

National Poverty Watch Report

Austria

1. Introduction

EAPN Austria: network of more than 40 NGOs which advise, support and accompany over 500.000 people a year. Is in six of nine federal states active through regional networks.

Analyses background and reasons, data and strategies as well as measures against poverty and social exclusion in Austria.

Works together with people experiencing poverty to improve their situations.

2. What is happening to poverty? Who are the groups most affected?

Based on EU-definition 2016 approximately 18% of Austrian population (1.542.000) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (3 risk-factors), 14% (1.208.000) are at risk of relative income poverty and 3% (257.000) are severely materially deprived. Since 2008, which is base year for EU-2020 poverty reduction target, indicator at risk of poverty or social exclusion decreased from 20,6% (2008) to 18%. The number of people who are severely materially deprived could be significantly reduced from 5,9% (2008) to 3,0%.

This reduction doesn't really reflect the situation noticed by EAPN Austria but maybe in the official statistical figures will be seen next year. Anyway, fact is that 300.000 to 400.000 people are in existential hard situation. That's a lot for a rich country like Austria. 410.000 manifest poverty, 257.000 extensive material deprivation. Impairments regarding health, chronic illness, living quality, housing conditions. 84.000 People all 3 Indicators: low income, exclusion, problems in work.

Children in poverty: 52.000 children in households that have problems keeping flat warm during cold seasons.

Challenges: growing expenses reg. housing, energy, nutrition, problems reg. physical and psychological health, low working conditions, cause loneliness and shame

New social risks: new ways of work –new freelance work, precarious work, care-work, disabilities, migration

Most affected groups: migrants, long-term unemployed, single parents and families with 3 or more children

3. What are the key challenges and priorities? What do people in poverty think?

Means tested minimum income

Organized by federal states autonomously, approximately 838 Euros/month for single households, 1.257 Euro/month for (married) couples.

Reduction of MI in the last year in several Austrian provinces! > see Austrian EMIN context-report (section 2): <https://eminnetwork.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/emin2-context-report-austria-20171.pdf>

2015 received app. 284.000 people in app. 168.400 households means tested minimum income.

Problems: amount is not enough for real expenses. More explanation. Split responsibilities of federal states cause unequal treatment of population, arbitrariness in cutting the out-payments for particular groups (people with granted asylum, households with many children),

Housing

Growing numbers of people affected by homelessness. 2008 – 2013 rise in the number of homeless registered people about 41%. More new entrants and increase of length of homelessness. 2013 16.033 registered homeless people. Dark numbers reg. homeless women (hidden homelessness).

People with low income invest average 43% of their income for flat-renting. Together with operating expenses, water and energy they have to invest more than 50% of monthly income into housing.

263.000 people in Austria can't keep their flats warm during cold seasons, app. 60.000 households endangered to energy deactivation yearly.

Work and working poor

Number of unemployed people grew massive over the last years, 2011 in average 206.702 unemployed people, 2016 in average 357.313 people. Unemployment rate decreases slightly since Jan 2016 for the first time in 5 years.

Hardest affected groups: elderly people, long time unemployed people and persons with health issues

Challenges:

Working poor: 313.000 people (app. 8%) 2016. Reasons: increased precarious jobs, atypical jobs, part-time jobs

Health and psychic health problems

Regional responsibilities of federal states lead to unequal treatment in health sector. People with health issues are especially affected by unemployment. More data.

General problem: Many disadvantaged people do not participate in elections

Voter participation decreases during the last years especially in disadvantaged groups: people who live in precarious situations, who are affected by poverty or long-term unemployment. If these groups don't use their right to vote, their interests are not represented anymore in the political process. The danger in this development is that political interventions don't focus on their interests but on requests of higher-income earners. This is an international problem which is also true for Austria. A new study for Germany proves (only available in German):

<http://www.armutskonferenz.at/blog/blog-2017/gib-mir-was-was-ich-waehlen-kann-demokratie-ohne-langzeitarbeitslose.html>

4. What is the role of EU and national governments?

Dialogue with EU through European Semester, mainly focussed on economic issues, poverty for example in CSR just cross-sectional area and rarely discussed, only mentioned that social welfares still high overall but some groups are at higher risk of poverty and inequality is on the rise.

Anyway, developments are noticed and mentioned. Lack of self-reflection and motivation to search for solutions for a more equal society.

EU Social Pillar: politically discussed but in fall 2017 again early elections which dominate media discussions. Social Pillar no subject in election battle.

5. What is EAPN doing?

Only some activities and projects mentioned here!

Paper: With human rights against poverty 06/16

Activities on Minimum Income:

See EMIN2 context report (section 4):

<https://eminnetwork.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/emin2-context-report-austria-20171.pdf>

Additional activities in this spring:

In spring and summer we made some press releases, as rigorous minimum income laws were introduced in some Austrian federal states.

As described in our context report on page 9 in Upper Austria, in Lower Austria and in Burgenland a cap of 1.500€ was agreed. In first line this regulation hit families with children. Because in German language for “cap” we use the same word as for “lid” – “Deckel”, we made a cartoon and it was spreaded quite largely on social media (in June 2017 before cap-law in upper-Austria was officially agreed in regional parliament):

“Deckel drauf! – Kinder und ihre Zukunftschancen bedroht.” (*Lid on! – Children and their future perspectives are threatened.*)

Press release in German:

<http://www.armutskonferenz.at/news/news-2017/mindestsicherung-ooe-deckel-drauf-kinder-und-ihre-zukunftschancen-bedroht.html>



Press releases and public pressure because of practice in some federal states to deduct amount of care allowance from amount of Minimum Income (especially single mothers with handicapped children and caring relatives are the sufferers). Success: Lower Austria changed the law in August 2017, others hopefully will follow.

Press release:

<http://www.armutskonferenz.at/news/news-2017/pflege-und-mindestsicherung-schikanen-gegen-pflegende-angehoerige-und-alleinerziehende.html>

Journalism prize for respectful poverty reporting

Prize on national level and international transfer project

JOURNALISM AWARD GOES INTERNATIONAL

Award for respectful reporting on poverty organised for the first time in Finland, Iceland, Croatia and Hungary

This award for journalism at eye level was developed by the Austrian Anti-Poverty Network (as "Journalismuspreis von unten", award for journalism "from below") in 2010. The aim of this award is to promote reporting which does justice to the many aspects of poverty, treating the people affected by poverty with respect, making their voices heard and their concerns visible and shedding light on the background context. The jury consists exclusively of people experiencing poverty, which makes the award a very special sign of recognition for the 53 journalists who have received it so far.

In 2015, with support from the ERSTE Foundation and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), activities were started to spread this award to other countries, and international

exchange workshops were organised for this purpose. In 2016, for the first time the Award for Respectful Reporting on Poverty was also given to journalists in Hungary, Croatia, Finland and Iceland. In 2017, the Award will be introduced in Macedonia, Serbia and Romania as well.

Some features of the Award for Respectful Reporting on Poverty are common to all the countries involved: in each case, the jury consists of people experiencing poverty. The award itself is of a symbolic nature and not linked to a monetary prize; on the one hand, the organising NGOs do not have the available resources for such a prize, and on the other, a symbolic award is more in keeping with the fact that the jury consists of volunteers experiencing poverty. And all the countries where award ceremonies were held have reported that the winners received their awards with great joy and pride, and some were even moved to tears.

Particularly in countries where poverty and social crises are burning issues in society, media coverage on these issues is often sidelined. As all NGO representatives agree, it is urgent to bring socially committed journalists into the limelight and show support for them. One idea that has emerged is to involve students of journalism more intensively so as to already include respectful reporting on poverty in the education and training of journalists. The contacts initiated with journalists of various media in the course of the award ceremonies have been maintained and cultivated up to the present day. This is another characteristic of the award in all countries: the festive occasion of the award ceremony is not the final act after the decision of the jury, but rather the beginning of closer collaboration between the media, NGO representatives and people experiencing poverty. It fosters mutual understanding and “perspective from below” visible to the public.