

Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people

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Regarding of reforms aiming to offer more effective services and programmes for people with a relatively large distance to the labour market we would propose to distinguish between two dimensions of respective reforms.

The first dimension may be discussed from a makro-perspective, where institutional reform (like the re-definition of competencies of existing institutions or the establishment of new ones, like the NAV offices in Norway) appears to be of major importance.

The second dimension is the actual outline and implementation of respective measures within an existing set of institutions (more to be covered from a micro-perspective).

According to our understanding, this peer review deals with both dimensions of reform. Our comments below deal more with institutional questions under points 1 to 5, more with questions of implementation under point 6.

1. Relevance for Austria

- The experiences made with the new Norwegian Qualification Programme and respective adaptations in the institutional structure of Norwegian Social and Employment Policy are of very high relevance for Austria.
- This is particularly the case because Austria is currently developing extramural Social Assistance into a new so-called Means Tested Minimum Income Scheme (Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung; BMS).
- One of the declared goals of this reform is to improve training and other services for people with a relatively large distance to the labour market, who at the same time make up for a large part of the clientele of traditional Social Assistance.
- This envisaged reform takes place on the background of the fact that people with a large distance to the labour market up to now had de facto only rather limited access to respective (personalised) employment and training programmes.
- The latter is caused by the traditional fragmentation of responsibilities for (most of the) employment and training programmes on the one side (which lies in the responsibility of the public Employment Service/AMS - a federal organization) and responsibility for Social Assistance as a means tested welfare programme of last resort on the other side (within the responsibility of the nine federal states / Länder and partly the municipalities).

- In other words: In Austria, employment and training programmes are, at first instance, performed by the Employment Service. Their traditional clientele are recipients of unemployment benefits and recipients of unemployment assistance. Regarding these two groups, a substantial extension and upgrading of respective services has become evident since the mid-1990s. But Employment Service traditionally did not offer respective programmes to recipients of Social Assistance or at least not to sole-recipients of Social Assistance (i.e. recipients of social assistance without synchronous benefits from unemployment insurance) (see e.g. Sundl/Reiterer 2009).
- This means that for a long time an extensive deficit was evident regarding employment and training programmes for recipients of Social Assistance. However, this situation has - although only gradually - changed during recent years on the background of a growing number of respective projects (partly co-financed via ESF). These programmes combine support by social workers with the opportunity to acquire and stabilise professional and social competencies and qualifications (see e.g. Sundl/Reiterer 2009). However, for the time being, such services are still rather small-scale, not comprehensively available, and mid-term outcomes are varying (see e.g. Dimmel 2008, 622).
- The envisaged reform-package of the BMS would address this problem to some degree, as it is planned to structurally integrate recipients of this benefit into training measures of the Employment Service.
- However, this would – according to current planning - only be the case for people who all in all are “fit for work” by mental, social and physical means. The decision if this is the case or not is planned to be left to a kind of clearing-institution, whereas the organisation of the latter has not been accurately defined up to now (this is still a topic to be sorted out between regional Employment Service and federal states / Länder).
- All in all, it is likely to turn out that this re-organisation comes along with new opportunities for those who are largely “fit for work” and at first instance show deficits regarding professional competencies and qualifications only.
- For the others, more “made to measure” (personalised) employment and training programmes, coming along with support by social workers, are necessary and it would to a large degree remain to be in the responsibility of the federal provinces / Länder to introduce and finance such programmes (although in co-operation with the Employment Service and with other sources of co-financing, e.g. from ESF) (see e.g. Sundl/Reiterer 2009, 566ff. for a discussion).
- Overall, this reform process – going ahead with the introduction of the BMS – makes the respective experiences made in the Norwegian case extremely relevant for Austria. They could help to highlight crucial points of planning and implementation, and in this sense they could help to optimize respective outcomes in the Austrian case.

2. Similarities/differences with the experience in Austria

- As already lined out above, the question of a re-adaptation and expansion of respective services and measures for people with a large distance to the labour market is on the political agenda in Austria as well.
- It has been realised that – irrespective of gradual improvement during the last decade – deficits still do exist within this field.
- One further similarity with Norway is the fact that it has been realised that services should be offered in a more integrated way and that respective institutions (especially the Social Welfare Administration – dealing with Social Assistance and in future with BMS - and the Employment Service) should co-operate in a more systematic way.
- Similar as in Norway, it has been discussed to introduce as “one-stop-shop” for all types of services and benefits under BMS (originally planned to be located within the Employment Service), but this goal has not been accomplished during the negotiations for BMS.
- Here, one important difference of the Austrian case comes in: Austria is not a unitary state, but a Federal Republic, where the responsibility for Social Assistance (and as well in future for BMS, replacing extramural Social Assistance) is located at the level of the Länder (including respective competences in legislation). This makes it more difficult to introduce new institutions like the NAV offices in Norway, which would likely go ahead with a reduction of the regional administrative discretion in the planning and implementation of respective measures (whereby the latter appears to be opposed by the Länder to some degree).

3. Potential transferability to Austria and likely conditions for application

- Transferability of Norwegian experiences would in principle be high, as the topic is – as sketched out above – on the political agenda in Austria as well. In other words: problem awareness for respective questions is rather high.
- Yet, one major problem lies within the fragmentation of respective competencies: National State and Employment Service regarding “standard” employment and training services, Länder as legislative bodies within Social Assistance and in future regarding BMS; other institutions - district commission (Bezirkshauptmannschaft) or in Vienna at the municipal administration (Magistrat) – as implementing bodies for Social Assistance and in future BMS.
- This means that the goal to co-ordinate different institutions has to be reached in a model of mutual interexchange, given the non-existence of one institution like the Norwegian NAV offices, which appear to hold a kind of general responsibility in implementation.
- This fragmentation in competencies may as well go ahead with a kind of “joint-decision-trap” (Politikverflechtungsfalle), where one level of the state tries to shift off

responsibility for (potentially expensive) measures to the other level (and vice versa). Here - in the Austrian case – the definition of “job readiness” and the rules according to which the above mentioned “clearing-institution” will “sort-out” the respective clientele will be of extraordinary importance. All people labelled “fit for work” would – per definition – fall within the prime responsibility of the Employment Service.

- In a second step, the Länder (partly in co-operation with the municipalities and the Employment Service) will have to decide which services they offer (and finance) for people not supposed to be “job-ready” or “fit for work”.
- On this background, it is of major interest for the Austrian case to learn from the respective Norwegian experience: How to evaluate if someone is “job ready” / “fit for work” or needs additional social services (for psychological stabilisation etc.) at first instance? And how to define exclusion and inclusion criteria for participation in more tailor-made personalised programmes?
- One other major point relevant in this context is the one of financing / the costs of respective measures. International experience shows that personalised programmes for people with a relatively large distance to the labour market is very cost-intensive (and, as evaluations e.g. from Denmark show, not cost-effective in purely monetary terms). On this background it would be of major interests via which channels the respective measures are financed in the case of Norway and how high the actual costs are according to the experiences made in the pilot-schemes.

4. Possible ways to measure the results or the impact of respective policies/measures

- Results and impacts may be measured via monitoring and evaluation against the background of the declared goals of the respective strategies implemented.
- Hereby, it appears to be of crucial importance which criteria of success are used (employment-centred or wider criteria of social participation and inclusion).
- It is of large interest for the Austrian case to learn how decision makers and stakeholders in Norway deal with this point.

5. Important respective questions raised and debated in Austria

- As sketched out above, questions of optimized services and programmes for people with relatively large distance from the labour market have been put on the political agenda to some degree during the negotiations between the National State and the federal provinces / Länder regarding the reform of Social Assistance / introduction of BMS.
- However, it appears that these discussions at the same time have been dominated by questions about the eligibility criteria for monetary transfers and the level of them (the latter is still to some degree subject to political debates), as well as regarding questions

of financing training and employment measures within the Employment Service for those who are by and large “fit for work”.

- At the same time it appears that problems of those who show even more extensive structural deficits (regarding health, psychological problems etc.) remained to be addressed in a rather rudimentary way only.
- The latter took place irrespective of the fact that respective problems and deficits in public measures are well known: e.g. a lack of offers for people with structurally reduced working capacity, for people with mental disorders, for people with drug addiction, for (secondary) illiterates etc. (see. e.g. Sundl/Reiterer 2009, 566ff.).

6. Experiences regarding more specific questions

6.1 Recruitment of client groups (e.g. qualifying criteria for programme participants)

6.2 Strengthening client involvement (e.g. motivation, prevention of drop-outs)

6.3 Good practice examples (e.g. concerning measures and combination of measures, tools, procedures, timing, personalized follow-up)

6.4 Cooperation with employers and NGOs (e.g. supportive structures, incentives for employers' commitment, establishment of a fruitful cooperation with NGOs).

Regarding these and related questions we add some information regarding innovative measures within the scope of the European Social Fund (ESF) in Austria (see below).

European Social Fund in Austria (ESF)

Innovative measures for the integration of marginalised groups into the labour market:

Priority 3b of the ESF Operational Programme (OP) for Employment Austria 2007-2013 calls for innovative projects for the integration of persons distant from the labour market. New challenges arise for Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) in 2007-2013 as the TEPs develop and co-fund projects at regional/sub-regional/local level to reach out those on the margins of the labour market and bringing them into the mainstream.

What is a Territorial Employment Pact?

Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) are contracted regional partnerships to better link employment policy with other policies in order to improve the employment situation on regional and local level. In co-operating as partners, the specific aims are

- to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the use of resources;
- to improve the quality of support given to certain target groups;
- to secure and create jobs;

- to obtain funding for the regions;
- to preserve in a sustainable manner the region as a place to live.

The support structure is being offered within the framework of the Austrian Operational Programme for Employment 2007-2013 (ESF) on an intensified basis by means of a specific focus (priority 5 of the Operational Programme for Employment 2007-2013).

Why can TEPs help?

- The responsibility for supporting the target group lies within the Labour Market Service as well as the Regional Governments and cities and municipalities.
- A well established cooperation between above mentioned institutions is a necessity for an improved assistance for the target group (personal, social and labour market problems need to be solved).
- The above mentioned institutions already cooperate within the TEPs and now should deepen their cooperation for the specific target group.

Priority 3b of the OP for Employment Austria 2007 - 2013:

The overall strategic aim of Priority 3b is to improve the integration of marginalised groups into the labour market via testing and developing innovative measures and improved cooperation of institutions.

The first call for proposal was launched in winter 2007 for projects at the interface of labour market and social policy (target group: beneficiaries of social welfare, persons without any subsidies). All projects need to be based on a joint analyse, strategy and implementation plan of all actors. Furthermore, only innovative projects and measures will be funded. The projects budgets (first round) range between € 1 Mio. to € 9 Mio. per TEP (for a 2 years periode; co-financing of 54% is to be provided by regional means).

The second call for proposal was launched in June 2009 and the project implementation phase will start 2010.

In order to allow for finding a common understanding between the TEPs in Austria quality criteria were established by the TEPs together with the Nation-wide Coordination Unit (Koo) comprising:

- criteria for TEP structures such as e.g. TEP is responsible for the overall project, all relevant partners are integrated, enlargement of action space of TEPs, overcome institutional, financial, legal and economic barriers, minimize communication gaps, etc.
- as well as criteria for project implementation such as e.g. criteria are established for the overall strategy as well as for the quality of actions, sustainability and monitoring and evaluation. Criteria range from system development to the implementation of holistic & integrated approaches for solving problems (e.g. integration chains, mix of actions and target groups, etc..)

Priority 3b assists in closing gaps between policies (labour market and social), strengthens the TEP's role in implementing innovative measures, improves the situation of the poorest, presses the partnerships forward to make best use out of their unique position (the cooperation) via enlarging their scope of activities, supports structural and systemic developments as well as innovations and contributes to mobilising reforms in the field of social and labour market policies.

Project Example of TEP Vienna

Demand-oriented integration in Vienna

- partnership consists on 8 strategic, 12 operative and 3 financing partners (out of a total of 17 partners);
- target group: youth, migrants, social welfare beneficiaries, drug addicts;
- 11 coordinated measures in labour market and social policy (support for employment, social workers assistance, social advice, dept counselling, crisis intervention, housing, recovering and health measures);
- close gaps in supporting the target group with a holistic bundle of innovative measures;
- improve the cooperation between actors involved (e.g. overcome legislative burdens);
- Budget: € 9 Mio for 2 years (46% ESF, 54% regional means).

References

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