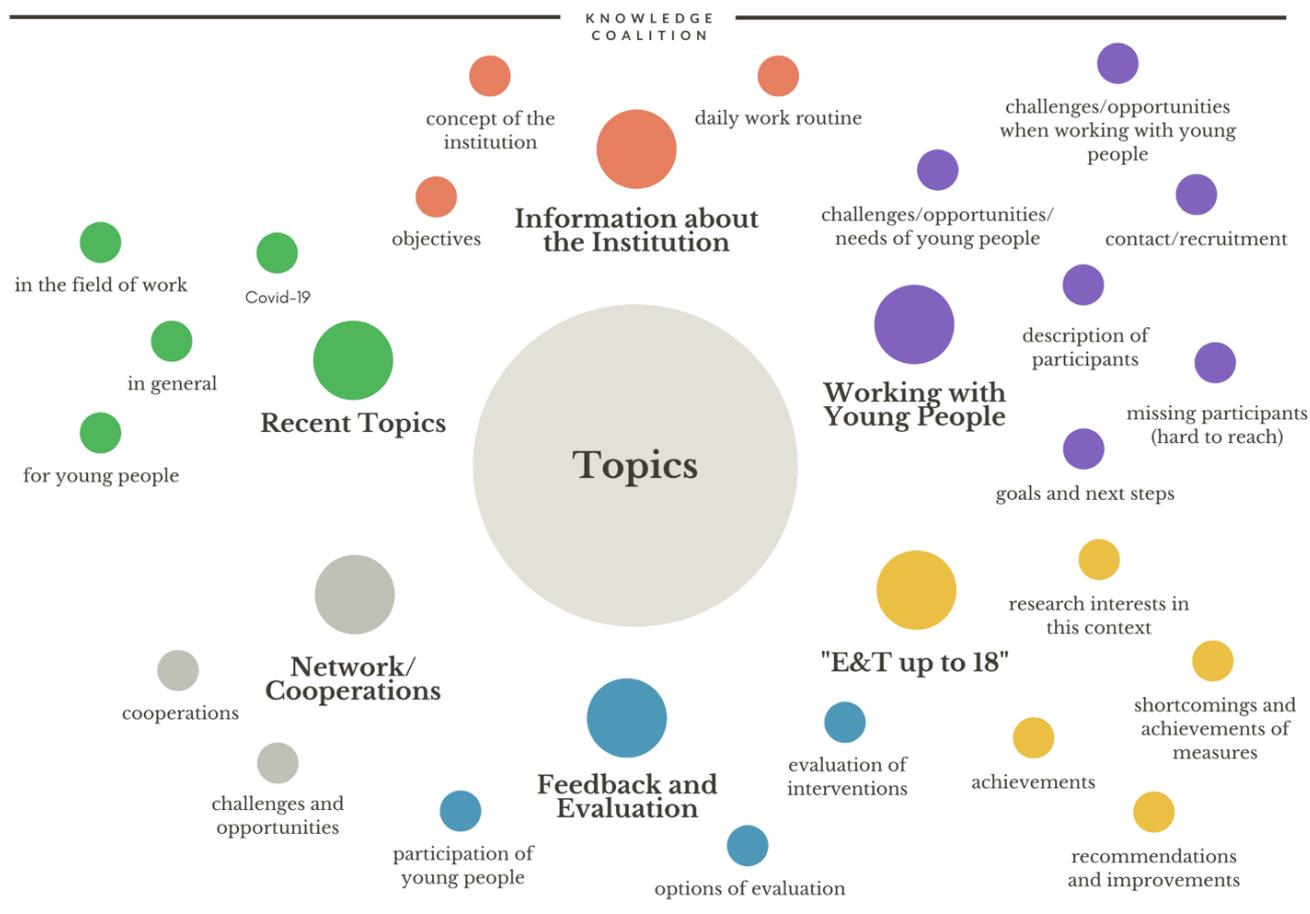


Figure 3: Topics of the Knowledge Coalition Conversations

Some conversations were conducted in person because the regulations regarding Covid-19 allowed it, while we switched to online formats in others. Since our Knowledge Coalition constitution process was delayed, we postponed the first collective meeting to January 2021. We consider this an opportunity to present and discuss interim results of the conversations as well as to include the outcomes of our first collaborative research projects with young people.

3.2 Knowledge Coalition Outcomes

The following outcomes are based on nine conversations with stakeholders of the “E&T up to 18” landscape and provide a practical perspective on relevant topics. The chapter focuses on the daily observations and experiences of social workers, coaches and those responsible for the implementation



of “E&T up to 18”, as well as illustrates the main strands of discussions. The chapter provides an overview of the recent topics, challenges and proposed recommendations by practitioners and highlights some of the most pressing challenges young people face in the educational landscape and the labour market.

3.2.1 The Various Challenges of Early School Leavers



Definition of the Target Group “E&T up to 18”

The target group of “E&T up to 18” are young people up to the age of 18 who have fulfilled the mandatory years of school attendance and are staying in Austria not only temporarily. The obligation for education or training does not apply during the first four months after leaving school or training, in waiting periods for an education or training, when receiving childcare allowance, when pursuing a variety of social or military services, for medical reasons or in case of hardship (Ausbildungspflichtgesetz 2020).

Because the official definition of the target group of “E&T up to 18” is rather comprehensive, the target group is characterised by a diverse constellation of challenges and needs. The members of the Knowledge Coalition stated that, in practice, it is hard to define the youth they are working with, because of the variety of their life situations, skills and individual circumstances. Challenging life situations range from psychological problems, language difficulties, school dropouts, family problems, violence, disorientation, health problems, and many more. Although it is hard to reach an overall description of the target group, four observations were shared by the Knowledge Coalition: 1) more young men than women are among the young people who need support in pursuing their education, 2) psychological problems are a growing issue that needs to be addressed (see also 3.2.6), 3) the lack of familial support in pursuing education has negative impacts, 4) (hidden) homelessness is a problem among the youths. Particularly the last two aspects are further elaborated by the practitioners: the familial surrounding is often mentioned as a source of support but also as a source of restrictions regarding future plans of young people, e.g., parents prohibit certain career choices, young people have to take on responsibilities to support their families or suffer from emotionally burdening family relationships. This is also connected to precarious living conditions, which aggravate the youths’ possibility to concentrate on their own educational path and can



lead to homelessness and sheltered housing, all circumstances that do not have a beneficial impact on education or training.

Besides these four main topics, the addressed concerns by the different organisations depend on where these organisations are positioned within the realm of “E&T up to 18”. However, the collection below illustrates various struggles and challenges young people deal with in their every-day lives.

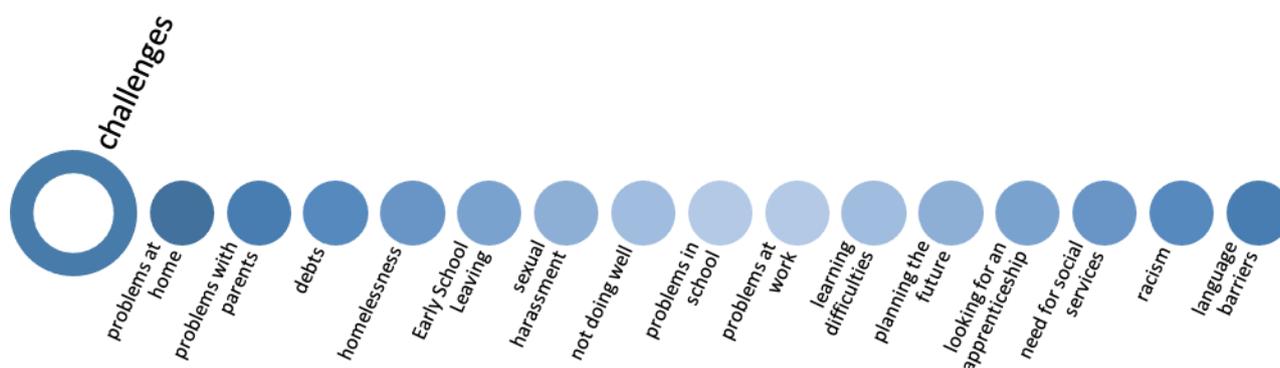


Figure 4: Challenges of Young People collected by the Knowledge Coalition

In general, the facilities reach their target group well. This is achieved by the diversity of measures offered within the framework of the support network on the one hand, and the compulsory nature of the measures on the other hand. However, certain groups are more difficult to integrate into the system, such as young people who are not able to leave the house and those who have addictions and/or psychological problems. Some measures specifically target young women, while some measures which are in theory open to all genders attract mostly young men, because their concept is not tailored to the interests of young women. One member of the Knowledge Coalition states that young women are especially hard to reach if they are bound by private responsibilities such as care work. For external organisations, like youth labour organisations, for instance, it is hard to reach young people who do not pursue any regular education or training, because they are not included as partners in the core network of “E&T up to 18”.

3.2.2 Practitioners’ Goals in Working with Young People

The overall goal of “E&T up to 18” and its measures is to enable young people to pursue an education or training. In practice, practitioners in the field formulate auxiliary goals to facilitate the overall success.



One overarching goal is the stabilisation of young people, which involves supporting them in finding their next steps when planning their professional future. Supporting young people in such a way, so the idea, may open up new paths that were not previously conceivable to them or their parents. When participating in a concrete measure, ancillary goals might be to convey a sense of work reality and to offer a daily structure. Equally important are goals that are more focused on the social and emotional well-being of young people. This means supporting them in all matters that concern them and giving them a sense of being cared for and listened to. The appreciation and recognition of the young people's abilities are considered as central to the goal of fostering their self-esteem.

3.2.3 Challenges in Cooperative Coaching, Education and Training

The Knowledge Coalition members identified some challenges for young people regarding their chances and abilities in the educational system. One concerns their difficulties in choosing their further paths. This process is complicated not only by potential skills required for education or training they might lack, but also by the fact that a lot of young people are undecided about which education or training they actually want to pursue. Exacerbating this, a lot of them already made negative experiences in their previous education and/or in their attempts to find a place for apprenticeship, which often leads to self-protective, rejecting and contemptuous behaviour in coaching situations. When supporting young people, it is occasionally difficult to encourage them to see their own small achievements as steps towards their ultimate goal, whether that may be an apprenticeship or re-entering school. Sometimes, ideas are not realisable at a given moment and it requires patience and motivation to take necessary measures to reach them. The same can be applied to the motivation of finishing a training, since this forms a basis which the young people can build on. Because what practitioners stated for the school environment is also true for "E&T up to 18" – it is more difficult to acquire new skills later in life, which is why practitioners are trying to motivate the young people to put their energy into developing skills as early as possible. To provide the young people with as big a range of opportunities as possible, practitioners try to demonstrate a wide variety of professions. This includes addressing and questioning gender stereotypical career choices that might limit young people in their perceived choices.

One fundamental issue that transcends all other topics concerns the overall status of educational and training measures in Austrian society as well as in the labour market, and how it impacts participants of



such measures. As one member puts it: there is an obligation to education or training, but there should be a right to have a place in a diverse and valued educational landscape. What exacerbates this imbalance is the fact that young people participating in measures of the “E&T up to 18” programme are confronted with ascriptions of being dumb or lazy, and the perception that it is their fault that they are not able to find adequate education or training. Such attributions run counter to any attempts to motivate young people to negotiate their way through a complex situation.

The lack of recognition and valorisation of different educational tracks is another ongoing theme within the Knowledge Coalition. Especially inter-company vocational training is mentioned several times. Here the frictions within the Austrian system of vocational training are clearly visible: while too little apprenticeship places are offered on the labour market, alternative measures intended to alleviate this shortage are simultaneously de-valued.

3.2.4 Principles and Guidelines in Practice

The institutions and organisations of “E&T up to 18” work according to certain principles and approaches that are adapted to the specificities of their target group. One important approach focuses on **individuality**, meaning the individual configuration and adaptation of offers and measures towards a specific young person. In practice, this entails that respective training steps are planned together with the young person in question and tailored to their specific needs. This approach is presented both before participants enter a measure and during the measure. Another important working principle mentioned by several members of the Knowledge Coalition is the attempt to provide a **network** for young people and **build up relationships** to ensure a trusting work atmosphere. One member states that in their organisation, they try to involve the social system of the young person, but due to the limited resources available to the organisation, this becomes challenging. Nevertheless, they see it as necessary to work on obstacles preventing education or training and build on existing familial support.



Instead of focusing on the deficits of young people, trainers, coaches and social workers highlight the **resources** young people already have at their disposal. The school environment is mentioned as a place in which deficits are at the centre of attention. This is contrasted by the approach followed by “E&T up to 18” organisations of **acknowledging everyday skills** – also acquired in leisure activities and other interests – and applying them in the process of consultation on further training and educational pathways. Here, the focus lies on positive experiences as well as success stories as a foundation to building plans for the future. Another central feature consists of the measures’ **multi-dimensional approach** to build and foster skills through activities. In addition to coaching, work training and basic education, many offers are linked to leisure and social activities. Through these activities, central concerns such as health and well-being are addressed. One member of the Knowledge Coalition also states that in embedding necessary skills-training and basic education in other activities, the training character moves a little into the background and the measure becomes more attractive, especially for hard-to-reach youth. Furthermore, some measures pick up topics that are of relevance to young people, such as questions about religion or labour law, and invite experts to address them.

Further Information



The Ministry of Social Affairs Service is providing a manual for the main organisations and institutions of “E&T up to 18,” which contains, among others: common goals, specific target groups, as well as detailed clearing processes with Early School Leavers. The concept and rules of implementation are publicly available and will be revised in 2021.

The concepts and rules of implementation can be downloaded from:

https://sozialministeriumservice.at/Arbeitsmarktprojekte/Projektfoerderung/Infos_fuer_ProjekttraegerInnen/Infos_fuer_ProjekttraegerInnen.de.html

One strength of the structure of “E&T up to 18” is the **networking in-between measures and with external cooperation partners** that are specialised on a specific target group, such as young people with visual impairment. If necessary, these cooperation partners are invited to the coaching process in the context of “E&T up to 18”. Youth Coaching as the hub for education, training and supportive measures



for Early School Leavers is especially focused on networking with all the institutions they refer young people to. Some measures also have a close network of companies that provide young people with the option to try out different activities and jobs on-site.

3.2.5 Conflicting Systems

One prevalent topic in the conversations with members of the Knowledge Coalition concerns the frictions between the educational system, the labour market and “E&T up to 18,” especially when it comes to questions of responsibilities and expectations of the different spheres and their respective stakeholders. The following graphical illustration shows which topics are negotiated in between these systems.

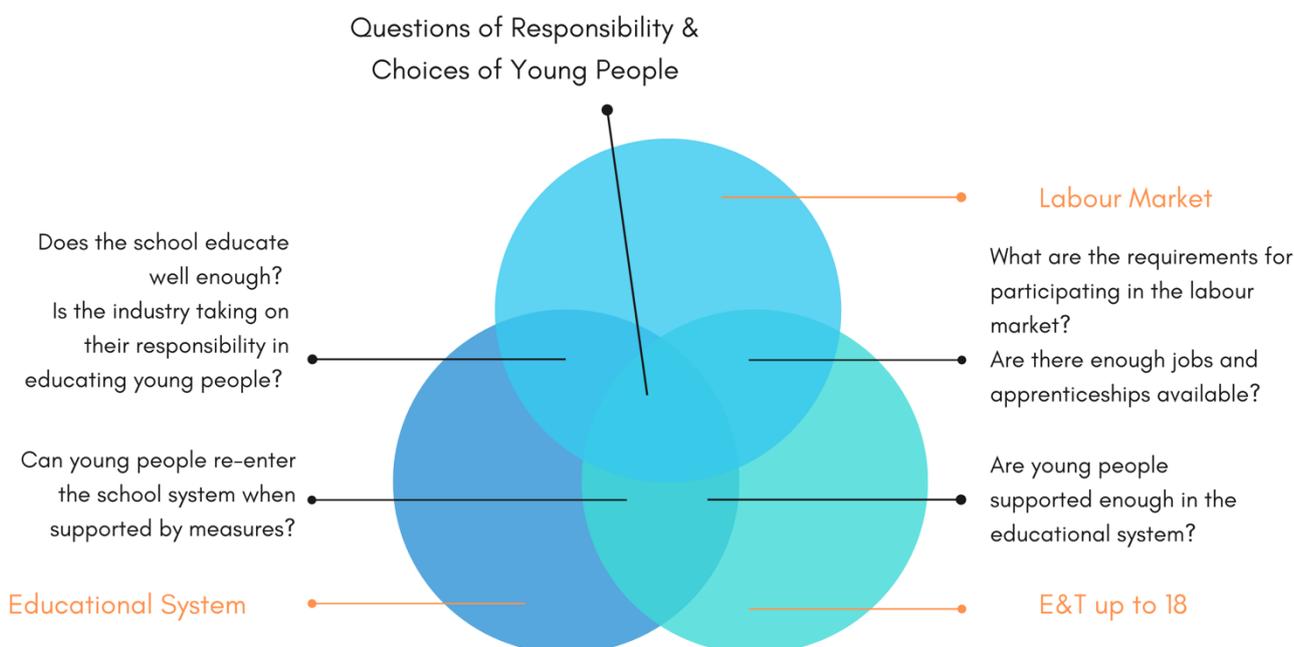


Figure 5: Systemic Relations

A main challenge expressed in relation to the job market concerns the lack of vacancies for vocational training. Here, a disparity within the Federal States of Austria was recognised, with more open apprenticeship positions available in the Western Federal States and more young people seeking such positions in the East. Especially in Vienna, where training places are scarce, a lot of young people are trained in inter-company vocational trainings instead of companies. However, these programmes suffer



from a bad reputation, which also affects the chances of young people on the labour market later on. Furthermore, even if “E&T up to 18” initiates the creation of specific training places by communicating the need to the responsible authorities and committees, they are offered, if at all, only after a time delay. Therefore, alternatives must be found for young people who are currently looking for a training place and are unable to find one in their area of interest. On a broader level, the transfer from school to labour market taking place at age 15 is marked by the debate if young people are educated enough to start their apprenticeships after finishing compulsory school, and to what degree industries need to take on more responsibility to educate new trainees. Arguments are brought up for both sides, one saying that young people are not equipped with basic social skills such as punctuality and courtesy, another saying that the companies have too high expectations when hiring young people. Another prominent topic of debate concerns the issue of digitalisation, which is said to have negatively impacted well paid workplaces in some industries, but at the same time changed the required skills of young people who aim to work in these areas. Nowadays, one member of the KC summarises, more abstract and less mechanical knowledge is required.

The system of “E&T up to 18” functions as a hub for young people to re-enter the labour market or the school system and distributes young people to the different preparatory measures. One issue raised is the pressure to put young people in preparatory measures while they are still in a coaching process. For more difficult and challenging cases, there is not enough flexibility to properly attend to the young people in the longer term. Furthermore, there is a lack of continuity, because the institutions offering measures need to re-apply for funding only ever provided for limited periods of time, which leads to losing and rebuilding infrastructures and therefore a lack of consistency in measures.

3.2.6 Recommendations and Solutions

Recommendations and solutions proposed by the members of the Knowledge Coalition concern the three layers of labour market, school system, and the development and improvement of measures. Common to all of them is the goal of improving the systemic conditions to better support young people in their educational path.

Recommendations for the Labour Market



A major problem of the labour market is the lack of training positions, which means that measures such as inter-company vocational training are becoming the norm. Ways to guarantee an adequate number of apprenticeship places are either to reduce standard working hours or provide a “Fachkräftemilliarde” (“a billion Euros for skilled workers”, see info box below), as demanded by some political organisations and associations. Furthermore, the working conditions in industries which complain about a shortage of skilled workers need to be improved and unattractive jobs need to receive higher remunerations to balance the status ascribed to them. In addition, more energy should be invested in training concepts that can cover digitalisation and new technologies to prepare apprentices for the future. In times of Covid-19, one member mentioned the need for a special monetary fund that supports young people in their education.

Recommendations for the School System

Many suggestions of how to improve the situation of young people in training measures are critical of the current school system. Suggestions ranged from better preparation for work life in schools to modular school systems and transition years which should facilitate a re-entry into the education system. A basic tenor of the Knowledge Coalition is that young people are not educated well enough, i.e., that schools do not meet the requirements of other systems. This leads to the necessity of “E&T up to 18” measures to compensate for deficits that were not addressed in school. Another recommendation concerning the final apprenticeship exam calls for partial tests in order to reduce the burden of the final exam, which is conducted outside of the educational facility at a higher-level institution.

Recommendations for “E&T up to 18” Measures

A central challenge experienced by the target group of “E&T up to 18” concerns the various psychological strains they are under, as described in greater detail above. A proposal that is already being implemented in a pilot project attempts to support young people in dealing with these strains through on-site counselling in individual and group settings. Another proposal calls for employment projects within the system of “E&T up to 18”, as self-esteem can be built up by enabling adolescents to gather actual work experience. Additionally, one demand focuses on the inclusion of young asylum seekers into “E&T up to 18”, as they are currently excluded from this educational structure. Last but not least, making public



transport more affordable to young people who participate in “E&T up to 18” measures would be an improvement.



Further Information

Trade Union Youth have an idea how to secure apprenticeship places: [Fachkräftemilliarde](#)

The concept addresses the shortage of skilled workers and the simultaneous shortage of training places and suggests, that all enterprises provide 1% of the gross remuneration sum for distribution to training enterprises and inter-company vocational training. This should not only secure the financing of education and training but also provide an incentive for companies to train apprentices.

3.2.7 The Effects of Covid-19: Digital Catch-Up and Inequalities

Covid-19 had a decisive influence not only on the work with young people, but also on labour market conditions. Currently, more than 60 000 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are either unemployed or participating in a training measure (AMS, 2020), and youth organisations observe difficulties of young people in finding an apprenticeship position or employment. There is a strong concern that future consequences are considered too little in current labour market policy, and that too little is done in order to reduce youth unemployment in the long term. Some young people who had already been accepted for an apprenticeship in spring had to return into the “E&T up to 18” system because their spot was cancelled due to COVID-19 regulations. Even some of the young people who had good chances moving on from “E&T up to 18” measures could not leave the supported environment. Additionally, the practical experiences of young people participating in measures suffered, because they could not and still sometimes cannot complete internships.

The measures taken by the Austrian government, such as complete or partial lockdowns, also influence the work with young people within the context of “E&T up to 18” up to the present moment. Counselling, one-on-one meetings, as well as group activities were offered online by almost all institutions. Although



this worked well, one main obstacle of using digital formats was the lack of technical devices experienced by some young people, especially those of low-income backgrounds, as well as the need to develop the skills to use them. Although young people are mostly well-versed in using social media and smart phones, an observable amount of them is not used to independently working with office applications on their computers. The older the young people are and the more socioeconomic resources they have, the easier they handle the change to digital activities. But especially younger people who had no established relationship with their coaches before the first lockdown turned out to be badly served by the move to digital environments.

One member of the Knowledge Coalition raised the question of how well one can actually reach young people with digital services, and if these can even serve as an adequate means to boost confidence and support. Another member described that they met youth outdoors within the legal parameters to ensure the psychical wellbeing of some of their participants. The same person stated that the main reason why the peak phase of the Covid-19 restrictions in spring could be mastered so well was due to the commitment of the employees to support the young people. Although the psychical health of participants in “E&T up to 18” measures was a worrying issue already before Covid-19, it became even more pressing because of the recent developments.

The lockdown and restrictions on social interactions led to an expansion of digital services by probably all institutions and organisations of “E&T up to 18”. Even though many of these changes can be described as challenging, there are nevertheless positive effects which came about because of the restrictions. The necessary adaptation of “E&T up to 18” institutions to digital technology is a change that would otherwise have taken years to undergo. However, it is not yet decided how new ways of communication and counselling will be integrated into everyday practices of institutions in the future.

One final problem mentioned to have been aggravated by Covid-19 concerns fake news and how media can be used critically. Many young people searching for orientation in times of uncertainty were found struggling to deal with contradictory statements offered by politicians and the media during times of lockdown.



3.2.8 Evaluation and Feedback in “E&T up to 18”

The institutionally embedded evaluation of the measures by young people takes place mainly via standardised questionnaires, which are initiated and analysed in a centralised way by a federal agency. Through this questionnaire, young people can communicate their opinion of the measure they take part in. One member of the Knowledge Coalition mentions how their questionnaire is easy to fill out with smileys to check and with further opportunities to elaborate the assessment. The form is available in an easier to read version as well as in an electronic form, and the results are fed back to the institutions.



Further Information

The participant survey of the Federal Coordinating Offices was developed in 2013 for Youth Coaching and revised and adapted for other measures in 2016.

Results of the participant survey 2019

https://www.bundeskost.at/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NEBA-Teilnahmebefragungen-2019_Bericht.pdf

Datasheet participant survey 2019

https://www.bundeskost.at/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NEBA-Teilnahmebefragungen-2019_Datasheet.pdf

The extent to which further evaluation measures are taken depends on the respective organisations themselves. Some have semi-institutionalised approaches, with rounds of feedback at the end of each workshop and the possibility to contact the social workers, trainers and head of programme at any time with complains or requests. Others describe reflective conversations with youth at the end of their collaboration as a form of evaluation.

The same applies for the participation of young people: some organisations are not very fond of the idea that young people participate and co-decide in the decision-making processes, whereas others encourage young people to participate in the planning. One member compares his organisation with a company, in which usually no co-determination is possible. Others try to include the wishes of young



people on a small-scale level, letting them for instance choose between several sports, decide in which environment they want to talk to their coach, or giving them a say in the methods to be employed to reach a goal within a measure.

To discuss current measures and their advancement, an advisory committee on a federal level is mandated by law, of which some members are representatives of youth organisations. In order to develop a new measure, a deficit in services must first be identified. If resources and funding are available, an experimental pilot is usually implemented to test ways of addressing the deficit. Outside of this federal corrective instrument, only one youth organisation organises collaborative and participatory events in which young people discuss and decide together positions and services of the institution.

The success of measures is monitored until young people come of age, in average they are followed two to three years. If a young person enters an education or training, they will be traced to see if they continue to participate. Furthermore, there is communication between the organisations on whether young people have dropped out of a programme or have joined the measure.

3.2.9 Research Interest of the Knowledge Coalition

The members of the Knowledge Coalition are involved in the R&I Action #2, both as experts for training measures for young people and as addressees for study results of the CoAct project. It is therefore of interest where they themselves locate research gaps within the context of “E&T up to 18”. All in all, three major topics could be identified: biography and resources, the future, as well as evaluation and improvement of measures.

Biography and Resources

In order to better understand the target group of “E&T up to 18”, members of the Knowledge Coalition articulated an interest in the experiences young people already had in educational settings, and what hindered and supported them on their way up to now. Another topic of interest addresses the resources young people have in their familial and social surrounding and the hardships they encounter in their everyday lives, such as responsibilities for family members. Interest in young people’s leisure activities as well as their opinions and attitudes, e.g., towards different nationalities, were mentioned, too.



The Future

A second area of interest revolves around questions about the future, i.e., how young people imagine their personal and professional future. How do they envision society and participation as well as education? Do they feel prepared for the changes to come, including digitalisation of work environments? How do they see their chances in education and training? Another point of interest here are the more private futures, namely how do young people see themselves in their prospective lives? What are their dreams and what do they want to achieve in their lives?

Evaluation and Improvement of Measures

A third area of interest is focused on the improvement of services and how young people would like to be supported in their educational endeavour or integration into the labour market. This highlights the desire to encourage young people to trust in their capacities and support them in a way that fosters their motivation to engage in education. One member suggested that it would be interesting to change the roles and ask young people what they would do differently if they would be the manager/head of their organisation. Another member would like to know what young people are passionate about, being then able to conceptualise measures that connect better to their life-worlds. The question remains how measures can be better adapted to the needs and situations of young people – not only to reach them with suited measures, but also to really offer them the support they need.

4. Concluding Remarks

The following section summarises the main outcomes so far collected within the Knowledge Coalition. Since the Knowledge Coalition is a fluid and dynamic construct, new members can foreground additional topics in the future, making this report a current mapping of experiences and interests.

4.1 Key Outcomes

The Knowledge Coalition members shared their experiences in their field of work and work-in-practice approaches. The following key outcomes summarise the main messages of the conversations:

- Early School Leavers worry about their future especially in times of Covid-19 and economic crisis



- There is a systemic imbalance of supply and demand when it comes to apprenticeship places
- Some young people experience a variety of difficulties early in their lives which complicate their success in education and training
- “E&T up to 18” works with principles that foreground individual needs, comprehensive support that also including families, and the resources of young people
- Some young people find it especially challenging to make decisions about their education and to see it through
- Esteem, recognition of skills and resources is of importance in the work with the target group
- Alternative educational or training tracks need raise in reputation and recognition
- Young people participating in “E&T up to 18” measures do not have any official representatives

4.2 Reflections on the Constitution Process

The constitution process of the Knowledge Coalition was complicated by the fact that institutions of “E&T up to 18,” like all members of society, were deeply affected by the various restrictions imposed due to Covid-19 from March on, including two complete lockdowns in spring and fall. Not only were some of the institutions closed and faced with uncertainty about the way to proceed with their work, decision processes were also delayed. This meant that all agreements and planning remained on uncertain ground. However, in the end a good number of institutional members took part in the preparatory process, sharing their expertise about the structure and implementation of “E&T up to 18” and provided insight in practical matters and concerns. Accordingly, theoretical as well as practical insights on the status-quo from the perspectives of different stakeholders could already be achieved. Furthermore, the intended purpose of the Knowledge Coalition of connecting young people and people responsible for implementing measures seems to be on the right track, paving the way for fruitful discussions and the development of further measures. What remains to consider in the future are the concrete means of connecting young people who participate as Co-Researchers with other members of the Knowledge Coalition, for digital means appear unsuitable to provide an environment of equal and agreeable exchange and discussion. After reflecting on the current members of the Knowledge Coalition, we aim to include the Open Youth Work as partners in the future. They seem to be an important, but sometimes overlooked interface between different stakeholders such as ESL, social workers and youth experts.



4.3 Next Steps

The next step is to further engage Knowledge Coalition members from institutions and responsible representatives with the young Co-Researchers and start discussing the results of this report as well as the first round of research conducted by the young people. Therefore, we will invite all participants to an off- or online meeting (depending on the current Covid-19 safety measures) in January 2021. These kinds of roundtables will progress in accordance with the Co-Researchers' projects and continue until the final closing event. Additionally, the dissemination of the results will be coordinated with the Co-Researchers to make them available to other target groups through formats such as YouTube videos, journal articles, or podcasts. Furthermore, we will initiate a meeting platform to facilitate the exchange between young people who are part of educational or training measures. This meeting platform can be used to continue research projects outside of institutional research settings and to build a network between young people, which in turn strengthens their influence in round tables and other decision-making processes.



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