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Mapping and stock taking of Scouts for Green Apprenticeship

Country Snapshot AUSTRIA

Developed by: Auxilium

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Introduction: definition of the landscape of SDGs and Green Deal implementation in your country across the VET and business ecosystem

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were launched by the United Nations to create a more peaceful, just and socially inclusive world in which sustainability and environmental protection are also a priority.

Austria also committed itself to the 2030 Agenda with the title "Transformation unserer Welt" (transformation of our world) and the 17 defined development goals to the best of its ability. The cooperation of the state, the (educational and) private sectors as well as of all individuals is essential to achieve the SDGs (UN-Agenda 2030: Die globalen Nachhaltigkeitsziele / SDGs im Bereich Bildung, n. d.).

Austria focuses on the following three main themes:

1. Digitalisation

The government of Austria set a focus with the topic of digitalisation. This digital transformation will also be used for the general implementation of Agenda 2030. More specifically, this project seeks to expand the modern digital infrastructure with broadband and 5G on the one hand and to increase the digital skills of the population on the other. These measures are intended to ensure the best possible participation in the opportunities of the digital transformation for prosperity, health and sustainability. Austria's smart cities are among the most innovative and liveable municipalities in the world, as this country strives for holistic approaches to the sustainable use of the digital transformation.

2. Women, Youth and "Leaving no one behind"

The inclusion of a gender perspective in the systematic achievement of the SDGs is essential; after all, gender equality is one of the basic requirements of Agenda 2030. The participation of young people in decision-making and participation processes is also essential. For this reason, young people must be given space for their ideas and supported in the best possible way. The Austrian health system fights poverty and social inequality. Targeted measures in this area significantly improve the living conditions of disadvantaged people, for example people with disabilities, older people, young people and children, as well as excluded groups of people.

3. Climate protection and climate change adaptation

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by about 36% by 2030 is a commitment under European law for Austria, and Austria has also set itself the goal of increasing renewable energy sources from 46 to 50%. In 2012, Austria was one of the first EU member states to draw up a climate change adaptation strategy and link it to a comprehensive action plan to implement concrete recommendations for action. An update was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2017. Through the Green Deal, a process to adapt climate and energy targets by 2030 was announced by the European Commission and this will have direct repercussions on Austria's climate and energy policy (Republik Österreich, 2020).

The Green Deal is a measure of the European Union to fight climate change and protect the environment. The goal is to make Europe a climate-neutral continent by 2050 and Austria supports this project with the aim to switch to 100% renewable electricity by 2030 and to become climate-neutral by 2040. For this reason, Austria implements various regulatory measures and promotes environmentally friendly mobility, renewable energy, more sustainable industry, eco-innovation, pollution control and greening of agriculture (Der Grüne Deal in Österreich, n. d.).

All of these are the official goals and objectives, but implementation in Austria looks different in reality. According to the focus group conducted, the concept of the SDGs is hardly known in companies, if at all. Certain partial aspects are known in the economic eco-current, but in a purely economic context, such as waste separation (focus group, 2023).

On the other hand, an official survey among the members of the Austrian Association of cities (2021) shows that more than half of the participating cities include the SDGs in their work. For about 15%, the SDGs are an important frame of reference and 10% of the respondents state that they have also anchored the SDGs in mission statements and/or strategies (kdz_austria 2021). This shows that the official bodies try to integrate the SDGs, but in economic practice the relevance behind the project is lost.

However, a distinction must be made here between small and medium-sized enterprises and large companies. According to the experience of the participating company representatives, the SDGs are irrelevant for the former, as their implementation can often mean a loss of profit for small and medium-sized enterprises (focus group, 2023). Nevertheless, Austrian companies are among the pioneers and market leaders in modern environmental technology, and they are also ranked far ahead in the fields of renewable energy and innovative urban infrastructure. Sustainability is in vogue and thus creates an ever-increasing demand for sustainable, resource-conserving products, services and business models. However, this primarily affects the global market and thus primarily large Austrian companies (Republik Österreich, 2020).

The representatives of the VET sector reported something similar, even though the topics of the SDGs and the Green Deal are more likely to be applied here, but without explicitly using the terms SDG or Green Deal. Furthermore, these topics tend to play a role in vocational school, but not during training or within the company. The SDGs are a big topic in politics and are globally relevant in terms of development policy, but not for companies. The Green Deal is still more likely to be applied, but only as long as profit does not suffer. The goals of the Green Deal are definitely integrated into apprenticeship training, such as resource conservation. For example, apprentices are taught how to use certain materials without having to consume them by using new technologies (focus group, 2023).

The results of the survey among the members of the Austrian Association of Cities (2021) also showed that almost two thirds of the participants consider the level of awareness of the SDGs among the population to be low. However, about one third of the participating cities reported awareness-raising activities to increase the awareness of the SDGs among their inhabitants. Around 71% of these approaches are carried out by the cities themselves, while the rest are carried out by kindergartens, schools and associations, in other words through civil society. The main aim is to raise awareness, and more than 40% of respondents reported that they have already implemented internal information and education activities on the SDGs in their cities. In addition, more than one third of the participating cities have already established an SDG partnership with local actors (kdz_austria 2021).

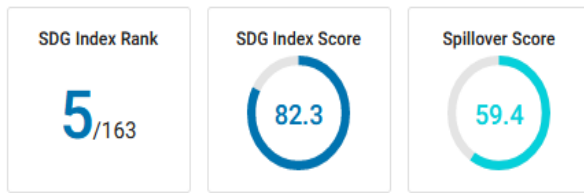
In summary, it can be said that in Austria the SDGs and the Green Deal are given a high relevance on the political level, but in reality, in the VET sector and in the companies themselves they are only applied when it is necessary, legally required or economically advantageous. While the goals of the SDGs are included in the training and strategies of companies because it is morally correct and required, this is not done to fulfil an SDG.

Quantitative indicators on SDGs and Green Deal implementation in your country across the VET and business ecosystem in AUSTRIA

The fulfilment of the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda should be consistently monetised. In order to be able to do this, comprehensive sets of indicators were created that are available at global, regional and national level. However, the targets of the individual SDGs are very extensive and multifaceted and were not quantified in large parts, but only defined in a guiding manner. For this reason, assessing the extent to which the goals have been achieved so far by means of indicators proves to be very challenging. Although the UN Agenda 2030 leaves it up to the national states to set additional national target limits, no such limits were set in Austria. For this reason, it is not really feasible to evaluate the achievement of targets, but it is possible to evaluate the development of indicators in the desired direction, meaning whether they are increasing or decreasing.

Since 2017, Statistics Austria has been compiling the national SDG indicator set to assess and monetise the achievement of the goals. Currently, around 200 different indicators have been created. The development of the indicators is assessed on the basis of four levels symbolised by four arrows. Green arrows indicate a significant or moderately positive development, while red arrows indicate a moderate or strong negative development (Statistik Austria (b), 2021).

The chart below shows these assessments and gives different rankings:



SDG Dashboards and Trends

Click on a goal to view more information.

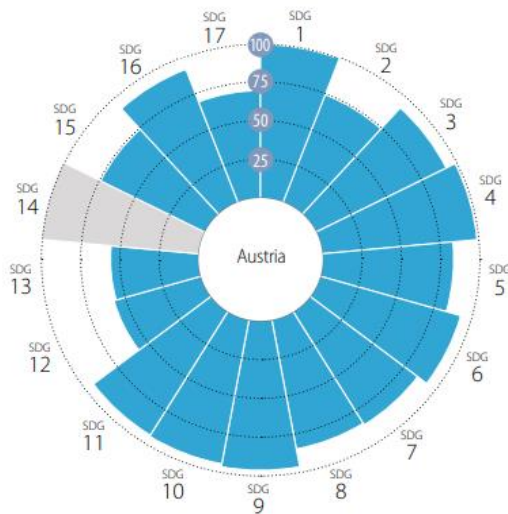


Figure Sustainable Development Report 2022, n. d.

On the SDG Index Rank, Austria ranks fifth among the 169 participating countries of the 2030 Agenda and has an index score of 82.3. This score is a theoretical measure and quantitatively indicates the extent to which the 17 SDGs have been achieved. (Cambridge, 2022)

The Sustainable Development Report 2022 also shows that Goal 1 (no poverty) and Goal 7 (affordable and clean energy) are growing strongly in Austria and have even been achieved in part. In general, Austria is at least moderately improving in almost all goals. Only goal 15 (life on land) is stagnating according to this report and no values could be collected for goal 14 (life below water). On the other hand, Austria is well on its way to achieving Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), even though there are still some challenges.

▼ AVERAGE PERFORMANCE BY SDG



The graph on the left shows the average performance by SDG in Austria as well. This graph shows more clearly how far the individual goals have been achieved. With the exception of goals 2, 15 and 17, the average performance is over 75%. Goal 14 still cannot be evaluated and only Goals 13 and 12 are only slightly above 50%. This shows that Austria is well advanced in achieving the goals. However, this graph also shows that Austria, although we are already in 5th place in the international ranking, still has to take a few more steps to successfully implement all SDGs. SDG 2 (no hunger), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG 13 (climate action) must therefore be pursued and worked on much more intensively so that the ideas of the 2030 Agenda can be fulfilled (Cambridge, 2022).

Statistics Austria recorded a share of 7.1% in young adults who are neither employed nor in education or training as of 2019, which represented moderate progress toward meeting the eighth SDG (human dignity, work and economic growth) (Statistik Austria (a), 2020.). However, the latest surveys show a significant regression in this area, with 8.5% of young adults neither in employment nor in education or training in 2021. This regression is due to the pandemic but shows that there is a need for action in the VET sector (Unterziel 8.6, n. d.).

On the one hand Statistics Austria recorded a decline in the unemployment rate, which reached a peak of 10.8% within the EU 28 in 2013 and was 6.3% in 2019. On the other hand, due to the pandemic and the associated economic crisis, massive fluctuations are to be expected here as well and are more likely to be negative. The unemployment rate (according to the ILO) for the labor force aged 15 to 74 was 4.8% in 2010, then increased significantly, reaching a peak of 6.0% in 2016. From 2017 (5.5%), the rate decreased, and in 2019 it was 4.5%. In the EU 28, unemployment peaked at 10.8% in 2013, and has since declined, reaching 6.3% in 2019.

On a positive note, income gaps are narrowing in terms of gross annual income for employed women and men working full-time year-round. Since 2010, the gap has narrowed from 19.1% to 15.2% for 2018 (Statistik Austria (a), 2020).

Domestic material consumption is also in an unsatisfactory range. According to the preliminary calculation of Eurostat for 2019, the consumption of Austrians was around 19.5 tons/capita and thus proved to be significantly higher than the average of the EU 28.

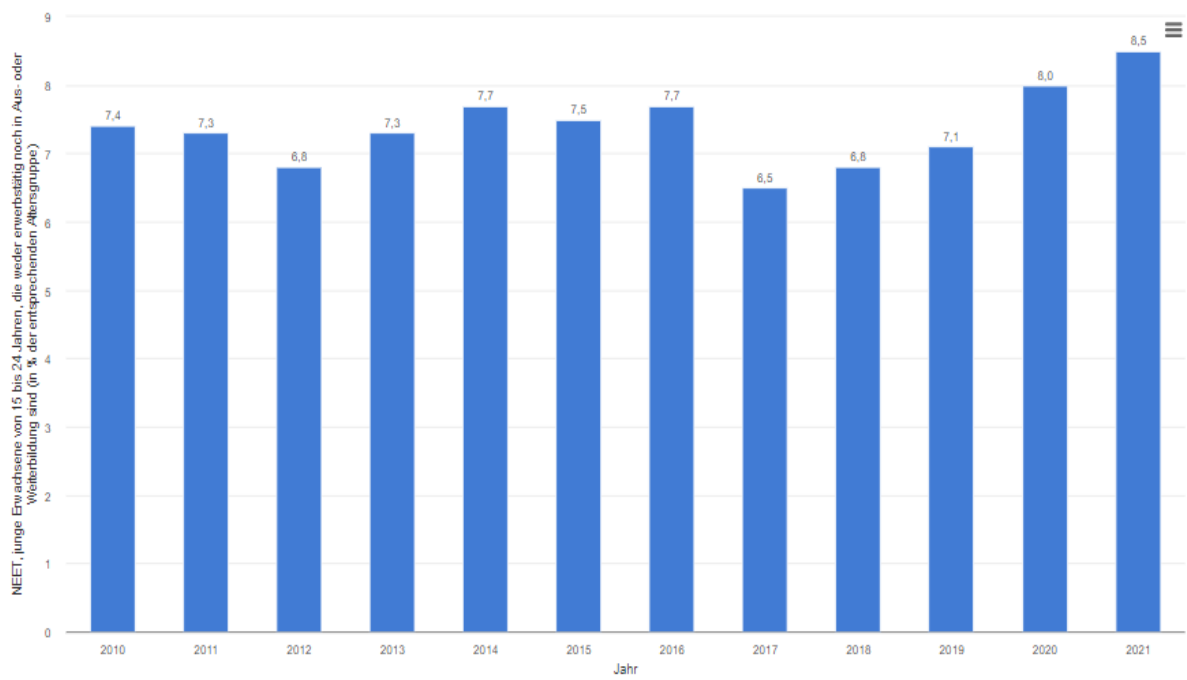


Figure Statistik Austria (c) n.d.



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Qualitative descriptions of SDGs and Green Deal implementation in your country across the VET and business ecosystem

A focus group was conducted to collect qualitative data on the achievement of the SDGs and the implementation of the Green Deal in Austria. Ten participants were invited, half of whom came directly from the VET sector and the other half from the corporate sector.

The group discussion clearly showed that the SDGs as a concept are hardly or not at all known, neither in practice nor in the vocational school sector. The topics themselves, such as inclusion, environment, resource conservation, fairness and so on, are indeed integrated into the world of work and education, but no one is aware that the SDGs are being fulfilled. The Green Deal is the one most widely known, as it is accompanied by a number of subsidies.

Grants and subsidies make the SDGs much more attractive to companies, and compliance through the Green Deal is also significantly increased by such grants, according to focus group participants. Large companies have more budget and are therefore more likely to be able to implement changes, which in turn also have a greater impact than those at small companies. However, according to the focus group (2023), this also depends on the particular sector of the economy. In agriculture, they believe that smaller farmers are more able to make changes and adapt to the desired organic and sustainable demand without incurring losses (focus group, 2023).

The various chambers of commerce in Austria are also trying to integrate the SDGs and the European Green Deal more into the Austrian business landscape. The Salzburg Chamber of Commerce (2021) for example reports that the platform www.actforclimate.at was launched to raise awareness of the SDGs and the Green Deal among companies and private individuals through events, best practice examples and the CO2 quick check, and to motivate them to become part of the project (WKS 2021).

"Leaving no one behind" is the approach under which the Un-Agenda 2030 is being pursued. For this reason, the UN guidelines provide for many disaggregations, for example according to age, gender, disability and migration (Statistik Austria (b), 2021).

This is also reflected in the various projects and instruments developed and implemented in Austria to fulfil the SDGs. Next to decent work, education is the strongest weapon we have to fight poverty and reach SDG number one. In order to reduce the number of unemployed young people, the instrument of "training up to 18" was created to help young people in their search for training or in the transition from the school system to the world of work. In addition, Austria is trying to motivate companies to take on more apprentices with disabilities by means of an inclusion bonus (Republik Österreich, 2020).

According to the focus group, the SDGs play a major role at the political level, as these are global goals. The Green Deal is much more interesting, at least for companies, as it takes place at the EU level. The participants of the focus group (2023) agreed that all SDGs and also the Green Deal would be feasible as long as an economic benefit would emerge. The company representatives, for example, reported that it can be very useful for advertising purposes alone to be able to present various green credentials, as the market is strongly oriented towards these new directions. In addition, the VET side reported that many apprentices choose companies based on how morally and environmentally acceptable the company or occupation is in their eyes. In this way, the companies are forced to pay attention to their corporate social responsibility and therefore also unknowingly come closer to the SDGs (focus group, 2023).

Opportunities: training available and operational tools

Through the Green Deal and the SDGs, an increasingly strong awakening is taking place. Even if these two measures have not yet really arrived in companies and VET, many of the projects are already anchored to some extent in the two divisions.

In apprentice mobilities, for example, green traveling plays a significant role (focus group, 2023). More and more opportunities are also being created to make better use of public transport. There is, for example, the possibility for apprentices from the metal industry to receive a free climate ticket, with which the apprentices can travel throughout Austria (Gratis-Klimaticket für Lehrlinge, n. d.). Many companies now also pay for the tickets for their apprentices. More and more shuttle companies and car pools are also being used (focus group, 2023).

Another growing field concerns gender equality. There are still many professions that are classified as women's or men's occupations. However, Austria is addressing this issue in a wide variety of projects and trying to overcome this hurdle. The Talent Center, for example, offers young people the opportunity to discover professions that might suit them based on their interests, regardless of their gender (WKO Steiermark n. d.).

The focus group also talked about sustainability. In the short term, implementing the SDGs and the Green Deal may increase costs, but in the long term it will massively reduce expenditure and increase revenues (focus group 2023). The Austrian economy, like the global economic market, will be confronted with two major challenges in the future. One is the global warming and the other is the shortage of raw materials. These issues pose a great risk to the livelihood of future generations. However, these problems are solvable and manageable. Renewable energies are fundamental in the fight against global warming and material innovations or intelligent product development help to conserve raw materials.

Through the European Green Deal, the EU has given the banks, among others, an essential role in creating a more sustainable economy by steering entrepreneurial investments towards sustainability through financing at the banks and via the capital market. In this way, both companies and banks win by investing in a cleaner and fairer future. (WKS 2021).

This shows that by implementing the Green Deal and achieving the SDGs, not only can the environment be protected and regenerated, but also companies and of course society can benefit greatly from these innovations.

Needs

The trend toward sustainability and moral correctness also affects the Austrian apprenticeship system. When choosing their future profession, more and more young people are making sure that it is environmentally friendly and fair. For apprentices, work-life balance, green jobs and mental health also play a major role. These are topics that are also reflected within the SDGs and Austrian companies need to adapt to these needs.

It is also important to create greater awareness. The SDGs are absolutely topical and present in the political context, however companies, which make up such a large part of the implementation, often do not even know what it is. This means that more public relations work is needed, combined with an enumeration of the advantages for companies and apprentices if they should help fulfill the SDGs and the Green Deal (focus group 2023).

The results of the survey among the members of the Österreichischen Städtebund also show that there is a great need for expansion regarding the dialogue with the population, as there are still some deficiencies here and the awareness of Austrians regarding the SDGs and the Green Deal needs to be further promoted and expanded (kdz_austria 2021).

In addition, the bureaucratic and administrative barriers must be removed or at least greatly reduced and financial support must be used sensibly and purposefully (focus group, 2023).

Challenges

Worldwide, Austria is currently in fifth place in the fulfillment of the SDGs, yet not all of them have been met yet.

One example is the fact that women still perform more unpaid work than men, and the consumption of raw materials per capita is also above the EU average. In addition, the level of government development aid must be readjusted (Große Herausforderungen, n. d.).

The focus group also emphasised that funding often seems to be distributed arbitrarily and that small enterprises in particular are often overlooked (focus group, 2023). The results of the survey among the members of the Österreichische Städtebund (2021) also confirm that funding is urgently needed to disseminate and use the SDGs locally.

In addition, the results of this survey also show some other hurdles that stand in the way of achieving the SDGs in Austria. About 88% of the surveyed members state that they would need guidelines and tools to better implement the SDGs. But also further training measures for the local administration are indispensable according to the participants. According to this survey, the lack of information regarding the SDGs is the biggest problem (kdz_austria 2021).

Energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions from transport must be improved (Große Herausforderungen, n. d.) and this will also pose some challenges for Austria as the infrastructure in the Austrian rural areas is often not developed enough. As a result, many people have no choice but to use a car to reach their place of study or work (focus group, 2023).

As it turned out, money plays a major role in the extent to which the SDGs and the Green Deal are integrated in companies or how attractive they are for companies. Unfortunately, the switch to a greener work concept is often associated with increased costs due to prejudices. This means that this negative stereotype must be eliminated, otherwise the motivation to change something about the current situation is not really there. No changes take place as long as a certain fear of financial loss remains. (focus group, 2023).

Long-term thinking is becoming increasingly relevant, even for small businesses. In order to be able to continue using resources, they must not be used up completely. The awareness exists, but the global aspect should not be underestimated. Companies cannot cut back their production, thereby becoming more expensive for the end consumer and thus less attractive, if there is a surplus of offers from all over the world for less cost. Globalization makes it much more difficult for small companies to implement sustainability economically (focus group, 2023).

The results of the survey among the members of the Österreichische Städtebund (2021) also draw attention to the fact that monitoring and evaluation are only implemented sporadically and sees the lack of urban indicators as one of the reasons for this. The majority of the cities surveyed need help in implementing the SDGs and in breaking down the complex system of goals into more easily understandable targets (kdz_austria, 2021).

Another challenge according to the focus group is the question of how to get participants involved in the various projects and actions. The question of profit is very big here and without it, it is almost impossible to motivate the companies or the people around them to get involved and support the SDGs and the Green Deal (focus group 2023).

Traditional role models fuel the shortage of skilled workers. Male kindergarten teachers, for example, are still heavily scrutinised and condemned in their work because they are men working in a women's field. This discrimination ensures that many men decide against this profession, which means that many potential skilled workers are lost. The SDGs attempt to combat this exclusion and to make women and men equal, but the long-established role models are deeply rooted in society and thus make it difficult to achieve this goal (focus group, 2023).

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