

# THE SOCIAL FACE OF EUROPE

**20 YEARS OF EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND  
IN AUSTRIA**



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# HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

2015 Austria is celebrating 20 years of membership in the European Union and thus also 20 years of European Social Fund in Austria.

The 20th anniversary is a special occasion not only for celebrating but as well for reflecting about the achievements of the past years.

The ESF is the oldest fund in the EU and its socio-political projects for an enlarged education offer and an improved functioning of the labour market have a significant influence on the social cohesion of society.

The ESF is colourful and full of variety and so are the people who are supported by the ESF, so are the faces and actors behind the ESF.

Thanks to the ESF the cold and administrative image of the EU receives a more human, social face.

„The Social Face of Europe – 20 Years of ESF in Austria“ is therefore the title of this book, which invites you to stroll within the variety of 20 years of ESF in Austria.

Neither figures nor facts are the focus of the book, but the people behind the ESF, their experiences and stories.

20 chapters with 20 different perspectives are expecting you, looking into the past, underlining the political and social significance of the ESF, and above all, giving a voice to those who are a part of the numerous successful ESF projects. The interesting life stories of various participants as well as critical reflections and wishes result in a colourful mix reflecting the variety of the ESF itself.

20 years of ESF in Austria have proven that despite administrative burdens, the funding of socio-political projects is in fact a success story. The ESF in Austria is mainly characterised by being innovative and stimulating.

The ESF offers support where help is the most needed and cares for target groups who otherwise are impeded in entering the labour market. Maybe this is the Austrian ESF recipe for success: complementary funding adding to the national standard measures in order to create a fair labour market.

Dear readers, this book invites you to travel in time, to celebrate, to sympathise and share the hope and joy the ESF has granted Austria.

20 YEARS OF  
EUROPEAN  
SOCIAL FUND  
IN AUSTRIA  
IN 20 CHAPTERS



“THE WEAKNESSES  
OF THE EMPLOYMENT  
MARKET COME FROM  
MISCONCEIVED ECONOMIC  
AND FISCAL POLICIES”

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MICHAEL FÖRSCHNER



# THE EARLY DAYS OF THE ESF

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL FÖRSCHNER

**Born in 1960. After completing commercial college, studied Social Sciences at the University of Vienna. Began his working life with the employment Policy Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs. Headed the Austrian ESF programme from 1995 to 2008. Thereafter, research at the ZSI (Centre for Social Innovation). Between 1993 and 2009 performed various roles for Austria in the OECD and also worked directly for the Organisation in Italy and France. Has lectured at the Eisenstadt campus of the Burgenland University of Applied Sciences since 2009. Has worked for the Office of the Burgenland Provincial Government since 2013.**

*Gerhard Loibelsberger: So you were on board from the very beginning, in 1995, when the first ESF projects were launched in Austria?*

**Michael Förchner:** I played a part in the initial preparations back in 1994, as the coordinator of ESF funding in Austria. That work opened the way for the programmes to kick off at the start of 1995.

*Were you involved in the Austrian EU accession negotiations?*

**Förchner:** No, but in 1998, 1999, 2005 and 2006 I was responsible for renegotiating the ESF Structural Funds programmes, and liaised with the European Commission and the other member states on these activities.

*How did it feel, back in 1995? Like the threshold of a new era?*

**Förchner:** The feeling was actually one of being overwhelmed. There were only two of us when we got the ESF rolling, and we had a lot of money to parcel out.

*What initiatives did you have in place then, at the inception of the ESF funding?*

**Förchner:** We gave a strong lead in some areas. That goes for the funding programme for employee upskilling. The idea was to help people in employment to enhance their skills so as to prevent future redundancies. There had never been anything like that before – there were just schemes for the unemployed.

Another example is innovativeness. As we were required to spend five percent of the money on innovative activities we developed a number of programmes of our own, such as a drive to improve

women's prospects on the labour market, efforts to help farmers qualify for part-time employment, and skills training for young people and the disabled.

A third instance is the introduction of a culture of evaluation. This means that you start by analysing the status quo. Then you set clear targets, and map out the steps needed to meet them, and finally you carry out a systematic evaluation to determine how effective the various activities have been. We didn't have such a methodical approach to evaluating employment policy before Austria joined the EU. In fact, the evaluation findings attested to the excellent job done by the funding bodies and project promoters in virtually all areas.

*What were the first projects to receive the ESF funding?*

**Förchner:** Training schemes run by the AMS employment service.

*Today, 20 years on, how do you see the impact of the ESF funding?*

**Förchner:** There has been considerable progress in some aspects of the employment market, such as the assistance for disabled and disadvantaged people, support for women, and the creation of new networking structures – in this case, the Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs).

*Have the projects supported by the ESF brought enduring changes in Austria?*

**Förchner:** Yes, definitely. I'm quite certain of that.

*How good is the record on gender mainstreaming?*

**Förchner:** We've used ESF funding to introduce and roll out gender mainstreaming – as regards employment and disability policies – in Austria.

*Did the EQUAL development partnerships bring any progress as regards the discrimination against disadvantaged people in working life?*

**Förchner:** EQUAL was a milestone. True, it was incredibly bureaucratic, but on the upside, it was armed with a lot of money to put into innovative and creative ideas. There were two forms of innovation: thematic (trying out new ideas) and structural. All the projects had to be jointly implemented by line-ups of NGOs, the social partners or government bodies. That made them more sustainable, and in fact some of them still exist today.

*Has Austria succeeded in raising workforce skill levels – one of the ESF's main aims?*

**Förchner:** That's a constant challenge – a “never-ending story”. But there's no disputing the fact that our programmes have enabled tens of thousands of people to improve their vocational skills. That can't help but have a long-term impact, as shown by the evaluation results.

*The Austrian unemployment figures are constantly mounting. Has the ESF failed in its mission of promoting job creation?*

**Förchner:** No, the weaknesses of the Austrian employment market come from misconceived economic and fiscal policies. Employment policy can only do so much to counteract these mistakes. And the ESF itself accounts for only about five percent of total labour market policy spending – far too little to solve this problem.

*Despite the ESF the European Union has a cold-hearted, neoliberal image. Why is that?*

**Förchner:** I think the European Commission and the member states have got their priorities wrong in many areas. They go to huge lengths to ensure





that the money is correctly accounted for and the formal rules are observed, but don't make much of an effort to find out what actually happens to the funds.

By way of illustration, imagine you buy your child a cake for a birthday party, but you couldn't care less what sort of cake it is or what it tastes like. All that matters to you is whether the till receipt is correctly made out and the VAT is itemised, and whether you obtained quotations from at least three shops. The EU is like that. At the European Commission hardly anyone bothers about whether the measures taken were successful and more people are in work as a result of them. All they're interested in is correct accounting.

For a long time now, people have been having the wrong conversation in the EU. It's timid bureaucrats who call the shots, and not people with an imagination and visions. That's why it's structures, accounts and formal details that get discussed, but people hardly ever get a mention. It makes no difference whether the subject is the unemployed or, as now, refugees.

*Is the ESF up to the job of promoting economic and social convergence (cohesion) in Europe? Doesn't a lot more need doing?*

**Förchner:** As I said, the ESF simply has far too little funding for that. The EU needs economic and

fiscal policies that actually further social convergence. In view of the growing disparities in Europe, I can see little sign of that.

*What do you value most about the EU?*

**Förchner:** Its fundamentally strong conflict resolution capabilities.

*What have 20 years of EU membership brought the Austrian people?*

**Förchner:** More prosperity than it is generally credited with, as well as, sadly, a shift in purchasing power away from the working class and the socially disadvantaged, and a lot of feeble excuses for things that have gone wrong in our country.

*Could you tell me three good memories you have of your work on behalf of the ESF?*

**Förchner:** I look back with pleasure to the TEPs. That was the best bit, because they changed structures and the substance of policies, and at least did a bit to break down the silo mentality.

The innovativeness and the opportunities to change things that came with it. And the internationalisation, which created more understanding, more knowledge, and sometimes also friendships, provided that there was a measure of good will.

< Michael Förchner in front of the University of Applied Sciences in Eisenstadt





**“WE CAN DO OUR  
BIT TOWARDS  
COMBATING POVERTY”**

**BIBIANA KLINGSEISEN**



# ESF – THE SOCIAL FACE OF EUROPE

INTERVIEW WITH BIBIANA KLINGSEISEN

Bibiana Klingseisen began her working life at the Upper Austrian bfi vocational training institute. In 1992 she moved to the Vienna Regional Employment Office. Three years later she switched to the Employment Policy Section at the Ministry of Social Affairs, going on to work for the Internal Audit Department and the ESF audit authority. In 2011 she became the deputy head of the ESF department, with responsibility for the secondary labour market, programmes for people with health impairments, standardisation, and representing the ministry on the funding and audit committee of the administrative board of the Public Employment Service. She has headed the ESF department since October 2012.

*Gerhard Loibelsberger: You are responsible for ESF funding in Austria. How does this task differ from your previous roles?*

**Bibiana Klingseisen:** It's quite a lot more complex than my previous positions. Our work here involves a wide range of forms of cooperation, with various ministries, the provincial governments and the social partners. We have to take widely differing approaches and perspectives into account, and we learn a lot in the process.

*Shortly after taking up your new appointment you were faced with renegotiating the ESF programmes. Was that a case of being thrown in at the deep end?*

**Klingseisen:** Yes, absolutely. During the talks with the European Commission it fell to us to put forward Austria's positions. We had a lot less leeway than I had originally imagined. Often, we would end up discussing details for hours on end. The Commission often has too little insight into the way things work in Austria to understand what we are up against here.

*You said then that you saw your main task as simplifying the ESF's administrative channels in Austria. Have you managed to do that?*

**Klingseisen:** Streamlining the ESF will be an uphill task. The programme has already been adopted, but we're still negotiating on uncluttering the administrative procedures so that it doesn't get caught up in red tape.

*One of your predecessors, Michael Förschner, thinks that the EU makes an immense effort to ensure that the funds are properly accounted for and the formal rules complied with, but takes scant interest*

*in what actually happens to the money. Would you agree?*

**Klingseisen:** Yes.

*One of the main themes of the new ESF programmes is improving the institutional capacity of authorities and stakeholders, and achieving increased administrative efficiency. What does that add up to in practice?*

**Klingseisen:** That doesn't apply to Austria, as our institutions are well resourced and work properly. In consequence, we have not made this one of our priorities here.

*The upskilling projects for people already in work have been one of the innovations made by the ESF programmes, and one of their priorities. Where do these initiatives go from here?*

**Klingseisen:** Things are looking very good. This is now a well-established funding mechanism, which is being kept in place by the AMS. It's a real success story for the ESF.

*What innovative features does the new programme have?*

**Klingseisen:** As such, every section of the current programme has innovative aspects. What is entirely new, though, is the anti-poverty objective. The programme now covers target groups that previously didn't figure in it, such as the Roma and the working poor. The latter also include non-standard workers and one-person businesses.

*What is the outlook for gender mainstreaming?*

**Klingseisen:** That's a general principle that runs through the entire programme and all the investment priorities.

*Is there a successor to the EQUAL development partnerships?*

**Klingseisen:** No.

*The number of people in poverty in Austria is growing year by year. Can this trend be halted?*

**Klingseisen:** The ESF alone can't stop this trend, but we can do our bit towards combating poverty. We can innovate, and pilot actions that can then be taken up and pursued by other institutions. We invest around 30 percent of the ESF funding in fighting poverty.

*What about the massive wave of migration that is currently engulfing Europe? Can and should the ESF respond?*

**Klingseisen:** In principle, we can only address the target groups that are named in the programme. However, approaches and actions aimed at migrants can certainly be developed and implemented as part of the anti-poverty priority.

*Discrimination against migrants is an everyday occurrence in Austria and the whole of Europe. What could the ESF do to combat it in future?*

**Klingseisen:** We set out to ensure that our measures are open to all. It goes without saying that no one is excluded. German courses for people from immigrant backgrounds are a big issue for the ESF. There is also funding for additional German teaching at schools attended by a high proportion of immigrants to ensure that, as far as possible, all schoolchildren have equal opportunities.

*Another priority of the new ESF programme is "transnational cooperation". What does that mean in practice?*



**Klingseisen:** The Commission keeps urging us to cooperate with neighbouring countries. In reality, this is difficult and is bound up with heavy administrative expenses.

*Despite the ESF the European Union has a cold-hearted, neoliberal image. Why?*

**Klingseisen:** Due to the fact that I am in constant contact with the Commission, and discuss social policies and issues, I don't have this impression. There are some very committed people at the Commission who are well versed in social welfare issues. And at the meetings with other member states we are all pulling together to ensure that Europe keeps moving ahead on the social policy front. At the ESF we are the social face of Europe.

*Is the ESF up to the job of promoting economic and social convergence (cohesion) in Europe? Doesn't a lot more need doing?*

**Klingseisen:** It can't be the whole story. There ought to be a big push to strengthen solidarity between member states. The ESF can't solve all of Europe's problems on its own.

*What do you value most about the EU?*

**Klingseisen:** I believe the EU and the Commission have repeatedly triggered major bursts of innovation in Europe – and especially in Austria. There have been so many new breakthroughs in the area of social policy.

*What have 20 years of EU membership brought the Austrian people?*

**Klingseisen:** Personally, I have become a lot more European, for example. When I go on holiday, I love travelling across a Europe without frontiers. You can move around Europe freely now.

*The motto of the 2013 ESF annual meeting was "Employment, education and fighting poverty". Does that describe the ESF's priorities in Austria through to 2020?*

**Klingseisen:** Yes, it does.

*Can you tell us three wishes for the future you have as ESF coordinator in Austria?*

**Klingseisen:** Less red tape, a focus on the content of the programmes, and successful implementation.



**“UNEMPLOYMENT HAS TO  
BE TACKLED PRIMARILY  
THROUGH SUSTAINABLE  
ECONOMIC GROWTH”**

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RUDOLF HUNDSTORFER



# SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE ESF

INTERVIEW WITH RUDOLF HUNDSTORFER

**Rudolf Hundstorfer was born in Vienna in 1951. He did an apprenticeship in office management and studied to obtain a university entrance qualification in adult education. 1990-2007: member of the Vienna Provincial Parliament and Vienna City Council. 2007-2008: president of the Austrian Trade Union Federation (acting president since 2006). 2008: Minister of Social Affairs and Consumer Protection; Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection since 2009.**

*Gerhard Loibelsberger: Unemployment is rising every month in Austria. Will the situation here soon be like it is in Spain and Italy?*

**Rudolf Hundstorfer:** Over the last two decades, economic growth in Austria has consistently been higher than in many other EU countries. That's not the case any more. Relatively slow economic growth in Austria, in combination with a growing labour force, has led to an increase in unemployment.

Below-par macroeconomic growth exposes the limitations in labour market policies. Forecasts

suggest that growth will pick up again next year, thanks to the tax reforms and housing construction programme that have been implemented.

*What can be done to address rising unemployment – in Europe as well as in Austria?*

**Hundstorfer:** Unemployment has to be tackled primarily through sustainable economic growth. With regard to long-term growth in Europe, this would mean investment especially in key areas such as education, affordable housing and infrastructure. Additionally, Austria needs to extend its active labour market policies. In other words, we need to do more to help particularly disadvantaged groups get back into work and improve general levels of education.

*What can, or should, the European Social Fund (ESF) do in particular?*

**Hundstorfer:** Labour market support programmes like the ESF are a way of counteracting shortcomings and contributing to equal opportunities. The ESF therefore plays a crucial role when it comes to improving access to the labour market, and above

all addressing the needs of those at risk of social exclusion.

*Can a society or the whole of the European Union be indifferent to the large number of people who don't have a job?*

**Hundstorfer:** Society definitely cannot be indifferent to it. The ongoing economic crisis and associated high levels of unemployment have unfortunately also left their mark on the number of people at risk of poverty and exclusion. The crisis has proved, very dramatically, anyone can quickly lose their place in society.

We can't abandon the people who need our support in these difficult economic times. And the people who have lost their jobs as a result of the economic crisis shouldn't be made to pay again for a crisis that wasn't their fault.

The best protection against poverty and social exclusion is quite simply a high-quality, well-paid job. So a healthy job market is the cornerstone of social cohesion. That's why the ESF's current funding period is also focusing on fighting poverty through labour market integration and inclusion initiatives.

*What is your opinion on the recurring issue of unemployment benefit entitlement rules? Does it make sense to put unemployed people under pressure?*

**Hundstorfer:** In my opinion the discussion should focus on how we can create jobs in the economy. Rising unemployment isn't the result of people not wanting to work. It's not about determining how far someone should be expected to travel to work. It's about making sure that the jobs exist in the first place.

*What should happen to those people who are not young or well-educated, or who require special support?*

**Hundstorfer:** Groups who are disadvantaged or at risk of exclusion, like single parents, migrants, people with disabilities and people with a limited education, find it particularly difficult to get work. It's a priority of mine, particularly in times of crisis, to strengthen the social consensus for avoiding benefit cuts for socially disadvantaged groups. Active labour market policies are the key.

The federal government's decision to increase the budget for the 50+ employment initiative will provide crucial support for older people and the long-term unemployed. It's also important to help young people when they are making the transition from school to work. The AusBildung bis 18 (Education until 18) initiative centres on providing a wide range of options and the right incentives to ensure that all under-18s remain in education so that young people have better career opportunities.

*What should be done so companies finally also start employing older people? Are better incentives or compulsory measures required?*

**Hundstorfer:** Older workers are one of the groups that have been hit hardest by unemployment, and statistics show that it is especially difficult for these people to find work again if they lose their job. It is absolutely essential to integrate older people into the job market in the long run!

Implementing a bonus and penalty system for companies is a first step. The objective must be to change the recruitment policies of Austrian companies for the better. We need to raise awareness of the fact that demographic change necessitates a higher employment rate among older people.



Labour market pilot projects within the scope of the ESF will have an impact and offer improved consultation on demographic change for companies.

*Why is the average Austrian almost totally unaware of the ESF and the EU's social engagement?*

**Hundstorfer:** Austrians aren't totally unaware of the ESF. Recent Eurobarometer surveys show that in Austria almost 50 percent of the population have heard of the ESF. The problem is that many people don't really know what it's for. The ESF's complex structures have to be outlined more clearly and simply.

*The European Union has a cold-hearted, neoliberal image. How could the benefits of the ESF be publicised more effectively?*

**Hundstorfer:** We have to reach both hearts and minds when it comes to European integration – and we still have some work to do on that front.

To highlight the benefits of the ESF and to win public support, the ESF needs a clearer profile – one that makes its social and community functions more transparent. The successes of the ESF and its initiatives could be highlighted from a personal and people-centred perspective. The stories of people who have benefited from the ESF have to be the focus, in order to illustrate the ESF's significance to everyday lives. This is the only way that people will be able to identify with it.

*What would the EU look like without the European Social Fund?*

**Hundstorfer:** Without the ESF the EU would have no social face. The ESF invests in people: in employees, young people, older people, women –

in everyone who needs support in the job market. An EU without the ESF would be an EU without its citizens.

*How do you see the future of the EU? As a union built on solidarity, or a union of multinationals and major banks?*

**Hundstorfer:** We have seen that in times of crisis familiar, tried-and-tested approaches are called into question. I don't want to jump on this bandwagon because we need a constructive, collaborative approach to overcome the obstacles we are currently facing. This requires a social Europe in which all the member states are pulling in the same direction. We have to ensure that strengthening social protection, promoting social inclusion and achieving full employment are fundamental building blocks of the EU. Europe is the home of modern, social welfare states, and we Europeans want it to stay that way. Only a socially progressive Europe can ensure long-term prosperity and employment for the people of Europe.

*What do you value most about the EU?*

**Hundstorfer:** Above all I value the European way of life and social model which is based on social justice, human rights, equal opportunities, solidarity, democracy and peace. I share the opinion of European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker when he says that the EU has to combine its strengths to respond to global challenges such as the migrant crisis and integration.

*How have the people of Austria benefited from EU membership over the past 20 years?*

**Hundstorfer:** Peace, stability, political influence and of course economic factors show that the country has mainly profited from accession.



We know that thanks to EU membership around 480,000 additional jobs have been created in Austria. Austria would be strikingly worse off economically, because without membership unemployment would be 3,600 higher each year. We also shouldn't forget that prices would be 4.5 percent higher without EU integration.

Austria's accession to the EU has had a significant impact in terms of integration and given

the country's economic growth a boost. The EU has helped to make Austria crisis-proof. We have to work together to overcome the challenges that have emerged since the onset of the crisis in 2008. To ensure that the EU remains a successful integration project in the future, Austria will push for economic growth that also takes social factors into account.



A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black dress with white sleeves, stands in a grand hall with many tall, fluted columns. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The floor has a geometric pattern of red lines. The background shows more columns and a mural on the wall.

“THE EU HAS  
DONE MORE  
FOR AUSTRIA  
THAN IS  
APPARENT AT  
FIRST SIGHT”

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EVELYN REGNER



# THE ESF IS FINE AS IT IS

INTERVIEW WITH EVELYN REGNER

**Evelyn Regner was born in Vienna. After obtaining her secondary school leaving certificate she studied Law and became a refugee advisor at Amnesty International. 1994–95: judicial clerkship year. 1996–99: position with the social policy department at the ÖGB (Austrian Trade Union Federation). 1999–2008: head of the ÖGB liaison office in Brussels. 2008–2009: head of the ÖGB’s international unit. July 2009–present: Member of the European Parliament; 2015–present: head of the Social Democratic Party of Austria’s EU delegation.**

*Gerhard Loibelsberger: Your background is in the trade union movement. Doesn’t this set you up as an adversary in the eyes of many liberal, conservative and right-wing EU parliamentarians?*

**Evelyn Regner:** That’s a question for others to answer. On a human level, I’m nobody’s enemy. I try to find common ground with people in the European Parliament who think differently to me. At the end of the day we have to find solutions and compromises with MEPs from other political groups. We, the social democrats, make up 25 percent of the members. New alliances are always being forged on different issues in the

European Parliament. There are recommended party lines from the group, but there’s no party whip.

Of course, the MEPs from the various political groups know where they are with me. As a trade unionist, I fight for workers’ rights and more industrial democracy, as well as the creation of high-quality jobs. When it comes to consumer protection, I side with consumers and advocate high levels of protection. I also know what to expect from many members of the liberal and conservative political groups. They represent the interests of the “other side” and want to lower standards, so companies can operate in an environment with as little regulation as possible.

*One of the things you say on your personal website is that you think the main concern should be people, not profits. Do you ever feel you’re fighting a losing battle when you’re putting forward this point of view in the European Parliament?*

**Regner:** My answer to that is a definite “no”. The make-up of the European Parliament mirrors society, and at the moment the conservatives and liberals have a majority. In spite of that, there are many fervent Europeans who are energetically

championing ordinary people. When I’m trying to apply the principles behind my website slogan, I feel that my political group entirely understands and supports me. There are also MEPs from other groups who fight for the welfare of ordinary people in Europe.

As compared to the other European institutions – notably the Commission – the European Parliament is less remote from the concerns of the man in the street. I believe that all the MEPs know that they are there to represent the electorate and not profits. Some may perhaps have a different view of the public good to mine as I’m a trade unionist.

*You stand for a social Europe. Is there a majority for this in the European Parliament?*

**Regner:** Unfortunately not. As I said, the Socialists & Democrats comprise 25 percent of MEPs, the United Left about seven percent, and the Greens just a touch less than that. But we can attract support from other groups on some important issues – sometimes the Liberals and Democrats when it comes to social policy, or even the Conservatives and Reformists – or split them to win votes.

Europe doesn’t have as much control of social policy as the member states have kept this for themselves. What the EU does, for instance, is to introduce minimum social standards that are meant to apply throughout Europe. Member states are free to make stricter regulations.

In general, a rethink will be needed, because austerity policies are going to run into a brick wall before long. Far too many people in Europe are at risk of poverty. The crisis reminds us that the EU and its member states should no longer just rescue the banks, they should also come to the aid of ordinary people and put them centre stage.

*Despite the ESF the European Union has a cold-hearted, neoliberal image. Is that impression justified?*

**Regner:** There are three reasons for this image.

- Firstly, it’s always easy to lay the blame at someone else’s door. When in doubt, it’s always the EU’s fault.
- Secondly, as a result of the political composition of the national parliaments and governments, at the moment mainstream politics in the EU gives precedence to free competition over respect for regulated working hours, work-life balance and the fight against unemployment.
- Thirdly, currently we are purely a trade and economic union, but not a social one. What’s missing is a common fiscal and social policy.

*The ESF – the social face of Europe – is virtually unknown to the Austrian public. What can be done about that?*

**Regner:** People don’t notice most of the projects supported because they have a low profile. All of the projects are co-financed, but nobody bangs the drum for Europe or the ESF. Maybe it should be written everywhere in big letters that the project is co-financed by the ESF.

*Extremely complicated administrative procedures sometimes make life difficult for the ESF bodies. Could the European Parliament simplify the process?*

**Regner:** The European Parliament does a good job of formulating the objectives and goals in the ESF Regulation, and other relevant regulations and directives. But there are lots of rules and formalities to comply with, in order to prevent the misuse of EU funds. The criteria for the award of money from the ESF must also be met, of course. The





Evelyn Regner, Member of the European Parliament, on a visit to the Austrian Parliament

European Commission has a role to play in terms of providing better guides or “operating instructions” to make it easier for national bodies to submit applications.

*One criticism is that the EU goes to huge lengths to check that the funds are correctly accounted for and the formal rules are applied, but makes little effort to find out what actually happens to the funds. What’s your view on this?*

**Regner:** I’ve also noticed that, and it’s naturally off-putting for applicants. But it’s clearly necessary, because unfortunately there have been cases of funds being misused.

I hope that in a few years – and not a few decades – enough trust will have been built up to permit a reduction in the red tape.

*You demand a reduction in unemployment. What else can Europe do apart from the ESF? Or are the resources and efforts of the ESF enough?*

**Regner:** The ESF is fine as it is. What we need in Europe is to set common goals for unemployment rates, rather than just concentrating on regulating banks and bailing them out. Europe must introduce a European “Youth Guarantee” along Austrian lines, along with other action to maintain existing and create new, quality employment. In principle I’m in favour of increasing the ESF’s financial resources by redirecting money from other funds.

For instance, the social democrats in the European Parliament have put forward the Europe Back to Work ten-point plan. Its proposals include an annual investment of EUR 194 billion in job cre-

ation, and the establishment of dual education systems and minimum wages across Europe. The potential is there to create five million new “green jobs” in the first three years.

*The number of people in poverty is increasing in Austria and Europe every year. Can this trend be reversed?*

**Regner:** It will be hard unless there’s a change of heart soon. The prevailing austerity policies and the approaches of many European governments are stifling economic growth rather than stimulating it. The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) – the new investment plan – is a first step. We need massive investment, and people need more money in their pockets so that they can get the economy moving.

*What about the huge wave of migration that is currently posing massive challenges for Europe? Can and should the ESF respond to this?*

**Regner:** The ESF isn’t the right vehicle, and in any case ESF resources may not be used for this purpose. There are other funds for humanitarian aid, and these should be topped up. Europe needs an overall plan with quotas, so refugees can be distributed fairly among member states. But other action will be required, too. Europe has to commit to the stabilisation of the regions that these people are fleeing from.

*Is the ESF up to the job of promoting economic and social convergence (cohesion) in Europe? Doesn’t a lot more need doing?*

**Regner:** Of course we need to take more action. Europe has to prove to the people that it offers protection. Social security, and the prevention of unfair competition such as wage dumping, are needed to show European citizens that collective action is the right way forward. Increasing unemployment as a result of the financial and economic crisis is affecting the whole of Europe, which means we have to tackle it with Europe-wide initiatives.

*What do you value most about the EU?*

**Regner:** Lots of things. The EU has brought more prosperity and forged closer ties between its individual nations. Many may have forgotten this, but the EU is the greatest peace project in history. Today's older generation experienced war in Europe in their lifetime. The EU has kept the peace in Europe for the past 60 years. We shouldn't forget how valuable this is – especially at a time of crises and wars that are very close to home. The EU has brought more open-mindedness, economic progress, better education, and many advances with regard to equality and consumer protection.

What we have to work on, though, is reducing the social and economic disparities between and within member states.

*What have 20 years of EU membership brought the Austrian people?*

**Regner:** Austria has become more diverse, more colourful and more cosmopolitan. Today it's taken for granted that we can travel freely from one country to another, that we can use the same currency in neighbouring countries, and that students can gain valuable experience in other EU member states. And we shouldn't overlook the fact that Austria has profited a great deal from a united Europe

economically speaking. For instance, exports have risen by an annual average of 6.6 percent since we joined the EU, and GDP has grown by an average of 1.9 percent since 1995. Some 13,000 new jobs per year have been created since accession.

And just recently, in 2014, the EU has formed a banking union to ensure that in a future crisis the taxpayer won't have to foot the bill for failing banks. The European Union has done a lot more for Austria than may be apparent at first sight.

*What do you think the EU will be like in 20 years' time? More capitalist or more welfare minded?*

**Regner:** It will still exist, that's for sure. Naturally, I hope the EU will become more welfare minded. Europe's citizens also want social union. They want security, jobs and prosperity. To attain these objectives, the Union must become more social. An EU that is purely driven by capital and business won't be able to gain the trust and support of ordinary Europeans.

There still won't be anything like a European federal state, but something that is one of a kind. I can't see the emergence of a "United States of Europe". We'll find a distinctive model for close and efficient cooperation. Despite the prophecies of doom, this European structure will hold its own against China, Japan, India and the USA. Things may take a little longer in Europe, but the results are long-lasting. We move forward slowly, but we do keep moving.

*You have to commute between Vienna, Brussels and Strasbourg for your work. What do you like about these cities?*

**Regner:** Vienna's my home, and I like everything about it. From a political perspective, Brussels is the most exciting. Most of my parliamentary work

takes place in Brussels, where all the institutions are situated in one place. That's where intensive negotiations take place, the detailed work on the directives and regulations to be adopted goes on in the committee meetings, and most of the administrative work is done. Brussels is the most convenient, quickest and most efficient location for discussions with all the stakeholders in the member states, associations and trade unionists. Strasbourg is a fantastic city. This is where the European Parliament plenary sessions take place twelve times a year, and during these weeks all eyes are on Strasbourg, where Parliament's final political decisions are made. You don't get to see much of the city, but you're at the centre of most of the action. It's not uncommon for the day to start at 7.30 and go on until 10.30 in the evening or later.



**“PEOPLE FOUND OUT  
WHAT TRAINING  
COULD DO FOR THEM”**

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MARTIN IVANCSICS



# USE OF ESF FUNDING IN BURGENLAND

## INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN IVANCSICS

**Born in Burgenland in 1950. Grew up in Klingenbach and now lives in Zagersdorf. From 2000 to 2010 head of the office of the governor of Burgenland. Spokesperson of the chairman of the Conference of National Minority Advisory Council. For the past 27 years, chair of the Croatian Culture and Documentation Centre.**

*Gerhard Loibelsberger: Were you involved in the Austrian EU accession negotiations?*

**Martin Ivancsics:** Only on the sidelines. I didn't follow the talks in detail, but I caught the gist because I was a civil servant, working for the province's legal and constitutional service.

*Burgenland was the only Austrian province or region to be awarded Objective 1 funding status. Why?*

**Ivancsics:** In those days Burgenland was the easternmost part of the Western world. Its peripheral location frightened investors off. Along with the generally weak infrastructure, this was one of the main reasons for the province's underdevelopment. The fact that the people of Burgenland didn't shrink from admitting their poverty played an important part in the negotiations.

*Five funding priorities were established for the Burgenland Objective 1 programme: commercial and industrial activities; research, technology and development; tourism and culture; agriculture, forestry, fisheries and nature conservation; and last but not least, human resources. The latter spending priority was to draw on ESF money. Wasn't that rather meagre?*

**Ivancsics:** At the start no one was in a position to predict how the programmes would be implemented, but we quickly recognised that we needed to take a holistic approach. The best example are the initial tourist industry projects – the spas – and here we put together a highly effective mix of funding.

For example, the expansion of the Bad Tatzmannsdorf spa resort was combined with a new health academy in Jormannsdorf, and the Burgenland University of Applied Sciences Pinkafeld campus with its Health and Health Management degree courses. In other words, besides the infrastructure actions we also took many skill enhancement and training measures, and this created a lot of new jobs.

*The Objective 1 human resources action priority meant that ESF funding kicked off with EU acces-*

*sion in 1995. Do you still recall the first Burgenland projects?*

**Ivancsics:** We retrained industrial workers whose companies were in difficulty, or had collapsed or relocated. At that time the big groups were starting to transfer what were then “low-cost manufacturing operations” in Austria to low-wage countries in Eastern Europe and Asia.

Particularly for the women in Burgenland, the world of work was changing, with the job opportunities shifting from assembly line work to skilled service occupations.

*What was the ESF funding used to do for people in southern Burgenland, where there is particularly high unemployment?*

**Ivancsics:** Mainly it was a question of redirecting surplus labour towards tourism, and the health and wellness sector.

In addition, we gave the young people the chance of a proper training, through the University of Applied Sciences. There was retraining for the older people.

*Today, 20 years on, how do you see the impact of the Objective 1 funding?*

**Ivancsics:** I think it has brought a step change for Burgenland. In the first place, we have become more outward looking. Secondly, we are a lot better off. And thirdly, we now have a lot of very highly skilled people in our region. We are the Austrian province with the most university entrance qualification holders per capita. Fourthly, we have made a conscious effort to improve our quality of life, and have become more up to date all round.

*Have the projects supported by the ESF in Burgenland brought enduring change?*

**Ivancsics:** Definitely. The ESF funding was a mind-altering experience, because people found out what training could do for them.

*Do you know anyone personally who found new employment opportunities as a result of the ESF funding?*

**Ivancsics:** Countless people.

*Unemployment is climbing in Burgenland, too. Has the ESF fallen down on its goal of promoting job creation?*

**Ivancsics:** On the contrary! The figures would be a lot worse if it had not been for the ESF.

*How good is the record on gender mainstreaming – one of the ESF's priorities for Burgenland?*

**Ivancsics:** Many of the ESF projects were specially created for women. They have strengthened Burgenland women's self-confidence and will to reach out for economic independence.

*On the subject of discrimination, have the ESF programmes and gender mainstreaming also affected relations between the various ethnic groups in Burgenland.*

**Ivancsics:** They've improved what was already essentially a good atmosphere. And they have opened the door to mainstream society for the Roma – a marginalised group. Other EU programmes have also financed and implemented a number of projects aimed at specific ethnic groups.

*What aspects of the Burgenland Objective 1 funding do you particularly appreciate?*

**Ivancsics:** I value the fact that they are highly efficient and have been strictly audited.



As regards implementation, I like the broad spectrum of beneficiaries – money not just for buildings and machinery but for people and the countryside, too.

*Europe currently has a massive refugee problem. Shouldn't the ESF be pitching in financially?*

**Ivancsics:** I think we need an overall, Europe-wide solution. The ESF funding should be stepped up as part of this – particularly to enable more money to be invested in education for refugees.

*Despite the ESF the European Union has a cold-hearted, neoliberal image. Why?*

**Ivancsics:** Because in Brussels as elsewhere, the only performance measures that count are quantitative.

Also, the EU administration doesn't have to win elections, but does listen to countless lobbyists. That's why it has a tin ear for the voices of ordinary people. People often have the impression that the EU cares more about increased aid for the banks and less obstacles for business than anything else.

*Is the ESF up to the job of promoting economic and social convergence (cohesion) in Europe? Doesn't a lot more need doing?*

**Ivancsics:** It isn't up to the job. There's a lack of cross-border structural measures. In Europe, we should think about regions and not just nations.

And I'm not satisfied with a Europe where NATO-capable transport networks take precedence over the infrastructure people need.

*What do you like about the EU?*

**Ivancsics:** Everything, and especially the bits I am still missing.

*What would you change?*

**Ivancsics:** I would shift the political and economic focus to ordinary people. I would put equal opportunities, solidarity, and related minimum social standards centre stage.

*Do you have three wishes for the future of Burgenland?*

**Ivancsics:** Firstly, more power to the arm of civil society.

Secondly, another big leap forward beyond all the borders in the minds of our people.

And thirdly, to remain a citizen of this wonderful province for as long as possible.

Martin Ivancsics: "The money was not just > for buildings and machinery but for people and the countryside, too"





# “ALL PULLING IN THE SAME DIRECTION”

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ANETTE SCOPPETTA





# A EUROPE WITHOUT SOCIAL POLICY? I WOULDN'T WANT TO KNOW ABOUT AN EU LIKE THAT!

INTERVIEW WITH ANETTE SCOPPETTA

**Anette Scoppetta grew up in Imst. In 1989 she went to Vienna to study Landscape Planning at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna. After graduating she returned to Tyrol and established a regional development association in Imst. Since 1999, she has worked at the ZSI (Centre for Social Innovation) in Vienna.**

*Gerhard Loibelsberger: You were in charge of the Austrian TEP coordination office. What exactly did your job consist of?*

**Anette Scoppetta:** At ZSI I played a part in establishing and subsequently managing the Territorial Employment Pacts. This was over a period from February 1999 to October 2014.

When we kicked off in 1999 the main task was getting the Public Employment Service (AMS),

the provincial governments, the social partners, the Bundessozialamt (Federal Welfare Office), the regional development associations and others round the table. That's because a region's employment problems can't be solved by a single body – say, the AMS – working in isolation.

We were also looking to consolidate funding programmes. For instance, there are business subsidies from the provincial governments and chambers of commerce, and employment subsidies from the AMS. These resources were bundled together in the Territorial Employment Pacts.

*In an article you wrote, you referred to the TEPs as “social containers for innovation”. What did you mean by that? And what's innovative about these agreements?*

**Scoppetta:** First I'd like to look at innovation.

- The cooperation between a wide variety of institutions and agencies led to the development of new ideas and approaches. The actions that arose from these were tailored to people's specific needs in coming to terms with the labour market. That was a genuine breakthrough.
- I used the expression “social container” because in the TEPs we sat down and worked out joint solutions.

*“Territorial Employment Pacts” – what can an ordinary mortal make of that?*

**Scoppetta:** All pulling together to solve employment and social problems in a given region or province.

*How long have there been Austrian TEPs?*

**Scoppetta:** The first employment pacts were forged soon after Austria joined the EU, in 1996 and 1997, in Vienna, followed by Tyrol, Vorarlberg and Salzburg. Then our team at ZSI set up these structures for the rest of Austria, too, starting in February 1999.

*Are there TEPs in all the provinces now? Where do they work best?*

**Scoppetta:** Yes, they exist everywhere.

There are different measures of success:

- Whether the pacts are especially innovative, and involve cooperation between a particularly large number of players, including NGOs, as is the case in Styria;
- or whether their strategies are sustainable.

*The TEPs go back to an EU initiative. Do they exist in any other member states?*

**Scoppetta:** There have been, and still are TEPs in some other EU member states, including Ireland,

Italy and Sweden. All of them belong to the OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Development, which promotes international information exchanges.

*What role did the European Social Fund (ESF) play in the roll-out of the TEPs?*

**Scoppetta:** Up to 2014 the ESF co-financed the TEPs' structures and policy measures, and this opened the way for many innovations.

*Would the TEPs have been conceivable without ESF participation?*

**Scoppetta:** No. Without it we would not have been able to roll out these structures and policies across the whole of Austria.

*Did assistance for asylum seekers recognised in Austria form part of the TEPs? Or was this – in part, highly skilled – group left out?*

**Scoppetta:** As far as the law allowed this, the pacts did also attempt to exploit the potential of this pool of jobseekers.

*Who were the main beneficiaries?*

**Scoppetta:**

- Young people without jobs, and in many cases also without school-leaving qualifications;
- older workers and unemployed persons;
- migrants;
- women;
- people with special needs (i.e. people with disabilities);
- people with little education or training;
- the long-term unemployed and economically inactive;
- persons in receipt of social assistance and needs based minimum income benefits.



*What would the Austrian employment market have been like without ESF funding?*

**Scoppetta:** Without the ESF the Austrian labour market would have seen less innovation. The help for target groups with problems would often have been restricted to off-the-shelf measures, and special assistance for such people would mostly have been ruled out.

*What would that have meant for unemployment in Austria?*

**Scoppetta:** The fact is that these days employers are mainly after young, highly qualified workers. Anyone with little or no education or training, or who diverged from this ideal in some other way would have had no chance of finding a job in the absence of support programmes.

*What would the EU be without the European Social Fund?*

**Scoppetta:** A community of member states with nothing but economic and financial functions. I wouldn't want to know about an EU like that!

*How do you see the future of the EU? As a union built on solidarity, or on the interests of big firms and banks?*

**Scoppetta:** I see the future of the EU as a union of solidarity, in which the economy is a part of society, and social policy is not just an adjunct of economics. I am very concerned about the recent trend towards a Europe in which policy making is actually in the hands of the large companies and banks.

*Is the ESF up to the job of promoting economic and social convergence (cohesion) in Europe, or are other funds and institutions needed?*

**Scoppetta:** The ESF can't meet the challenges of the future on its own. It can be a lever, but not a long-term anchor. A rethink by member states and Brussels will be needed.

*What do you value most about the EU?*

**Scoppetta:** The diversity of the people and thinking.

*What are your three favourite places in Europe?*

**Scoppetta:** Southern Burgenland, the Alps, and the "Cuadro" café-bar in Vienna's fifth district.

< Anette Scoppetta at the ZSI (Centre for Social Innovation) where she works





“THE ESF HELPED  
AUSTRIA TO  
BECOME A MORE  
MODERN NATION”

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SUSANNA KUNCIC,  
EHRENFRIED NATTER



# IF YOU'RE NOT LEARNING NEW THINGS, YOU'RE GOING BACKWARDS

INTERVIEW WITH SUSANNA KUNCIC AND EHRENFRIED NATTER

**Susanna Kuncic was born in Graz. She studied business administration and business education in Vienna. After graduating she went on to work at various international consulting firms and a major architectural and urban planning firm before training as a coach and supervisor. She joined ÖSB Consulting in 1998, and was appointed managing director in 2013.**

**Ehrenfried Natter was born in Vorarlberg. He studied business administration in Vienna and co-founded ÖSB as an honorary director in 1982. After working in social science research for the Austrian Catholic Social Academy he moved to ÖSB Consulting in 1993. A partner in ÖSB since 1995, he is currently in charge of the strategic programmes and projects department.**

*Gerhard Loibelsberger: Ms Kuncic, you are the managing director of ÖSB Consulting. What ÖSB's mission?*

**Susanna Kuncic:** ÖSB is a byword for innovative services in the labour market and in social, edu-

cation and health policy. We are actively involved in the latest labour market policy developments, as well as consultancy programmes such as the AMS employment service's Fit to Work, or f2w, flexibility consulting scheme for companies. This relatively new programme from the Ministry of Social Affairs helps keep older employees in work for longer. There are two sides to the f2w programme, one for the individual and one for the company.

*ÖSB Consulting has been advising the AMS on all aspects of ESF grants since 1995. What exactly does this involve?*

**Ehrenfried Natter:** We actually started our ESF preparations back in 1993. We looked at how EU countries were using the ESF and what we could learn from them as part of our preparation for EU accession on behalf of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Over the next 20 years I advised the ministry and subsequently primarily the AMS on aspects such as programming, developing the necessary instruments and implementing the ESF in

Austria as well as providing consultancy services on monitoring and public relations.

*ÖSB Consulting advises companies on productive ageing. What exactly is meant by that?*

**Kuncic:** It is about raising the proportion of 50 to 65 year olds in work and taking the average retirement age closer to the statutory requirement. And for us to achieve this, employees have to be able to, want to and be allowed to work. On the other hand, companies have to offer jobs that are set up in such a way that they do not make people ill and they offer individuals a chance to learn.

*Talking of training and education, how do you plan and implement upskilling measures?*

**Natter:** We are not a continuing education provider. As a consultancy firm we sit down with companies on behalf of the AMS and help them to determine their training and education requirements, plan the acquisition of training activities and their participation in training and education groups.

**Kuncic:** In the initial ESF grant period that lasted until 2001, conditions for awarding grants were formulated very clearly. However, an evaluation revealed that considerable sums were going to larger businesses and benefiting young, qualified male employees.

In the second phase the focus was adjusted to include grants aimed at supporting women, older people and less qualified employees. Smaller businesses with fewer than 50 employees were given additional access to a consulting programme. The AMS offered training and education consulting for businesses, a service it entrusted to ÖSB Consulting, among other providers.

Elsewhere upskilling groups were set up, under which multiple businesses clubbed together to train their employees together and take advantage of the ESF grants in that way.

*What do training and education measures have to offer in practical terms?*

**Kuncic:** Employees develop their skills, while companies improve their performance and their human resource management. Skilled employees are an asset to any company, tend to stay in their jobs longer and are able to find new employment more quickly and easily if they find themselves out of work. If you're not learning new things, you're going backwards.

*What are businesses missing out on if they do not offer upskilling measures for their employees?*

**Kuncic:** Businesses will not be able to stay competitive. Employees working at companies like this are in real danger of being unable to find new posts if they lose their long-term jobs. Because their knowledge is outdated and worthless. This is often a key aspect that comes up with the older long-term unemployed.

*When it comes to improving vocational skills for existing employees – one of the ESF's main focuses – has Austria been at least partially successful?*

**Natter:** In quantitative terms, definitely. In the last funding period, which ran from 2007 to 2014, some 270,000 people took advantage of the training and education grant for employees. 60 percent of them were women. In all there were almost 600 training and education groups, and almost 9,000 small businesses were given training and education consulting. The AMS conducted Austria's largest commercial adult education programme. And even





though the windfall effects of the first few years were not inconsiderable, the increased focus on in-service training, especially for women and older employees – i.e. those groups that receive a disproportionately low amount of in-company training – has had a significant impact.

*FBB stands for flexibility consulting for businesses, and has been supported by funds from the ESF. What is FBB about?*

**Kuncic:** In Austria, FBB was preceded by Europe-wide research and a transnational pilot project. The question was, is it possible to intervene in businesses before unemployment has a chance to rear its head? And the answer: yes, it is possible to do something. This heralded the introduction of the AMS's flexibility consultancy for businesses (FBB) programme.

The trick was to come up with a scheme that businesses felt was useful to them, while being fit for the purpose of preventing job losses.

**Natter:** And that's hardly trivial. The FBB scheme was used to expand the scope of HR activities with a view to responding quickly to structural changes and helping to keep jobs secure.

*Which businesses did you offer FBB to? Which companies got involved?*

**Kuncic:** FBB was an AMS consulting scheme aimed at business with 50 or more employees. The ÖSB-Deloitte bidding consortium was selected to implement the project following a pan-European invitation to tender. We offered the FBB programme to around 500 businesses in face-to-face meetings; around half of them took up the AMS offer, mainly SMEs, across all sectors.

< Members of the ÖSB team

*How did FBB benefit the companies? Can you give any specific examples?*

**Kuncic:** The businesses that participated were definitely able to strengthen their ties with the AMS, so they were able to make better use of the AMS's wide range of grants and services. This not only brings cash subsidies, but also helps to relieve the burden on HR while encouraging innovation. In a highly developed economy, human resources are the most important and most sensitive factor in terms of production and competitiveness, and the AMS is the largest "supplier" and partner for these businesses. FBB involved working with companies – always with the support of the works council or employees themselves, I should add – to identify specific solutions for current issues. For instance, when creating an upskilling matrix – who has skills and who needs to acquire them – which is used as the foundation for systematically planning and implementing training in future.

**Natter:** During the 2008 financial crisis we worked with the AMS on the development of FBB+, which was extremely well received by businesses. Its goal was to strike a balance between the need to rapidly respond to short-notice HR management challenges while retaining expertise and avoiding large-scale layoffs. This involved taking the necessary organisational precautions, redefining working time arrangements at the company and making the most of the opportunities presented by other AMS subsidies, such as short-time working and educational leave.

*How do you see the effects and impact of the ESF grants 20 years down the line?*

**Natter:** There was a lot of money during the first funding period. Somewhere in the region of 25 percent of the total AMS budget. Due to national

co-financing rules around 50 percent of the budget was earmarked for the ESF's active labour market policies: content-wise, in the form of multi-year programmes, as well as administrative activities. But by 2013/14 the available resources had declined significantly, to around three percent of the total AMS budget.

The most striking success is that the ESF helped to shape a long-term labour market policy that reflected what businesses were really looking for. In 2015 the AMS launched its Impulsprogramm für Betriebe follow-up project. Exclusively financed using national funds, it featured an adapted training and education grant for employees, training and education groups and a new consultation service for businesses.

Grants for people with disabilities were expanded significantly and measures were initiated to help gender mainstreaming make a breakthrough in the individual labour market programmes and institutions.

One idea that was completely new in Austria when the ESF first started in the country was to use taxpayers' money to finance labour market schemes and not just the funds raised through unemployment insurance contributions.

*What would we not have seen in Austria without the grants from the European Social Fund?*

**Kuncic:** Training and education consulting, flexibility consulting and upskilling funding like this wouldn't have happened. It is also down to the ESF that it was possible to establish long-term project planning in Austrian institutions. Overall you could say that the ESF helped Austria on its way to becoming a more modern nation.

*Unemployment is rising continuously in Austria. Has the ESF failed in its attempts to create jobs?*

**Natter:** No. Because that was never the ESF's role. The ESF as a whole, and company consulting programmes in particular, are not commercial stimulus programmes for companies. The ESF's main task is to help people to meet the challenges they face in the labour market, and provide companies with incentives to employ jobseekers and keep existing employees on for longer. Or to put it another way, to promote social cohesion.

*Older workers: unemployment among the over 50s is constantly growing. Can something be done about it?*

**Kuncic:** Yes. Training and education measures. You can promote upskilling and focus on health support. And you can take steps to combat discrimination against older employees and facilitate their integration.

**Natter:** Above all, there has to be a rapid change in the way that businesses think: if nothing is done to create jobs that are suitable for older workers, it will not be possible to keep people in work for longer.

*Despite the ESF, the European Union has a cold image. What could be done to change that?*

**Natter:** The ESF is a drop in the bucket. We need a much stronger growth and investment policy. And we need to create a real sense of cross-border, European solidarity. It's all about creating a social and transfer union

**Kuncic:** And we have to talk about bureaucracy. In Austria we have a distinct tendency towards bureaucratisation and overregulation, and blam-

ing the EU for homegrown problems. This pattern is damaging to the image of the EU – and we are all in it together.

*What have 20 years of EU membership given the Austrian people?*

**Natter:** Freedom, economic development, low unemployment. But EU membership has brought a number identity problems with it. There's always the question of who we are. Europeans? Austrians? Viennese? Vorarlbergers? And ripples in the fabric of democracy: how democratic is the EU? Where can we play our part?

**Kuncic:** Austria has definitely become more open. And today it is interlinked with the rest of the

world. And even though we are currently seeing a strong return to the notions of national identity and traditional values, I think that the achievements of a modern society cannot be reversed.

*What are the three things that you personally would recommend to older employees?*

**Kuncic:** In principle, I'd have to say that just getting old isn't enough! My advice: firstly, make sure that you are constantly learning new things. And secondly, stay flexible and mobile.

**Natter:** Thirdly, weight up the opportunities available to you, and your own limits. You also need to consider and ask of yourself how you want to be in old age and what you want to do with your time.



“IT WOULD MAKE SENSE  
IF THERE WAS ROOM  
FOR EVERYONE IN THE  
EMPLOYMENT MARKET”

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BARBARA WEWERKA, PETRA WELLEMSSEN





# AND SOMETIMES YOU FIND SOME TREASURE...

THEY DIG UP THE PAST TO HELP PEOPLE FIND THEIR PATHS TO THE FUTURE:  
THE ARCHÄOLOGISCH SOZIALE INITIATIVE NIEDERÖSTERREICH (ASINOE) OFFERS  
JOBSEEKERS REGULAR EMPLOYMENT AND ASSISTANCE FROM SOCIAL WORKERS.

**Interview with the ASINOE director Barbara Wewerka and their head of social work Petra Wellemsen**

*Klaudia Blasl: Archaeological excavations, social initiatives and the job market? How does that all fit together?*

**Barbara Wewerka:** So it all began at the end of the Eighties with a pilot project called “Mole”, initiated by a committed social worker who also had a passion for archaeology – he’s still a member of the board today. The basic idea was to help long-term unemployed people to tackle the obstacles standing in their way in terms of their employability through regular work and long-term support with personal problems – from doctor’s visits through to debt counselling – so they could get a permanent foothold in the regular labour market. It was so successful that in 1991 ASINOE was established, providing transitional employment for 40 people. It also involved, and still involves, social workers, archaeologists for the digging work, our own workshop, graphic designers, conservator-restorers and

admin personnel. Over the years – we’re celebrating our 25th anniversary in 2016 – we’ve helped over 2,000 long-term unemployed people, that’s an average of 76 clients a year. In particular, the combination of academic activities, physical tasks and social work interventions helps most of the participants to find stability in their lives, maybe for the first time.

*How does this all work in practice? Could you give a few concrete examples?*

**Wewerka:** Long-term unemployed people are placed with us and we employ them to work on archaeological digs. The work they do is very valuable, and this is something that is communicated to them. New recruits find out all about the processes involved: cleaning archaeological layers, the significance of various finds and the workshop procedures like conservation and restoration, and archiving. Sometimes there are even exhibitions. And they value their work so highly that they’re always inviting members of their family down to the site to proudly show them where they work, their “outdoor office”.

Another benefit of this outdoor work is that the type of employment that a person will generally be most suited to becomes apparent very quickly. How well do they get on with IT – a less visible aspect of archaeological work? Are they able to stand on site for eight hours a day? Can they see connections for themselves, or do they more or less automatically carry out instructions? You can also assess their soft skills, like how they work in a team, how they deal with conflict and criticism, and their leadership qualities, as well as their fine and gross motor skills.

**Petra Wellemsen:** The target groups are generally completely mixed in terms of age, sex and nationality. But a specific example I’d like to give to illustrate what we do is a young woman, who was almost twenty, from the Weinviertel region.

She still lived with her parents, spent her days on the sofa at home and was very overweight. She also had problems with her teeth. She had completed an apprenticeship in retail sales though. But she had never managed to get her first job. This young woman felt almost instantly at ease when she joined our dig. Regular employment and working hours and comprehensive support from our team of social workers really works to provide stability for these people. This client, let’s call her Anna, was able to hold down her new job as an archaeological excavation assistant for a whole year, and thanks to the physical exercise, she started to lose weight almost immediately. We were also able to persuade her to have dental treatment. She had had some bad experiences with dentists in the past and the procedure required a general anaesthetic – we even went along with her to the dentist’s. After her year with us, Anna had become a pretty young woman who was full of energy. She found her own apartment and moved out of the family home. Unfor-

tunately most of the people who come to us have these type of problems, that require lots of work to solve before they are ready to look for employment in the regular labour market, meaning there’s not nearly enough time. Up until a year ago, most of our inclusion programmes lasted for a whole year, but unfortunately only six months is possible now.

*What are the biggest challenges that ASINOE faces given the complexity of the work it does?*

**Wellemsen:** We also have lots of divorced men on our programmes, who have lost everything following their divorce. When they have an income and regular employment, they regain stability and find a new perspective on life, but they are often still homeless and live at their brother-in-law’s or uncle’s. So they need housing, and then there are usually arrangements with creditors to take care of. Around 60 to 70 percent of our clients require this, and it takes at least a year. A lot of time is taken up with advising on personal bankruptcy, and this is time we don’t have any more on the six-month programmes. If this isn’t dealt with, then it’s almost impossible for them to succeed in the job market. Another challenge is the fact that we have to operate almost like a conventional business – we’re not running a sheltered workshop – so we need contracts to survive and have to compete on the open market. This means that the excavation assistants are often under pressure to meet deadlines, and this is when they show us real commitment and try to keep to the schedules and finish their work on time. In return we offer them flexibility when it comes to their “out of hours” needs, we allow them to take German courses and go to the doctor etc. during the working day if necessary – the things they need to do to establish stability in their day-to-day lives. We keep in close contact with all the



relevant organisations, services and professionals like the men's advice centre, the women's advice centre, therapists, carers, language schools and debt advice centres.

*What does the European Social Fund (ESF) mean to ASINOE?*

**Wewerka:** As a result of ESF funding over a number of years at least, countless people have overcome unemployment and been able to return to work in the regular job market. Especially in these times of increasing unemployment there's a pressing need to use the ESF instrument more intensively to achieve the investment priority of improving labour market participation. Political decision-makers in the individual member states have budgetary constraints. It would be welcome if education and training initiatives like ASINOE were given the greatest possible backing and funding by a Europe-wide body such as the ESF, in order to provide the longer periods of support for jobseekers that are absolutely necessary so they can return to working life for the long term.

*What are your hopes for the future, Europe and the job market?*

**Wellemsen:** What we would really need is for our inclusion programmes to have a greater long-term

impact. Six months is just not enough time to get people with substantial problems that go back for years fit for the job market. Twelve months would be the minimum length of time, and 18 even more effective. In Austria we also need a third option: many of our clients who lack the stability to succeed on the regular labour market don't have the sort of difficulties that would make them suitable for a sheltered workshop. In general, I'd say that the job market is changing much too quickly. Many people are falling through the net, it's increasingly difficult for a group of marginalised over 50s, and young people also can't find a job. Only the segment in the middle is being utilised. It would make sense if there was room for everyone. And it would also be beneficial if there were more companies prepared to give these people a chance.

**Wewerka:** ... and if there were defined spaces: a level playing field, that the same standards applied. Different backgrounds and cultures also have to be taken into account, just as much as someone's individual personality. Arbitrary borders that are drawn up according to territorial affiliations have always led to marginalisation and the movement of people. New models are necessary for the future, which don't have one or more countries or states as the focus of shared identity, but rather the individual or ethnicity.

< The connection between the past and the future also helps to improve people's current circumstances





The search for historical treasures paves the way for the future

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE WITH TROWEL IN HAND

### A VISIT TO AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIG

It might all look very “normal” at first sight, like an ordinary building site: a few colourful container units, a digger off to the side and tarpaulins covering the ground in places. There also doesn’t seem to be anything unusual about the people at work, who are gathered in small groups. But on closer inspection you start to ask yourself why almost everyone is so focused on the ground, why some of them are often kneeling down, and what the little buckets are for. It’s obviously not a sandpit, it must be some kind of construction project. It really only starts to make sense once you find out it’s an ASINOE site. Under the expert supervision of an archaeologist,

the people at work are searching the ground for anything that’s worth keeping. The items are carefully removed from the soil and individually packed, ready for cleaning, categorising, graphical documentation and archiving in the workshop. So the dark, round patches on the excavated earth are not in fact minimalistic alien crop circles. They are evidence of the meticulous work that is being undertaken by a group of long-term unemployed people. Fresh layers are exposed in strict accordance with archaeological practice and finds of potential significance are put into a special bucket. It might seem to be an extremely difficult task, since to the unaccustomed eye the contents of the ground appear to be conspicuously inconspicuous. But to

the excavation assistants it is plainly anything but that “It’s really not that hard,” says one of them as he carefully places something in his bucket – what could be an ancient child’s bone, or perhaps just a modern-day chicken leg, “you develop an eye for it after a while.” It’s very noticeable how enthusiastically they – both young and old – are carrying out their work. Although combing over the excavated earth on your hands and knees with a trowel certainly isn’t particularly comfortable. They all seem to be extremely committed however, and at times even spurred on by the physical challenge. Loud warnings are promptly issued to those who stray onto a colleague’s patch: “Are you blind? Don’t step there, I’ve just cleaned that bit!” Otherwise it’s very clear that everyone’s learning to work as a team. And the pleasure they are taking in their work is also very apparent – from the enthusiasm in their eyes and the initiative they are showing. Rudi\*, for instance – a trained bricklayer, who was unable to find work due to his age – not content with just a trowel and pan, has brought along his own specially adapted tool for the job. And Werner\*, who has constructed a special attachment to improve the performance of the industrial vacuum.

Dani\* is eagerly documenting the location of a find on a peg board: “I always try to be as dainty

as a fairy when I move about, so I don’t disturb anything,” she laughs, while finding the letters and numbers for a cryptic-looking code like “SE 621-622-647”. To the initiated, this signifies the stratigraphic unit. “Some things only come along once in a lifetime,” she explains about the work, “like finding a mediaeval well or a Bronze Age pot. It’s really special, like in a dream.” The “back office ladies”, who previously worked out on the digs themselves, tell a similar story. Maria\*, Conny\* and Beate\* get their hands on the valuable historical evidence once it’s transported to the workshop. Beate is now a supervisor and would definitely have what it takes to train as a Chinese sign writer. She precisely tags the individual items with tiny numbers and characters that measure just a few millimetres to ensure that nothing gets mixed up. Once she found a skeleton: “You’re overcome with a deep sense of respect,” she recounts.

She also endorses the fundamental idea behind the project: “We’re delving into the past and simultaneously planning our futures. And it’s possible to learn how to do both of these things the right way.”

\* These names have been changed.



“OUR GOAL IS TO FIND  
A WIN-WIN SITUATION  
FOR BOTH WOMEN  
AND COMPANIES”

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MANUELA VOLLMANN



## WOMEN MIGHT GET PREGNANT...

ABZ\* AUSTRIA IS AUSTRIA'S BIGGEST WOMEN'S ORGANISATION AND DEVELOPS INNOVATIVE, VALUE-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS TO SUPPORT EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE.

**Interview with Manuela Vollmann, Managing Director of abz\* austria and Chairperson of the Federal Association of Social Enterprises in Austria (bdv)**

*Klaudia Blasl: A few words about abz\* austria?*

**Manuela Vollmann:** It all started nearly 25 years ago in Vienna's Am Schöpfwerk municipal housing estate.

In 1989 rising costs meant that many families were threatened with eviction, because single-income households could no longer afford the rent and service charges. The only answer was a second income, so the women had to find work. Studies were made to find out in what areas women could usefully and profitably be employed, such as in traditional bookkeeping activities, but it wasn't only about work for women and women's needs, but more generally about bringing women and enterprises together. So that was how we began. There were only four of us in 1989, but nowadays we work

with some 8,000 women in roughly 40 projects every year. We started with a single project for women returning to work. As an adult education organisation, we were not just concerned with the practical aspects: from the outset, continuing education, theoretical learning and the acquisition of qualifications were very important. The women were employed by us, trained and given work. Our goal was not only to improve women's quality of life but also to create win-win situations both for the women and for the organisations.

We have specialised in equality for women and men in business: we try to foster equal opportunity in the workplace, which often results in the creation of very innovative value-driven solutions.

*Where would Austria be without Europe?*

**Vollmann:** As far as abz\* austria is concerned, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that if we hadn't joined the EU and without the European Social Fund (ESF), we wouldn't exist anymore, at least not in our present form. Transnational European projects and cross-border collaboration are essential to the development of comprehensive

< Manuela Vollmann,  
Managing Director of abz\* austria

and sustainable initiatives. As Chair of the Federal Association of Social Enterprises in Austria (bdv), I'm personally very closely involved with the ESF, because bdv is the leading representative body among NGOs and non-profit organisations with voting rights in the Austrian ESF Advisory Committee. We fought really hard for that right to vote, and since then we have achieved a lot in areas such as education and employment policy. This kind of participation in policy-making is by no means the general rule in Europe yet, and Austria counts as thoroughly progressive in this respect.

*Women's needs and wants?*

**Vollmann:** A lot has changed in employment since those days. At the start of the nineties, women's main problem was with the massive increase in computerisation, so that IT skills were needed. In 1996 with the help of the ESF, we offered our first "Come to Technology" project for women, in which the participants were not simply users but could themselves learn programming. As a result of the enormous number of our direct contacts with women every year, we are generally a step or two ahead in recognising their present and future needs – we recognise the signs of the times, both in Austria and in European markets. Thanks to the ESF's support, we are often able to develop projects and policy measures for entrepreneurs and future employees at a stage when other people in Austria are only beginning to think about the upcoming problems.

*Balancing work and home life? What are the challenges women face?*

**Vollmann:** We need new meetings cultures, more home office opportunities, and job-sharing models

(for both men and women). abz\* austria is trying to increase employers' awareness of these needs and to encourage them to ensure that the necessary structural changes are implemented – on a permanent basis. New models for working hours and organising work are also necessary.

*National prizes, innovation awards, quality offensives?*

**Vollmann:** We have many years of largely excellent relations with the ESF, and with their help we have made much greater progress with gender equality in employment policy than we would have done without it. The ESF has provided not only financial support, but also help in the form of project content. We've had the opportunity to collaborate in nationwide networks, to make our services more flexible (e.g. by using online platforms to provide education counselling), and to increase our skills and expertise for our target group – educationally disadvantaged women. Great importance has always been attached to quality, which we appreciate greatly because we too are very actively involved in adult education and take our quality obligations very seriously. Not for nothing have we won two highly regarded continuing education prizes, the ESF Innovation Award for a game-based learning programme, Zukunftsweg – spielend zum Ziel, which is designed especially for young women who after having dropped out of the educational system want to develop their ICT skills, and the Austrian national prize for adult education.

*Graduate single mothers in the employment market?*

**Vollmann:** Going back to work after maternity leave is particularly difficult for single mothers.

Often they can only work part-time, which means financial constraints and reduced career opportunities.

## THE JOB MARKET HAS MANY FACES

OLIVIA LEFFORD IS A GRADUATE WITHOUT A JOB, AND A SINGLE PARENT.

Not quite 30, she is already an old hand, and has plenty to say about the many different – and not always so friendly – faces of the job market. The energetic young woman – who has a five-and-a-half-year-old daughter – completed drama, film and media studies, and has since then accumulated a varied portfolio of professional experience. While still a student, she had a part-time job with the ORF (Austrian Broadcasting Service), working on *Nachtjournal*, the evening news programme. It was exciting and her colleagues were congenial. Not content with that and a small child at home, she also took on a regular full-time job with a film production company. "That was a fantastic job," she remembers. "I was working in storytelling, and there were good prospects for promotion, but unfortunately the company went back to Germany. And there I was – fully qualified, with a small child, and without a job." For the first time in her life, the young mother knew what it was to be unemployed, even though only for four months at first. Then what looked like another good job appeared: she became production editor for a media company. But after three months she resigned, like several of her predecessors.

The working environment was appalling, agreements were never honoured, and "normal" working hours could be anywhere between half past nine in the morning and four o'clock the following morning – intolerable conditions not just for single mothers. "Then I sat down – cheerful and confident at the start – to write eighty or ninety job applications, and got nothing but rejections," explains Olivia thoughtfully. "That's when I began to wonder whether it was because I was a woman of a certain age, and with a child." She didn't even dare mention the business of being a single parent.

She ended up coming to abz\*austria as part of the Vienna Educational Counselling Project, where after intensive counselling she was able to enlarge the range of jobs she was interested in and soon find work. In a few months she will be starting as a passenger service agent for an airline and she can count on excellent promotion prospects. And family-friendly working hours. "And then my ambition is to work my way up, step by step, there are opportunities opening up ahead of me, and that's what I really need at this point," she explains enthusiastically. Women – just like men – don't want to spend their entire lives on the same rung of the career ladder, and everyone needs to find an appropriate work-life balance. But things aren't always that easy, especially for women. "Women with families aren't much appreciated in business today", Lefford maintains, "the management isn't keen on hiring women, because they might get pregnant. And if you've already had a child and are a single parent, then you're really not wanted." These are problems men don't have, and which in the twenty-first century women shouldn't be confronted with either. But society and the working world only change slowly, reluctantly and under protest.



“To be a single parent, out of work and thirty years old is not a good situation in today’s society,” is how she sums it up. There are still too many problems, particularly with childcare. Shift workers and hospital staff, but also journalists and media workers need greater flexibility in childcare hours, because not all have a granny available or can afford to pay for private childcare. But even if Olivia has had her darker moments, she has never stopped fighting for her future and the future of her child. “I want to be able to tell her later that I did it by myself and out of my own resources.” An ambition we hope will soon be realistic for everyone.



Olivia Lefford, university graduate >





“IT’S ABOUT  
SOCIAL INTEGRATION  
OF PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITIES”

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FRANZ WOLFMAYR



# PEOPLE NEED THEIR OWN STORIES, NOT CAREERS AS HANDICAPPED PERSONS...

MORE THAN 3,000 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, FORMERLY SEPARATELY CATERED FOR IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS AND SHELTERED WORKSHOPS, HAVE BEEN HELPED BY CHANCE B IN THE LAST 15 YEARS TO FIND "NORMAL" EMPLOYMENT.

**Interview with Franz Wolfmayr, co-founder and for many years Managing Director of Chance B, and President of the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD).**

*Kludia Blasl: Chance B has been actively supporting people with special needs since 1989: the first employment assistant in Austria was engaged in 1991, a ground-breaking innovation that at the time could only be financed with a loan. What is the situation today from the human perspective and with respect to financing?*

**Franz Wolfmayr:** Chance B helps people who need special support, wherever they are and whatever age they are. The objective is the social integration of people with disabilities, which means developing employees' communication skills and helping them develop technical and social competences. At the same time, employers and colleagues must be made aware of the essential needs of people with

learning disabilities. Since social legislation is the responsibility of the member states, the European Union is not responsible for those areas where subsidiarity applies. The major contribution of the European Social Fund (ESF) is in connection with work and employment, and this has by now made it possible to provide employment assistance and other occupational integration services throughout Austria. Before Austria's accession to the EU, that would have been unthinkable.

But what we need today is an enhanced initiative on the part of Austria and the EU with respect to people with disabilities, because across Austria they are twice as likely to be unemployed as people without disabilities. What is depressing about the situation is that the unemployment among those with disabilities is increasing at the horrendous rate of 30 percent a year. And what is even more depressing is that in the face of this situation Austria has clearly given up: funding support is being capped, cut back or simply cancelled, while what

we should be getting is needs-driven increases in effective measures for occupational integration.

*What has the ESF achieved, and what should it be doing in future?*

**Wolfmayr:** At the end of the eighties it was inconceivable for people with disabilities to work, sheltered workshops and occupational therapy were the only options. Chance B took out a loan to finance the first employment assistance service, and there wasn't a business to be found that would employ people with disabilities.

It was thanks to the ESF that in 1995 the first regular funding became possible, which was like a miracle for us, because people with disabilities also want to work, and can work, but they need help. With the ESF's help, many ideas were developed that are now standard, such as employment assistance, job coaching, youth coaching, clearing, etc.

What is now desirable is that there should continue to be EU innovation budgets for the development of new social services, just as there are for technology development. New services are continually being developed by social services organisations in Austria, but environmental conditions also have to be right.

*Austria as against Europe? What are the prospects for people with disabilities and disadvantages?*

**Wolfmayr:** In some respects European legislation is a good deal more progressive than the Austrian, because, for example, the legislators have mandated that EU member states must implement anti-discrimination laws in work and employment.

*25 years in the struggle for equality and fairness – what have we achieved, and what are the major challenges?*

**Wolfmayr:** People with disabilities – just like others – need their own individual stories, not careers in disability. You have to take their lives as a whole, not just one moment out of context, because often the circumstances – living conditions, work, or leisure – aren't right for people with disabilities and disadvantages. Significant changes are only possible with active intervention and on-the-spot support. Eastern Styria provides an ideal social environment for this: by starting in childhood we have been successful in integrating people with disabilities into normal, everyday life. The local communities, kindergartens, schools, businesses and other organisations are by now well able to cope.

Society changes not through revolution but by consciously taking steps in the right direction. In the past people went to a special school and later ended up having psychiatric treatment. None of the official figures of that period for children not capable of attending school were correct. Just in this one region we found several dozen children who were not allowed to attend school. Today, compulsory schooling applies for children with disabilities as well, and things have become more normal. We support not only the children in the schools but also the families and communities, but we do not provide care just for the sake of it, because our resources are limited and we are happy if people are independent or can become so. We ourselves have 360 employees, 60 of them with disabilities – we walk a budgetary tightrope, ensuring on the one hand that we remain financially viable, while bringing Chance B to as many people as possible.





## A VISIT TO...

... ALEXANDRA S. – FROM THE CHAMPS ÉLYSÉES TO A FEEL-GOOD JOB

Alex looks quite normal as she serves coffee, jokes with the customers, or arranges the fresh cold cuts in the delicatessen display. Her reddish hair goes perfectly with the pale green walls, she is slim and well dressed, with regular features and with no wild-eyed stare. But this young woman is one of those people for whom everything is more difficult. She suffers from specific learning difficulties, which can put her at a disadvantage in her work, but which may not be obvious at the first or even second glance. Only when she repeatedly fails to arrange the coffee spoons pointing in the right direction does one begin to have a vague suspicion that not everything is quite normal here. “I notice myself that I still have a lot of weaknesses and need to improve in all sorts of areas,” says the service all-rounder in the Wohlfühladen “feel-good” store in Lassnitzthal matter-of-factly, while still trying to get the coffee spoon and sugar sachet arrangement right. She has been working for this neighbourhood shop cum delicatessen and café operated by Team Styria Werkstätten GmbH for several years. Before that, she completed an inclusive apprenticeship programme in retail sales, was unemployed for a time and with the help and connections of Chance B, finally found her dream job. In this feel-good shop she does everything her colleagues do: selling, sorting goods, serving drinks, cleaning up, chatting with customers. “And as long as they’ll

keep me, I’ll stay,” she says triumphantly, as though this was the best day in her life.

## ASSESSMENT SUCCESS AND WORKPLACE BULLYING

She is proud, if somewhat doubting about how she got to be where she is. “It still seems to me something of a miracle,” she says. “I was in Paris staying with relatives. It was great, I even went roller-skating in the Champs Élysées. When she got back, she applied for this job to the Team Styria Werkstätten GmbH Assessment Center. “And it turned out that I was the best of the eleven – I won,” she explains, “perhaps because I was still on a high from my Paris trip.” Her enthusiasm for her work is undiminished, even if she has to think hard about almost everything she does, while others just do it automatically.

“What job isn’t stressful?” is her comment on the various technical challenges she faces. “But I’m tough.” At the beginning she had a really hard time, because her colleagues teased and bullied her, but it was she who stayed and the others who were let go. “We don’t pick on the weakest here,” says Birgit Wurzwallner, the department manager in the feel-good shops, confirming the decision.

“The colleagues of people with special needs or limitations have to be very sensitive – the team has to fit together and hold together,” she says. “Pity is not the answer, because we don’t want to treat them as poor unfortunate souls. Quite the contrary, we want them to grow and develop according to the full extent of their abilities, and to help them to be more independent.”

This approach has helped Alexandra not only in her work, but has also improved the quality of

< Franz Wolfmayr (left) and Birgit Wurzwallner (right) visiting Alexandra S. (bottom right) at her work





Birgit Wurzwallner (Team Styria) and Franz Wolfmayr (Chance B) make sure that employees with disabilities “feel-good” at their Wohlfühläden stores

her private life. For a few months now, she has been living by herself in her own apartment for the first time, and step by step she is learning to run her own life. “I’m so happy when I get home,” she beams, still concentrating hard on arranging the sugar sachets, “but I’m just as happy coming to work again.” And even if the arrangement of teaspoon, sugar and coffee cup still isn’t always right the first time round, Alexandra loves her work, which in the end counts for more than the occasional misplaced spoon.

**Birgit Wurzwallner, the department manager in the four feel-good shops, explains the challenges of integrating people with disabilities into the work process**

**Birgit Wurzwallner:** People with intellectual or physical disabilities have to be encouraged, but they also have to be challenged. Often, they’re perfectly capable of working and willing to work, they just haven’t understood what they’re being asked to do. It’s not lack of motivation, but lack of understanding of the requirements.

In Alex’s case it was clear from the start that with her condition she would need help and support in many of her duties. But it’s often difficult for her colleagues to know in advance when and where Alex will have difficulties, because unfortunately she doesn’t always ask for help. In the beginning this frequently led to disagreements and friction. After many talks and discussions with all involved, including Alex’s mother, and finally


with the help of Chance B, a solution was found that everybody could accept. Once a week for the next year, a job coach from Chance B is coming to the shop and spending the morning at Alex’s side. This helps build up her technical, communications and social skills, so that she can carry out her duties independently on a permanent basis: with increased self-confidence, many of these people can do a great deal more than they thought. At the same time, Alex’s colleagues are being made aware in more detail of what her needs are.

*Klaudia Blasl: In general, what do businesses have to bear in mind if they employ people with disabilities and difficulties?*

**Wurzwallner:** I don’t think there are that many differences between employing people with recognised disabilities and without disabilities. Employees’ motivation and commitment are absolutely critical to the success of a business. And only by understanding and regularly monitoring the needs

of your employees can you ensure that they are satisfied in their work. Sadly, employees with disabilities are often more conscious of what they can’t do than of their own strengths. Team Styria GmbH is itself one of Austria’s largest disability inclusive employers. We currently employ some 370 people, 70 percent of whom have some form of disability. And as a manager I have learnt that as a matter of principle there is no such thing as an employee without limitations. It is not really relevant whether particular deficiencies or disabilities are the result of unsatisfactory care as a child or of long-term unemployment. What is important is trying to find a good solution acceptable to all involved, because then the business gets a great deal in return. In Alex’s case, I have to say that by now she has become indispensable in our Lassnitzthal shop. She is almost never absent, she’s happy to stand in if ever there’s an emergency, and especially our older customers are very happy when she’s on duty. Alexandra is a real treasure.



A woman with short black hair, wearing glasses, a white top, and a pink patterned scarf, stands in the foreground. Behind her is a large, rugged mountain range with green forested slopes and rocky peaks under a blue sky with light clouds. A street lamp is visible on the left side of the frame.

“I JUST WANT THINGS TO  
CONTINUE ON AS THEY ARE  
NOW, THEN I’LL BE HAPPY”

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KARIN S.



# I DON'T NEED SYMPATHY, I NEED MOTIVATION

THEY ARE BLIND, ARE WHEELCHAIR USERS, HAVE COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS OR MENTAL ILLNESSES – THE ARBAS ARBEITSASSISTENZ TIROL JOB SERVICE HELPS ALL OF THESE PEOPLE ON THE PATH TO SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION INTO THE LABOUR MARKET.

**Interview with employment assistant Paul Steixner-Kircher**

*Kludia Blasl: Next year you'll be celebrating your 20th anniversary at ARBAS, so you were there almost right from the start. How did it all begin?*

**Paul Steixner-Kircher:** Back in 1996 it was identified that something was missing for people with disabilities, when they were transitioning between education and work – at the interface to working life, if you like. Many of these people were unable to find suitable jobs. The concept of supported employment comes from the US, but came to us via the Arbeitsassistentz service in Hamburg, and, thanks to government policy, was introduced across the whole of Austria. Of course the European Social Fund (ESF) funding also helped, and still helps, to support the implementation of this complex initiative. On the one hand, a suitable job has to be found, but we also have to work to maintain existing ones. Without ongoing supported

employment it doesn't work, and at that time this segment just didn't exist. So there was a clear and pressing need, and in Tyrol we were really the first to address this.

*In the past everything was better – would you say this was true in relation to the Arbeitsassistentz service.*

**Steixner-Kircher:** At the start the situation was a little better, yes, because even representatives of the ministry came and asked us about the framework that we needed to carry out our work – and that doesn't happen anymore. The wage subsidies were also significantly higher at the beginning: we have lots of men and women who, in today's performance-focused society, just can't produce the same levels of output, and so the subsidies were fair to the employers, to partially make up for the "underperformance" – otherwise with a disability, you just don't have the same opportunities in the job market. Unfortunately, the subsidies have been

continually scaled back over the past 20 years. The paradox is that while there are significantly more jobseekers with disadvantages, fewer and fewer subsidies are available. It's a bit like giving a patient who is getting sicker and sicker less and less medicine.

*What challenges does the Arbeitsassistentz service address?*

**Steixner-Kircher:** Firstly, our employment assistants have to determine the person's particular skillset, how simply their future work will need to be structured, if a job which involves contact with other employees is suitable – or if dealing with other people will be problematic – if the working hours need to be flexible, the travel time to the workplace, the attitude of managers, what the working environment is like, and lots more. We also have to find out how the company is structured, its processes and what it's like there. There are some workplaces where the communication is quite rough and ready, like at some of the petrol stations or factories that I've been to. An employment assistant has to ascertain information about all these factors and find a match with the client's skills profile, to determine a suitable type of work.

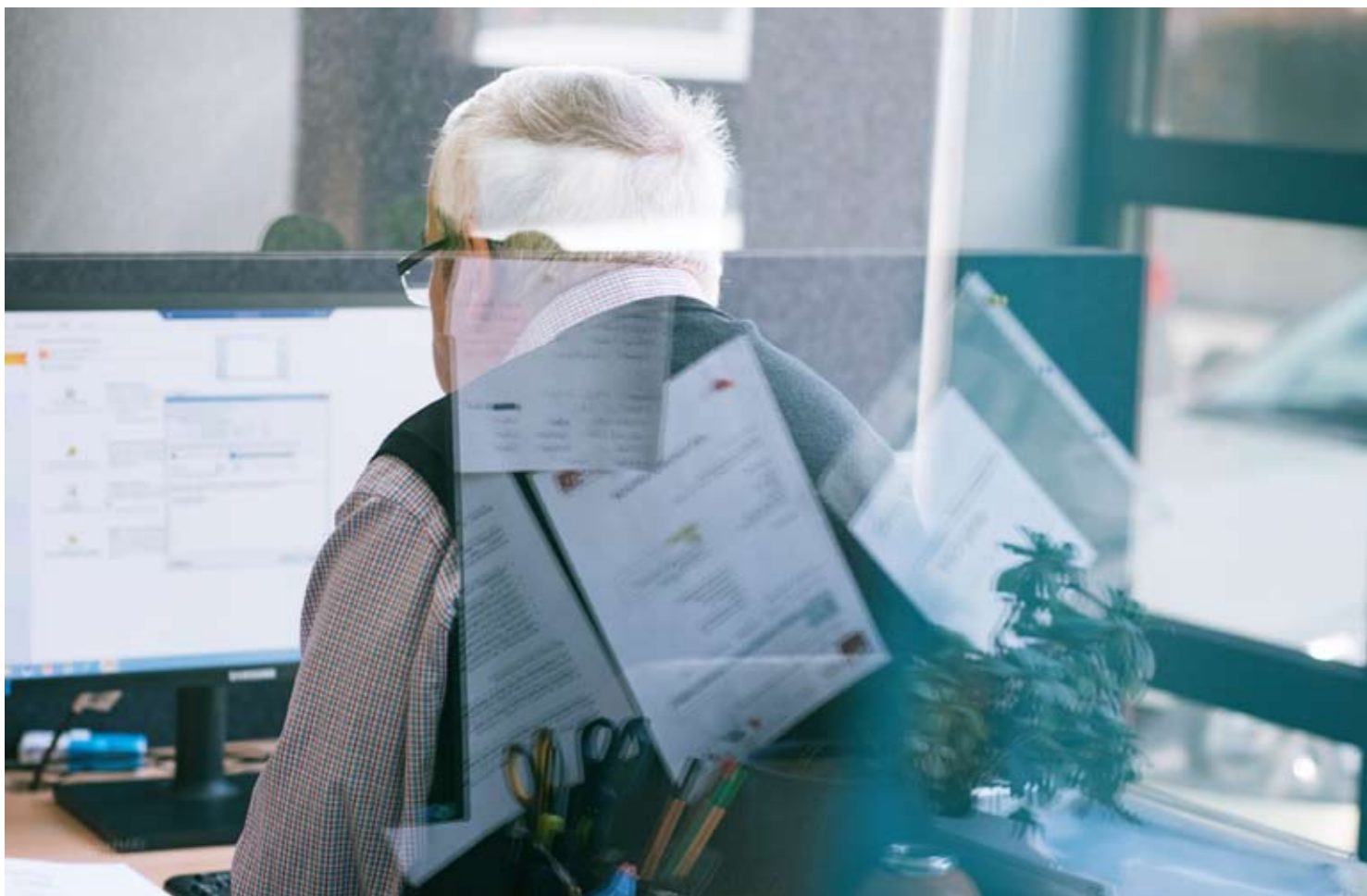
We don't just look at it from a social perspective, we want satisfaction on both sides. We see ourselves as service providers for both the employees and the employers. But I'm afraid finding suitable jobs has become harder and harder over the last 19 years. Compared to when I started doing this job, today I have to contact three times as many companies before eventually finding an appropriate position.

*But it's not just focused on the person's disability, right?*

**Steixner-Kircher:** Yes, that's correct. But you shouldn't look at it as if we just have a person with a disability who is unable to do heavy lifting or whatever it is, and all we have to do is find a suitable job for them. Unfortunately, it's a lot more complex than that. We not only support people with disabilities as they look for work, a lot of what we do is helping people with disabilities who are finding it incredibly difficult to get a job that fits the skills and abilities that they do possess. It's not automatically the case that a person with a disability will have major problems finding a suitable job. Often there are underlying social issues. For instance, some of the job seekers we help find it difficult to realistically estimate the amount of work that they can do. Some have difficulties dealing with conflict, or are in debt etc. We have to take all of this into account and establish contact with lots of other social services to facilitate their long-term employability.

*What is the basis for providing effective support for your clients?*

**Steixner-Kircher:** The most important thing is to establish a good level of trust with our clients and with the companies. This increases the chances of an outcome that leads to lasting employment. Some employers will wait until I'm back from holiday to discuss problems with me, like when maybe their employee hasn't turned up to work for a few weeks, and hasn't called in sick. Probably half of the jobs that I find for my clients are the result of the good relations that I maintain with companies; the calls that I make to the human resources staff that lay the groundwork for productive communication. Sometimes the company even gets in touch with us about a vacant position that they'd like to fill with one of our clients. Our service certainly doesn't end when the client starts work. We, the



employment assistants, make regular visits to the company to try to help with the processing of payroll-related costs, see how the person with a disability is coping with the requirements of the job, or if they have any problems they'd like to discuss.

*And your special achievements?*

**Steixner-Kircher:** They come along every year, every month in fact. You know you've achieved something, for instance, when you find a job for a young man who fell off a roof eight years ago, spent four months in a coma and was then unemployed for seven years – a long-term job that is suitable, given the limitations that he has. It's just a great feeling, because unfortunately this man didn't stand a chance on his own. His income is now EUR 1,200 a month instead of 400, he's paying into his pension and, despite his disability, he feels that he's in some way valued by society again.

I've also benefitted personally from my work as an employment assistant. I can understand people and the reasons for their actions better, resolve conflicts for everyone involved more effectively

and build trust with all sorts of different people – this all helps in your private life. I'm fortunate that I've been able to pursue a very worthwhile and interesting, if sometimes very demanding, career.

*Your hopes for the future?*

**Steixner-Kircher:** I would like us to be fairer to the companies that employ people who are really significantly less productive due to their disabilities. There should be higher financial compensation for these firms. Otherwise it's going to get increasingly difficult to find suitable jobs for people with disabilities. Raising the compensation for companies will also provide an effective incentive for companies to employ more people with disadvantages.

I would also like to see the Ministry of Social Affairs, the ESF and other institutions talking to the employment assistants again, so they can find out about the environmental conditions and structures that they really need to carry out their jobs. And a stop should finally be put to cutting funding for employment assistants when the demand for their services is increasing.

< Employment assistant Paul Steixner-Kircher,  
one of the original members of the ARBAS team



## THE AMAZING, ACCOMPLISHED LIFE OF KARIN S.

Categorising is usually easier than making distinctions. Like when it comes to people who are described as “disabled”, for instance. For these people, every generalisation leads to preconceptions, because a definition of this category would have to be just as diverse and broad as the category “people”. But there is one thing that they do have in common: their lives are more difficult than the “able-bodied” people in their communities. Karin does not fit into any of the common stereotypes. She does not use a wheelchair or go around muttering to herself. At first glance she shows virtually no sign of any limitations. Karin moves about “normally”, she is slim, well dressed and very articulate. “It” only becomes apparent when you sit directly opposite her. “It” is the Möbius syndrome, a very rare congenital disorder characterised by paralysis of the facial muscles on both sides, which also affects the eyes. People with this condition usually experience marginalisation and stigmatisation, because they are unable to smile, pout, blink, frown or move their eyes. And frequently the disorder is also accompanied by some other forms of physical impairment. No cure has been found for Möbius syndrome, and for those living with the condition getting to know new people, social interaction and communication can be a major challenge. At best the absence of facial expression often leads to misunderstandings, and at worst to total exclusion and rejection.

However, despite the “mask” that she has been born with, achieving what this woman has would probably result in borderline burnout and a slipped disk for most people. She went to regular

schools and graduated successfully, has completed two office management vocational training programmes and is a qualified social worker, was married for many years to a man with severe disabilities who had dependency needs, has three daughters – the oldest is already studying communications and media studies at university, and the youngest, Miriam, is only three – and a job at the ski lift operator Bergbahnen Serfaus.

Karin successfully combined marriage, home, kids and work for over twenty years. And with a disability, this requires enormous strength and extraordinary organisational skills. But she is not one to blow her own trumpet, even when it is deserved. “For me it was just normal,” she says, “as a person with a disability you have incredibly high standards, because you don’t want any flaws.”

Karin is a fighter and is glad that her mother sent her to regular schools. “My disability wasn’t very well known then, and people often thought I had a mental disability because I couldn’t show any facial expressions,” she explains calmly, “but my mother was great. She said ‘she does everything totally normally, so she should lead a normal life.’” Something that Karin has achieved, even with her limitations and through all the highs and lows.

But she wishes that people would more often just accept her as a person with a disability, and not look at her strangely, pigeonholing her as someone of limited intelligence. She had a normal job and will return to work in another position on the regular job market at Imst’s ski lift operator in autumn. And just like her professional life, she likes to lead the rest of her life “normally” too. And her former




Karin S. has overcome a mountain of challenges

boss Bernhard Schöpf never thought twice about letting a “disabled person” work as a cashier.

But even for her, at one point everything just became too much. Her kids have inspired her with confidence, but there is a time when even the most resilient simply cannot find the energy anymore. “Sometimes you’re confronted with situations when you think, ‘not another blow’, so you get frustrated, switch off and give up.” No work, no relationship, no energy to go forward – this is what brought Karin to ARBAS, where she found the right impetus: “People like us don’t need sympathy, we need

motivation. And other people to talk to and help us plan our futures.” People like Heidi, her former ARBAS advisor, who was there for Karin at just the right time and accompanied her through a difficult period of her life.

Now everything is going very well for Karin. She has found a new job, has improved self-esteem and describes herself as very satisfied with life. As for aspirations for the future, she doesn’t really have any: “I just want things to continue on as they are now, then I’ll be perfectly happy.”



**“WE TRY TO FIND  
WAYS OF HITTING  
THE TARGETS THEY  
SET THEMSELVES  
WITH THE COACH’S  
ASSISTANCE”**

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JOSEF SCHMIED



# AN EDUCATION AND TRAINING GUARANTEE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

INTERVIEW WITH JOSEF SCHMIED

**Josef Schmied was born in the Zwettl district. He did a mechanical fitter apprenticeship at the ÖBB (Austrian Federal Railways), and then took a part-time training in Social Education. He went on to qualify as a disability care worker, coaching supervisor, coach and organisational consultant, as well as completing the Akademie für Sozialmanagement (Academy of Social Management) leadership course.**

*Gerhard Loibelsberger: You head the careers advice service at the Caritas St. Pölten branch. What career steps led to this role?*

**Josef Schmied:** After a few years as a “social educator” at an Austrian Federal Railways apprentice’s boarding house, I moved back to my native Waldviertel region and worked for Caritas as a disability care worker. I was responsible for setting up the first assisted living group for people with disabilities in the diocese of St. Pölten. I then became the manager of a large residential home. In 2001 the “clearing centres” for careers advice were established, and I became the head for the Waldviertel

office. In 2003 I also started working in the vocational training support field. And then in 2013 the youth career coaching service developed out of the “clearing centre” service.

*Would you have welcomed some career coaching when you were young?*

**Schmied:** I think so, because there weren’t many options for me at that time. I joined the railways because that was where my father worked.

Altogether, things were very different back then. When you were in the final year of school, the next step was usually very obvious. You had the following alternatives: do an apprenticeship, work in agriculture, become a labourer or – for a very small minority – go on to an upper level secondary school.

*Youth career coaching has been offered throughout Austria since 2013. Before this, what career guidance did young people get?*

**Schmied:** Before that, as I’ve touched on already, there was the clearing service. It was set up in

response to a federal government employment drive in 2001. I worked as a “clearer” – or counsellor – for young people who needed specific support due to their special needs. We were a small team, so I was able to advise as well as manage the centre.

*How hard is it for young people to find the right job and the right career, these days?*

**Schmied:** Young people differ so much ...

There are young people with special needs, and those in academic and vocational upper-secondary education. They all face a huge variety of challenges and have different aspirations. It’s important to match up their individual wishes and dreams with the actual opportunities that are open to them.

*Children and young people today spend part of their lives in digital virtual worlds. How difficult is it to bring them back to earth in the real world of careers planning?*

**Schmied:** They live in a world full of information, but they can’t filter and sort all the opportunities they are presented with – because many of them don’t know themselves very well.

*There are three stages to your advice process. How does this work in practice?*

**Schmied:** The first step is to get to know each other, so we can exchange information and clarify what the young person’s specific circumstances are. Then the decision is made whether they need further, longer-term support.

The second stage is six months of coaching, where establishing a trusting relationship with the young person is important.

The third stage offers a year’s support for those who require more help with the transition from school to the world of work.

*Do the young people come to you of their own accord, or are they referred by schools, youth centres, etc.?*

**Schmied:** We keep in touch with all the schools in our catchment area. We visit the schools regularly and talk to the teaching staff there. Young people also get to know about us at our workshops and information events.

*Who do you advise? Young people with difficulties who have dropped out of school or who are unemployed?*

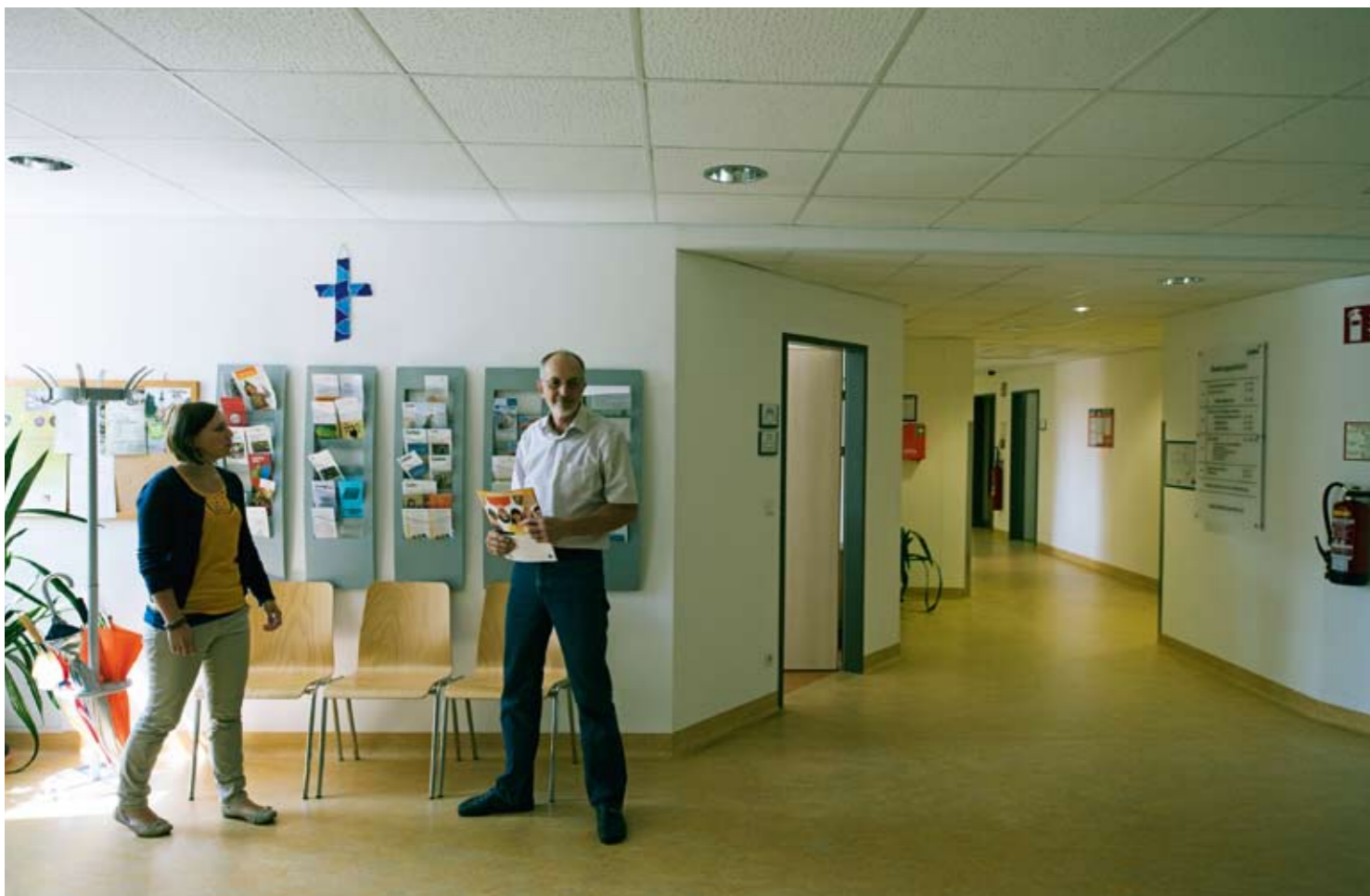
**Schmied:** We offer support to all young people, but especially to those who are at risk of social exclusion.

They can access our services in two ways: either they contact us directly or they are put in touch with us by a school, teacher or the AMS (public employment service). Usually the consultations take place at schools or at our advice centre, but in special cases we can make home visits. The sessions often focus on thorny situations the young people find themselves in. Together we try to find ways of hitting the targets they set themselves with the coach’s assistance.

*Do you see vocational training guidance as primarily a training intervention or ongoing support?*

**Schmied:** It’s advice and support, from looking for an apprenticeship place right through to the final qualification. And it could also be a matter of a one to two-year extension to an apprenticeship or a part-qualification. In the Waldviertel region we have about 140 apprentices in inclusive vocational education who receive advice and guidance from the vocational training support service.

*If an apprentice has difficulties with a supervisor, do they come to you for help?*



**Schmied:** I would hope so! We keep in regular contact with vocational schools and the companies that provide training, as well as the young people and their parents. Often the apprenticeship providers get in touch with us. It's especially gratifying when we hear that a young person is settling in at a company or the training is going well, or when trainers or vocational schools report back on successful learning outcomes.

*Youth unemployment is a Europe-wide problem. Do you also help the young people that you advise to find a job?*

**Schmied:** Of course. Unfortunately there are far too few jobs here in Waldviertel. Fewer and fewer companies are training apprentices. Another problem is that the companies' requirements are constantly increasing. And then there's the question of mobility. In some apprenticeships, for instance if you're an apprentice baker, you have to live very close by. Or the apprentice needs accommodation if they have to work away from home.

*What do you think should be done to tackle youth unemployment in Europe?*

**Schmied:** I would like to see an education and training guarantee for everyone up to the age of 18. Every young person should be guaranteed an education or training place.

*How important is ESF funding for the vocational training support and youth career coaching service?*

**Schmied:** We know that the ESF money is important for the funding bodies and for co-financing. I'm sure that many of the projects wouldn't exist without ESF funding.

*Despite the ESF, the European Union has a cold-hearted, neoliberal image. What could be done to change that?*

**Schmied:** More information and a greater effort to educate people about the EU. When people moan about Brussels, most of them have no idea what the EU has done for us.

*What have 20 years of EU membership brought the Austrian people?*

**Schmied:** Above all, peace and prosperity, and economic cooperation across Europe.

*What would your three wishes for the young people of Europe be?*

**Schmied:** Peace.

- Freedom of education, through a pan-European education and training guarantee.
- Taking pleasure in the beauty of our continent!

< Josef Schmied: "Young people differ so much..."



“PEOPLE NEED TO  
KNOW NOW WHAT THEIR  
PROSPECTS ARE”

OUSMAN BAH



# EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY A MUST

ISOP ENERGISES SOCIETY – WITH SUCCESSFUL INNOVATIONS IN BASIC EDUCATION AND LITERACY, AND ALSO IN EFFECTIVE SOCIAL, CULTURAL, ANTI-DISCRIMINATORY AND LABOUR MARKET PROJECTS.

## Interview with Brigitte Brand, ISOP Managing Director

*Kludia Blasl: ISOP (Innovative Social Projects) has been working in the fields of employment, education, youth and social work, and culture for nearly 30 years. ISOP received its first European Social Fund (ESF) support in 2005. What were the goals then, and what are they now?*

**Brigitte Brand:** The In.Bewegung 1 EQUAL Project (2005–2007) was the first one launched with ESF financial help. This project can truly be said to represent a major innovation in basic education and literacy in Austria. For the first time, the relevant institutions at the time worked together to develop basic standards for the quality of the products, and the professionalism of trainers and the organisations providing the services. New kinds of courses were developed and tested, appropriate non-discriminatory language for talking to participants was developed, and transnational comparisons involving partners in England, Finland and France were made.

These projects also gave rise to permanent institutions, such as a central advisory office. The

Alfatelefon Österreich Austria-wide hotline (0800 244 800), together with the basisbildung-alpha-betisierung.at website were developed as part of In.Bewegung. Quality standards for products, service organisations and professional training were created: many elements of these standards are reproduced in the programme planning documentation of the Initiative Erwachsenenbildung adult education initiative and are used throughout Austria.

### *ESF and Europe?*

**Brand:** In the In.Bewegung EQUAL Project there was a strong emphasis on European networking and transnational partnership. The collaboration and networking with European partner organisations was a valuable contribution to ISOP's work. A variety of different models and good practices were implemented inside the organisation – to the benefit of our participants. Strong transnational partnerships are a fertile breeding ground for innovative ideas, so we hope they will be continued.

ISOP's objective has always been not only to deliver the basic courses but also to contribute to

the development of the subject – the quality of the offerings, even more professional, non-discriminatory publicity work, and also ongoing development of course contents. Basic IT and mathematics courses have had to adapt to the changing needs of the target groups. Research and development in this area took place as part of ESF activities. ISOP as an organisation has benefited from ESF, in development, testing and introduction of courses materials, in spite of the high administrative costs. Opportunities for innovation, development and testing are stimulating: they contribute to the further development of the subjects.

### *Lifelong learning and basic education?*

**Brand:** A new, free, basic education course has just started, for adults who want to refresh, improve or rebuild their skills in reading and writing, mathematics and using computers. The course is taught in small groups of no more than six participants, making possible individual attention to their needs and objectives. The course includes practice in filling out forms, sending e-mails and managing money. Basic education courses are frequently offered to young people, and in this context intercultural considerations are of importance. Our basic education workshop, New Paths towards the

Professionalisation of Basic Education, offers our staff an ongoing opportunity to qualify themselves to ensure that their interaction and communications with course participants are anti-discriminatory and anti-racist.

*Do you think the ESF has a direct or indirect influence on society in a country?*

**Brand:** It is clear that ESF-sponsored initiatives benefit the target groups, and to that extent these adult education measures contribute to the reduction of inequalities and an increase in personal opportunities. This is true in important social contexts such as the improvement of access to job markets, but also at the most personal level, as in better basic education or more advanced German.

*Where would you like to see Europe in 10 years' time?*

**Brand:** In 10 years' time there should be fully developed, tried-and-tested systems and models in all areas of adult education to which all participating organisations should have access. There is a common European quality standard in place that ensures that the programmes implemented can be customer-focused – another step towards equal treatment.



## ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

OUSMAN BAH FROM GAMBIA

If the young man from West Africa was not a refugee, still waiting in the loop of Austrian bureaucracy, you might take him for a baseball star or a model for men's fashions. As it is, Ousman sits in an ISOP classroom named "Turmeric" and tells the story of his eventful and precarious life. He has been living in Austria for five years now, and has a Hungarian wife and a three-year-old son. His German is good, and he longs to be fully integrated, but he is still waiting for the final decision on his application for asylum. Ousman didn't want to leave his native land, but he had no choice. He landed in Austria, and is seeking protection. Austria has become his new home: he has put down spiritual roots, and founded a family. He doesn't talk about his hazardous flight, but about his fears for his future. "I have learnt a lot here, and I want to learn a lot more," he says, "I would like to finish secondary school (ISOP runs an external secondary school, together with all the necessary preparatory schooling), and then learn a trade and give my son a secure future." But he cannot be certain of a future he can rely on. "It is not easy here," says Ousman, "there is no chance of working, no way of knowing what tomorrow will bring. But I must be strong, strong for the sake of my child." One can feel the pressure he is under, and the effort he is making not to give up his hopes for security and stability. And one feels how important it is for him to be able to communicate and exchange ideas with other people. He still finds German grammar dif-

ficult, but as he already spoke four languages when he arrived in Austria, he will doubtless take this hurdle as well. People in a new country for the first time need to stick together. Ousman is definitely adaptable, but he would like to know what his prospects are. He still likes Austria and Europe, but he is also not blind to the problems. "The most important thing in life is solidarity, both for families and for countries. Of course you can't always agree about everything, but you've got to be there for other people, stick together and be prepared to sink your differences." A Nobel Peace Prize winner couldn't have put it better.

GABRIELE WIESINGER

ISOP EMPLOYMENT AND BASIC EDUCATION  
TRAINER AND PROJECT MANAGER

**Gabriele Wiesinger:** I've now been working here seven years, and can say that there is no standard reason why people decide to take advantage of our offers of basic education. In our initial interview, many explain that they want at last to be independent of their family or their husband, so they want to learn to read and write. Others want to be able to help their children with schoolwork. Immigrants often want to build a solid basis for their future in their new home. The participants are very mixed, for some German is their first language, and for others it isn't. Many have private problems – with their partner, with their finances or with the authorities – and we try to align their educational needs with their individual day-to-day problems. There is always a link between our teaching and their personal life, because the participants set their personal objectives at the start.



The most important thing in life is solidarity – and understanding (Ousman Bah and Gabriele Wiesinger)

*Klaudia Blasl: Where is the job satisfaction when every day brings new challenges?*

**Wiesinger:** It's wonderful to see people being successful, and I'm always very satisfied to see how much they achieve between the beginning and the end of the course. The high levels of motivation are a joy to see, how hard they work to improve their situation and support their families, and how they overcome problems. Many come from the weaker sections of society, so it is all the more encouraging that they want to make more of their lives. And if somebody who has just learnt to read and write sends us a postcard, I feel terribly proud – they're on the right road.

*Wishlist for Europe and the ESF?*

**Wiesinger:** I would like to see more investment in the future of individuals and their families – many more basic education courses. Fundamentally, it's all about being able to decide what one does with one's life. Family education has such enormous consequences for children and grandchildren. It makes a big difference whether children are read to aloud at home or not, and whether people tell stories. And small things like being able to fill out forms correctly are so important. Basic education for the parents improves the educational situation of the whole family and increases the opportunities of the next generation.

**“WITHDRAWAL IS  
NOT AN OPTION”**

MARYAM ASGARI





## THE WHOLE SPECTRUM OF LIFE...

“PROJECT 360° – CARINTHIA FOR JOB-MARKET ENTRANTS”: HERE THE PARTICIPANTS LEARNED EVERYTHING THEY NEEDED FOR A FULL LIFE, SUCH AS JOB MARKET PROCESSES, COOKING, SWIMMING AND HEALTHY LIVING.

**Adult education in Carinthia – interview with VHS Academic Director Beate Gfrerer**

*Klaudia Blasl: What were you hoping for when you started Project 360°, and were your expectations realised?*

**Beate Gfrerer:** The project enabled the participants, ranging from long-term unemployed to people with migrant backgrounds, to familiarise themselves with a comprehensive array (hence, 360°) of topics, ranging from refreshing or improving basic cultural skills (reading, writing, arithmetic and using PCs) to job and educational counselling, political education, enhancing social competences, personality training and aspects of health, diet and exercise.

*What was the role of the European Social Fund (ESF) in this, what were the advantages, and what still needs to be improved? How do you view ESF in relation to the adult education activities in the*

*Volkshochschulen (VHS) and in the light of present European developments?*

**Gfrerer:** The ESF has given Carinthia’s adult education institutions a sharper focus on new target groups in adult education. This made it possible to design and implement new and innovative projects, which enabled the Carinthian VHSs to develop an alternative education programme and new skills and expertise. The project also helped to reduce unemployment among people with a wide variety of educational deficiencies. In the light of what is happening in Europe, it will become even more important that European funding is invested directly in combating social problems such as poverty, education deficiencies and racism, in order to prevent a collapse of society and social solidarity.

*What proportion of your funding comes from the ESF, and is it linked to particular focuses?*

**Gfrerer:** In the most recent ESF funding period, two thirds of all Carinthian VHS projects were financed with ESF funding. Free basic education courses throughout Carinthia, job market integration initiatives such as the 360° project, and the opportunity to catch up on school leaving exam-

< For 11 years Beate Gfrerer has been responsible for the 2,500 courses that take place every year



inations were the most popular VHS options in the most recent ESF period. This enabled numerous participants to escape from long-term unemployment. It was also a benefit to the VHSs, because it made it possible to hire project coordinators, administrators, trainers and educational social workers all of whom contributed their special skills and expertise.

*Have the challenges and target groups for your programmes changed greatly in the past ten years?*

**Gfrerer:** The key idea is as always social inclusion. As a public interest adult education institution, we see education as a form of emancipation. When people are marginalised in society and education is no longer seen as a public but rather as an economic good, it is hardly surprising that social

solidarity in Europe is shrinking and outdated nationalistic ideas are re-emerging. We need the ESF's support to help combat exclusionary tendencies in aspects of society such as education, work, migration, health, politics and housing.

*What would you like to see in future?*

**Gfrerer:** Carinthia's VHSs have been implementing ESF projects for the last ten years. The schools benefit greatly from setting up projects with the Fund's backing. What would be necessary, though, would be implementation in all the Austrian provinces, the Bundesländer, on a permanent and ongoing basis. Gaps in the financing mean that hardly won expertise and laboriously established links to target groups that are difficult to reach are unfortunately lost again.

## HUMAN, ALMOST SUPERHUMAN...

MARYAM ASGARI FROM IRAN

**She has effectively transcended the boundaries of the possible and achieved the impossible. An exemplary life.**

Twenty is a magic number for this handsome woman from Iran, because it was exactly two decades ago that she began a new life in Austria. A life that can give courage to all those without hope. Maryam, once a refugee from Teheran, now has two academic degrees – she has mastered her destiny in all respects, and built a bridge to a better future out of the rocks with which her path was strewn. When she arrived, like most other refugees she had no German. At first, she didn't even have enough courage to go shopping by herself. She was afraid of the streets, afraid of the people, and terrified of the police, who she remembered from Iran as brutal and dangerous. But eventually she ventured out, and began working in a factory, at the same time starting a German course at VHS Klagenfurt. In her original home, Asgari studied medical laboratory science. In Austria, she not only felt isolated, but suffered from a lack of job opportunities.

"I wanted above all to become fluent in the language, and to be able to do something that interested me and in which I met a lot of people: I didn't want to go on scraping along as a waitress or a factory worker," she explains. And because her German was soon very good, she began to interpret for Afghan and Iranian refugees, some of whom were heavily traumatised. At the same time she met Professor Klaus Ottomeyer of Klagenfurt University, who was instrumental in persuading her to study

psychology, a study which she energetically pursued and successfully completed. "At the time I had a three-year-old child, so I could only study when husband and child were asleep, i.e. between one and seven in the morning." Not content with that, Asgari completed her course in teaching German as a foreign language, at 49 learned to swim, published a cookery book, considered doing her thesis, translated on protection from violence for NGOs, had several different jobs, found time for her son Karl, who is now in higher secondary school, and always had an open ear for the problems of refugees. "We in particular need to prove ourselves, if we are not to be marginalised. We want to be integrated, we want to learn and work, but we need support, which means that in times like these there has to be funding available."

"Withdrawal is not an option," she explains. Her commitment to her new life is almost unbelievable, and the career she has made for herself admirable by any standards. Since 2010 she has worked for VHS as an educator in the field of social pedagogy, helping women who want to reenter the job market. She teaches not only the basic competences but also time management, self-organisation and managing critical situations. Carinthia for job-market entrants: the 360° Adult Education Project kicked off in 2012.

The participants were young people aged 16 to 17, as well as people over 50. The aspiring entrants received employment education, but cooking, walking, and discussions about homesickness and lack of motivation were also part of the course. After their work placements, eight of the 15 participants were immediately offered jobs, "an enormous success", as Asgari describes it. She hopes that another





round of the 360° Project will start in January 2016, because “it was really worth the effort”.

She cherishes another hope, both for her own life and for everybody else: “Immigrants and a country’s original inhabitants should be able to

live together as good neighbours, and not worry about religion or where they came from, but focus on their common humanity. In Europe and everywhere in the world.”

## RECIPE

### LEARNING GERMAN FROM RECIPES

Colour coding of German nouns: **feminine – red**, **neuter – green**, **masculine – blue**

#### PITA WITH CHEESE

##### Ingredients:

2 **pots sour cream** (2 x 250g)  
600 g **cottage cheese (granular)**  
2 x 150 g **natural yoghourt**  
500 g **filo pastry** (very thin individual sheets)  
10 tablespoons **oil**  
4 eggs  
**salt** (approx. 2 tablespoons, half-full)

##### Preparation:

**Pre-heat oven** to 200°C, mix ingredients in **the bowl**, **grease baking tray** and **rim** with **oil**. Lay 2 sheets of **pastry** on **baking tray**, spread with **cheese filling**, now alternately **1 sheet of pastry** and **1 of filling** until used up. Prick top of pita, bake 10 to 15 minutes in oven, sprinkle lightly with **water**, cover **with cloth** and set aside for approx. 5 minutes, until **pastry** is soft at the corners.

< Maryam Asgari from Iran: from asylum to a university degree and professional career



1 weil es in meinem  
Land Krieg gibt.

1 weil meine Eltern geflüchtet  
sind.

## Wünsche

~~ein~~ + Apothekerin werden

Job + <sup>Später</sup> eine Familie haben



## BECAUSE OF THE WAR WHERE I COME FROM...

INTEGRATIONSHAUS HAS BEEN PROVIDING PROTECTION, SECURITY, COUNSELLING, CARING, EDUCATION AND HOPE FOR THE FUTURE – AND A ROOF OVER PEOPLE'S HEADS – FOR EXACTLY 20 YEARS.

**Integrationshaus (house of integration) – interview with Managing Director Andrea Eraslan-Weninger**

*Klaudia Blasl: The Integrationshaus Project was established in 1995. Today, it is a nationally and internationally recognised competence centre for the accommodation and integration of asylum seekers, persons eligible for subsidiary protection, refugees and migrants. How did this happen?*

**Andrea Eraslan-Weninger:** Right from the start, it was very important for us to respond to the needs of people who needed additional care, such as people who had experienced trauma, single parents, people with physical or psychological disorders and refugees who were unaccompanied minors. Because we see ourselves as active opponents of racism and marginalisation, we fight not only to protect refugees and asylum-seekers but also for a diversity of languages in everyday life, social multiplicity, and recognisably equal opportunities. We

apply a holistic approach to counselling and caring, and our work is cross-cultural, polyglot and very innovation-friendly when it comes to new ideas and projects. In particular in European projects, we do a lot of interesting specialist development work, largely in two major areas. One emphasis is on caring and counselling, including psychosocial and legal aspects, and the other emphasis is on a wide variety of educational and cultural projects. The overriding concern is in all respects to help people help themselves.

*A few examples of specialist development work in the context of European projects?*

**Eraslan-Weninger:** The ESF continues to be a valuable resource, making it possible to develop new ideas and approaches, and then to test them out and make them a permanent part of our programmes. Some examples are training programmes for multipliers, projects like Leuchtturm or MIGRA-TRAIN, a course which trains people with a migrant background to be trainers and counsellors for education and the job market. Sadly to say, the last time MIGRA-TRAIN was held was in 2011, when 16 people from 14 countries and

< Andrea Eraslan-Weninger and Integrationshaus support over 4,000 refugees and migrants every year







Taking the first steps into a new life is much easier with others by your side

with 26 languages between them successfully completed the course.

*What would happen if there were no ESF grants, what should be changed, and what are the greatest challenges?*

**Eraslan-Weninger:** I still think back to 2001 with pleasure, when under the EQUAL programme there were so many options for asylum-seekers. It is a real shame that due to lack of financing these ideas could not be implemented on a permanent basis. The lack is still keenly felt, and there have been no follow-up projects. I continue to see this as a really serious problem affecting the integration of people, because what is available today starts far too late. Asylum proceedings often take a long time, and only after they are completed

are the options for language courses, etc. open. People's valuable lives are wasted, and the even more valuable potential for society. There are so many well educated, highly motivated refugees here now that they need to be integrated into the labour market as quickly as possible – language courses are needed, and procedures for recognising the qualifications they already have.

The ban on employment during the asylum process results in people giving up hope and withdrawing from society, and significant health problems, such as severe depression. While the EQUAL programme was running, it was at least possible to take initiatives to prepare asylum-seekers for the labour market. It's true that we currently have a lot of ESF projects in which asylum-seekers can participate in language learning and basic education,



Ruzanna Madatjan from Armenia helps women to achieve true independence in their lives

but there are unfortunately far too few places. For young people, for every ten course places there are currently 70 people on the waiting list. Much more needs to be done for this target group, and funds need to be made available to cover current requirements. After completing these courses, young people would be in a position to finish their schooling, or to enter a trainee programme or be integrated into the job market. But only a few get this chance.

## DAY OR NIGHT, SOMEBODY TAKES CARE OF YOU

HOW AUSTRIA BECAME HER HOME  
YOUTH COACH RUZANNA MADATJAN

In her soft voice, she explains how she did it. She found her new life. For the young girl with the frightened eyes who fled to Austria because of the war in her country of origin, it will take some time. Integrationshaus accompanies her on the difficult journey. Like Ruzanna, who twelve years ago was helped to build a new life with self-respect and dignity. She and her husband are Armenian, and together with their three children they were looking for a more secure future. From the start, they





The future has many faces and a new, common language

felt at home in Engerthstrasse. “You knew there was somebody there for you, at all times of day and night,” she says. She still feels close ties with her first safe haven. She had an engineering degree in automation technology, but no sooner had she learnt German than she took the MIGRA-TRAIN course in order to do social work herself. Ruzanna wanted above all to help women to become independent, find work, and have a say inside the family. When she talks about it, the pleasure is audible in her voice. “It is satisfying work, and I’m very happy,” she explains. “Many of the women I helped

to find a job cried with joy, even if it was only a cleaning job.” She did her diploma thesis on highly qualified migrant women, and it offends her deeply that so many women with excellent professional educations can only get low-level jobs. Ruzanna found her first job just two weeks after finishing MIGRA-TRAIN. Since 2015 she has been working for Wienwork and feels totally integrated in all respects. But she maintains her networking links with Integrationshaus. “We are all one giant family here, and we’ll always be here to help each other.”



At Integrationshaus it's the people that matter, not their nationalities

#### PEACE, TRANQUILLITY AND SECURITY

It was pure chance that Ruzanna and her family landed up in Austria. “I suppose fate was on my side,” she says, and smiles modestly. In Austria she found something that was missing in Armenia: peace, tranquillity, security and a future for her children. “In Armenia any day can turn into a black hole that gobbles up your whole existence.” It was 2013 before the Madatjan family – by now all Austrian citizens – visited their original home again, and at first their feelings were mixed. It wasn’t long

before someone asked: “When can we go home again?” Home to Austria, where the 21-year-old Schuschanna is studying tourism, the eighteen-year-old Elena is attending a business school, and son Vahram is studying at Mödling HTL technical college. And there is even a granddaughter now. “I’m happy, the children are happy, my husband also has interesting work and is happy, and really I have nothing left to wish for.” Two things suddenly occur to her, though: stability in Europe, and more support for Integrationshaus, because “this is where the step from survival back to life is taken.”

**“EVERY WAY OF LIFE AND  
EVERY EDUCATIONAL  
PATH IS UNIQUE”**

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ROBERT GABRIS





# WE HAVE THE POWER...

TOO MANY ROMA AND SINTI STILL LACK THE NECESSARY CONFIDENCE AND OPPORTUNITIES TO INTEGRATE THEMSELVES. THE ROMBAS STUDY ANALYSED THEIR CURRENT SCHOOLING AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING ENVIRONMENT.

**Interview with Mikael Luciak, research director of the ROMBAS Study**

*Klaudia Blasl: Where did the idea behind the ROMBAS Study come from – what necessitated it?*

**Mikael Luciak:** Researching for a book project and listening to Roma and Sinti families as part of the Roma to University project, it became very clear that there is scant research on the educational environment of Roma and Sinti in Austria, but that there is definitely need for action due to the often precarious situation. This kindled interest in an education study with the participation of Roma and Sinti, based on the premise that Roma and Sinti researchers would have better access to the various Roma communities.

*How and when did the European Social Fund (ESF) come into the picture?*

**Luciak:** The funds for the Roma to University project came from what was then the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. But ROMBAS called for significantly more funding. Since the ESF grants can be used to support educationally disadvantaged groups, and allocation of funds is conditional on gaining a better insight into these groups' education environment, the idea of asking for financial support from the ESF alongside other

groups was put forward as one way to make sure the study became reality.

*The study was/is part of the wider VIV – Inclusion and higher education attainment project. What are the objectives surrounding it, what would the ideal vision of the future look like and what needs to be done to achieve it?*

**Luciak:** The topic of inclusion and higher education attainment was a good fit for the development and implementation of the ROMBAS Study. Collaboration with adult education institutions, VHS in this case, facilitated a discourse on the development of low-threshold advisory measures in place for members of the Roma community. As part of the overall project, education and training support was also offered to Roma. The vision for the future is to integrate Roma and Sinti more closely and, given the right training, allow them to operate as consultants themselves. This training also has to be funded from somewhere. As far as schools are concerned, we have already trained a number of Roma school mediators as consultants, who are currently still being funded via Roma associations.

*What would you say was the importance of this study and what steps or follow-up projects do you see coming out of it?*



For the first time, the ROMBAS study gathered data on and analysed the current education and training environment for Roma and Sinti

**Luciak:** First of all ROMBAS gives a better overall insight into the divergent education environments of Roma and Sinti between different groups and generations, and sheds light on some of the measures needed to improve educational opportunities. It also helped to empower the Roma and Sinti involved in the study. A follow-up programme is planned, to help upskill this group so that they can work as coaches and give seminars in schools and adult education institutions. The first step involves providing training that will enable them to independently host lectures and workshops in educational institutions on the educational environment of Roma and Sinti, as well as on the findings of the ROMBAS study.

*What would be on your wish list from Europe and the ESF?*

**Luciak:** The ESF promotes measures designed to help educationally disadvantaged groups. Separate evaluation is required to determine what effect these measures are having. Two points seem to be particularly important and desirable: firstly involving those affected from the various groups in the development and implementation of these measures (including shaping approaches) and secondly making it easier for smaller NGOs to participate in ESF projects. The incredible complexity surrounding the financial deployment of even the most modestly funded ESF projects often represents a major hurdle.



Attention instead of marginalisation, art instead of cliché – Robert Gabris is at home in many different worlds

## MASTER OF MY OWN DESTINY

A LOOK AT THE LIFE AND WORKSHOP  
ROBERT GABRIS, ARTIST,  
VISITING LECTURER AND ROM

Robert Gabris, originally from Hnúšt'a in Slovakia, is a graduate of the scenography masterclass at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. He is now an instructor at Vienna's Zeichenfabrik and can point to an exemplary artistic career. Robert Gabris is Rom. A disadvantaged minority that continues to struggle with discrimination and marginalisation. But these days anyone who is willing to fight for themselves, their vision and their culture can make it. Which is something that this young artist showcases, in every sense of the word. The graphic

works, sketches and copperplate pieces that adorn the walls of his new workshop in Neulerchenfelder Strasse in Vienna deliver a probing insight into the artist's strong personality and his story. But Robert also has the knack of finding the right words to describe his life. And those of many other Roma.

### CHILDREN WERE SIMPLY WHISKED AWAY

"Back in the days of communism," he explains, "they rolled up in cars and simply took off with the children because they deemed 'Roma' incapable of looking after their children. The social environment, hygiene, health, food and the education

levels found in the parental home fell outside the accepted societal norms of the day."

Like many others Robert spent his childhood in a children's home, in his case separated from his seven brothers and sisters. Looking back, he believes that this had less to do with the specific conditions in his family, and more with the objective categorisation of Roma as "incapable" – a prejudice that endures to this day. The largest ethnic minority in Europe, – there are around six million Roma living in EU countries – they primarily suffer as a result of their marginalisation. They are pushed to the fringes of public perception and face a long and hard struggle to obtain an education and a job. However, more and more of them are leading successful lives – not only Robert, who found out more about the lives of the Sinti and Roma in Austria through his participation in the ROMBAS Study. "The third generation demonstrates a much higher level of education than their grandparents," he explains. But Roma still find it much more difficult to get a fair chance, enter gainful employment and claim an equal standing in society. Far too many of them are confronted with anti-Romany sentiment and marginalisation from the outset.

### EVERY WAY OF LIFE AND EVERY EDUCATIONAL PATH IS UNIQUE

Robert rightly rejects generalised statements relating to his origins and art. He set out on his own path, and other people have to find their own paths, too. That said, people should always be prepared to help them. He personally feels fully integrated into life in

his adoptive country, pointing out that Roma tend to integrate very quickly and very well. "No matter where they are they can speak the language as well as the language of the Roma, preserve their own culture and integrate themselves into the foreign culture," he adds, focusing on enrichment instead of impoverishment. Gabris has also spoken out in favour of a continuation of the study and the implementation of a number of fundamental measures saying that "even if the study has finished, we are just at the start." Roma have to be able to say where they want to be and what they need to achieve it.

### SELF-DETERMINATION INSTEAD OF INCARCERATION

Robert Gabris' impressive and oppressive works are a gateway that gives people access to the Roma world. For his "Romane Thana – places of the Sinti and Roma" exhibition, the artist produced a picture cycle featuring a blue heart that makes statements on marginalisation, identity, belonging and reality, which get under the skin in two ways – both visually and in terms of the background stories. "My father spent twenty years in prison," he explains, "and during this time he tattooed the history of his family all over his own skin as an indelible reminder." Afterwards Gabris immortalised this sight in various copperplates. Roma are people, the same as any others, they love their families, want to make something of their lives and have a history. A history that also endures through difficult times. For Robert's father these desires did not come to fruition, but they have for his son.



“WE SHOULD SHOW  
MORE WARMTH TO  
YOUNG PEOPLE”

OLIVIA ARTHOFER





# THE LAST CARD

INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIA ARTHOFER

**Olivia Arthofer was born in Grieskirchen. She studied Painting and Graphic Art at the Linz University of Arts. She then worked as a carer for people with disabilities, and trained as an education facilitator, social educator and careers adviser. She joined the Verein zur Förderung von Arbeit und Beschäftigung (FAB) twelve years ago, as a youth project leader in her home town. She has been involved with the Wels based Talon project for the past five years, and has managed it for the past two years.**

*Gerhard Loibelsberger: You are an FAB (Association for the Promotion of Work and Employment) employee and run the Talon project. What was your career path to FAB and Talon?*

**Olivia Arthofer:** During my Social Education training I did teaching practice at the bfi vocational training institute in Grieskirchen. I ran into FAB because it was in the same building as the bfi.

*How did the name Talon arise?*

**Arthofer:** When launching this project we had to think of a name for it. It comes from the Austrian expression for “to have something up your sleeve”, and as the exclusion of drug dependent people is ever-present – from schools, employment and society at large – our project makes us the last people with something up their sleeve for

this group. For many people, we’re the last card left to play.

*Where did you get the idea of having young people with drug problems make quality art products?*

**Arthofer:** There was nothing to do and no work for young drug-dependent people in Wels. There was plenty of professional counselling, therapy and support, but there was a shortage of worthwhile activities. Because of this we decided to make something exceptional for exceptional people: quality upcycled craftwork.

*The Talon project has two parts – a workshop and a shop. How well is the shop doing?*

**Arthofer:** It’s seasonal. Business is always a bit flat in the summer, but sales are great in the run-up to Christmas and Easter. We are also increasingly making custom goods to order, and there’s a lot of demand for our one-offs. One of last year’s highlights was the commission to design the Christmas cards for the Linz Bruckner Orchestra. In fact, Talon has become a design studio.

*Work starts every day with breakfast together. Why’s that?*

**Arthofer:** Because the young people don’t spend the little money they have on food. Many of them are very skinny, and eating no longer counts for

much in their lives. At the project they learn to enjoy things again – in many ways.

Also, breakfasting together is always a chance for us to adjust to the shape they are in on that particular day.

*What does Talon offer the young people apart from three hours’ creative work per day and a daily wage?*

**Arthofer:** A “mini-job”. The pay is based on the collective agreement, and the young people can obtain social insurance at very low cost.

One of our most popular features is the voluntary principle. There are no referrals or pressure. The threshold for access is about as low as it could be.

*One of Talon’s rules calls for “respectful treatment” – something that is often absent in real working life. What’s the point of that rule?*

**Arthofer:** Respectful treatment of others is vital wherever people are living and working together. Otherwise, though, the young people can come as they are. We don’t try to impose our expectations on them.

*Do you succeed in weaning young people away from the drug scene and guiding them back to a normal life?*

**Arthofer:** That only works if it’s what they want, for themselves. All we can do is offer them an environment that is good for their health. But of course, that can contribute to them walking away from the drug scene.

*How long can a drug-dependent young person stay at the Talon workshop? A few weeks or months?*

**Arthofer:** We always make annual contracts which can be extended on 1 January if that’s what they want.

In 2014 we had an average stay of 3.2 months. That’s about the amount of time the young people need to regain some confidence in their own abilities – the feeling that “I can do it!”.

*Youth unemployment is a problem right across Europe. Do you help the young people you care for to find jobs?*

**Arthofer:** Yes. We offer assistance with all aspects of job seeking, and with everything that can help them make a living and recover.

*What do you think should be done to tackle youth unemployment in Europe?*

**Arthofer:** All our efforts ought to be directed towards making the most of young people’s talents, whereas at present the focus tends to be on overcoming weaknesses.

*How important is ESF funding for youth centres like Talon?*

**Arthofer:** Talon would probably not have been possible without ESF support. At the outset no one knew whether the target group would resonate to our project, and whether it would work.

*Despite the ESF, the European Union has a cold-hearted, neoliberal image. What could be done to change that?*

**Arthofer:** The negative image comes from a lack of information. Incidentally, there is also an information deficit when it comes to addiction prevention work.



*What would your three wishes for the young people of Europe be?*

**Arthofer:**

- That they should be allowed to be young and take risks;
  - that there should be less stress on control, and more appreciation of their strengths;
  - and that we should show them more warmth.
- Also, I ask myself what role models there are for the European youth of today to look up to?

## LITERATURE ON THE MARGINS

**The following are extracts from texts that originated at a writing workshop held by Talon. They were penned by young people who are drug dependent, and have found part-time work and regained their bearings at Talon.**

At 11 I started smoking, and at 12 I ran into the gateway drug (though I don't think it's seen as a starter drug). But I didn't like this feeling of weightlessness, dizziness and nausea. What I should also say is that on the days with my girlfriend I was always dead drunk, and mixing that with drugs is bound to blow you away. So it's best to leave that alone. But then at some point I got to know COCAINE, because that was what they were always secretly shooting. To start with I was just snorting it, but it didn't take long before I started mainlining. And that was when I went over the edge. The cocaine had me really wired up every day, and my days were just great. I was always able to tap friends and rela-

tives for the money, and I never had to go stealing to pay for drugs.

At some point I asked one of my female friends about this one nice boy who was part of our wider circle, because I was starting to take a bit of a shine to him, and the more I saw of him the more my inner feelings grew. She told me his name but said I'd better watch out if I was thinking about starting something with him. At that time I was already on NICOTINE; COCAINE and ALCOHOL, and I thought I was living in an ideal world. But it wasn't, not any more.

I lost weight incredibly fast. I wasn't physically addicted to the cocaine but I was psychologically dependent on it. I simply couldn't make it through the day without coke. But then there were days when there was a shortage of gear and yes, I could have gone out and got some nasty mixture of amphetamine and coke off someone or other but it just wasn't worth the money to me. The others knew what it felt like when there was nothing around for a few weeks, but it was a new experience to me, and my head was like a ticking bomb. I wasn't myself, and my head decided to do things I shouldn't have done. OK, I took things as they came because there was no alternative, and I got to know the good-looking boy from another neighbourhood clique. He didn't seem dangerous to me at first, either, but he was the "end of level baddie" in my particular game. He gave me my first shot. I was in seventh heaven, I was in love, and everything around me was like a fairytale. After about eight days of regular opiate and morphine consumption my body was adjusted to the stuff and needed it. I would often wake up in the middle of the night bathed in sweat, next to my boyfriend, and didn't even know where precisely the pain came from because all my joints hurt. You can't



A visual impression of Talon

describe the feeling – at least not to someone who has never known this dependency.

*Female, aged 26*

I'd rather not end my days as a junkie or drug victim, but you never know what's ahead. I'm still so young, yet I've already made so many mistakes! I've made my bed and now I have to lie in it! Of course you sometimes think of throwing in the towel and ending your life. Now I'm glad I didn't do that, or you could say I'm happy I didn't have enough money for an overdose! You've got to keep looking forwards and not back. Let's see what the future will bring.

*Female, aged 19*

All these drugs have changed everything for us young people, and we've been lied to about it.

*Female, aged 23*

Something should be done about the young people in Wels aged 13 or 14 who are already on drugs, including needles and pills. Young people need to seek out the right friends – the ones who steer clear of drugs, and work or go to school – because otherwise things will turn out just the way they did with me.

I'm on drugs, shooting up, etc.

*Male, aged 20*



I've been on the substitution programme for a while now. For the past nine months I've almost entirely ceased additional consumption, and I'm managing to keep away from the scene. As a result I'm looking better and healthier all the time, and I've taken up with my old friends again, which means a lot to me. Also, for a year now I've had no more trouble with the police because they've noticed that I no longer look like death now – no more pale face, dead eyes, rings around them, dark as night. I'm proud to have got this far, because two years ago I would never have been able to imagine it.

*Male, aged 22*

I've been on the substitution programme for four months now, because I want to kick the whole drug problem.

I'm also working now ... and I simply want to get a grip on my life again. I want nothing to do with all those people any more.

The trouble comes when you're walking round the town and they all come up and speak to you again (to find out if you know anything). That gets on my nerves.

Well, I think if you really wanted to stop altogether you'd have to move away from Wels – simply find another bunch of mates.

*Female, aged 20*

Taking drugs used to be fun, but after a while it just becomes a burden. I've had my first rehab, which I didn't manage to stick out, and then a second. The fact that I have to take other medications such as psychopharmaceuticals in addition to the substitution drug is also a drag. After a number of stays on a mental ward my addiction got worse. Now I'm 23 and still on medication. My doctor says I should stay on the programme.

I spend my days working at Talon, then shop and go home, listen to music and chill.

Because I like listening to music I enjoy going to festivals, concerts and parties. I see my future like this: another round of withdrawal therapy, so as to be free of all the pain at last. What I really want: a flat of my own again!

*Male, aged 23*

I had to score on the street, which was very expensive, and only adds to your troubles, because you have to get the money together from somewhere and mostly turn to crime. The doctors don't understand that at the start, and for a while afterwards the craving for the medication is still so great it's completely impossible to make do with a different one. That's because you're simply fixated on the drug. I'm 19 now and I've been addicted for two-and-a-half years. Fortunately, after much trepidation, I got the prescription I wanted, and I've had it for a year now. And now it would be easier to shift to a less powerful drug because the craving has worn off a bit. It would make sense switch now. Like that you have a better chance of abstinence or cutting down the dosage.

I wouldn't recommend a life of crime to anyone. Go and work at Talon for half a day so you'll at least have some money.

*Male, aged 19*

Some of my friends and acquaintances – a lot of them, in fact – are currently doing time in Wels, Suben or Stein. They're not just small fry, some of them went down for some pretty serious stuff...

*Female, aged 26*



Beautiful, weird and wonderful things from the Talon workshop

So, now I'm at Talon, I've got to say that I'm doing a lot better. I've been on the substitution programme for six months, and am almost down to nothing, and I'm happy with that. All that's left is to go on withdrawal, then therapy, and then I'll be happy. Everything will be OK again, or at least I hope so.

*Male, aged 21*

Talon is great for young people who've had a bad past with drugs, and are in therapy and gradually getting used to normal life again. It helps them get up in the morning and start doing a few hours' work a day. Our day starts at nine. We have breakfast, a cigarette, and then it's off to work. The girls

mostly sew blankets, quilts and pillow covers for beds, or make decorations for interiors or the garden, or they paint pictures and make jewellery. The guys have the tedious task ahead. They repair computer components and reassemble them, and make useful things from these parts. We have a break at 10.30, and go back to work until 12.15, and then the boss pays out our day's wages. Our two female bosses and the male one are always there to help. They talk to us and always listen if we have problems, regardless of whether it's about drugs, the police, family, money, love or illnesses.

*Female, aged 22*





“POVERTY IS  
OFTEN INHERITED”

SANDRA EDTHOFER,  
ANDREAS THIENEL



# ESF MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO TEST NEW APPROACHES

INTERVIEW WITH SANDRA EDTHOFER AND ANDREAS THIENEL

**Sandra Edthofer studied Education and Social Administration. She joined the Vienna branch of the Caritas charity in 2004. In 2014 she was appointed as head of the Hilfe in Not (Help in Need) assistance programme.**

**Andreas Thienel is a certified social worker. He has been with Caritas Vienna since 1984, and now heads the Arbeit und Chance (Work and Opportunity) Department.**

*Gerhard Loibelsberger: How long have you been concerned with poverty?*

**Andreas Thienel:** I started out as a social worker with the Vienna social counselling service. This delivers direct assistance with food, rent, etc. for people in need. I have been involved in employment projects since 1995.

*What is the poverty threshold?*

**Thienel:** There is the EU SILC threshold. That is a compromise formula for the at-risk-of-poverty

threshold in EU member states. Of course, it is weighted to take account of local circumstances. It is higher than the income support threshold in Austria.

*Are some people fated to live in poverty?*

**Sandra Edthofer:** That's hard to say. Poverty is often inherited. Poverty runs in some families for generations.

**Thienel:** There are families where every child is at risk of falling into poverty.

*Almost half a million people live in poverty in Austria. What can be done about it?*

**Thienel:** Poverty is partly educational poverty. Job opportunities increase with education. An education and qualifications are a must for a decently paid job.

**Edthofer:** Education is our starting point. This runs from basic education projects to ready people for the labour market, through to skills training and labour market integration projects.

**Thienel:** We take people as they come.

*The foreword to a report on poverty published by the Styrian branch of Caritas says that the aim is to help people help themselves. What's the key to that?*

**Edthofer:** Education. It's all about emancipating people, helping them find their way to empowerment.

**Thienel:** There are different forms of unemployment. The situation becomes critical when you've been out of work for half a year. That's when family or health problems can set in, and people's self-esteem takes a knock. The longer unemployment goes on, the more likely those concerned are to let themselves go.

We tailor our interventions to a realistic view of their current situation, and work to rebuild their self-confidence. We start with 16 hours per week jobs, aimed at enabling trainees to regain lost capabilities. Of course, they must also work on their professional skills.

**Edthofer:** As regards the youth projects, the first step is often to give participants a structure to their lives, and accustom them to an orderly routine.

*Looked at in detail, what ESF funded projects have there been in the past and are there now?*

**Thienel:** The EQUAL initiative was great. Caritas entered into development partnerships, and was involved in projects such as Spurwechsel (Lane Change), Generation 19+ and Ways to Work. All of these projects were concerned with creating new models for lifting people out of unemployment and offering them staged entry (or re-entry) to the labour market via low-threshold activities.

EQUAL was a wonderful programme, and is still having an impact, as it enabled us at Caritas to find new partners.

**Edthofer:** Identifying cooperation partners was a condition for submitting a project to the ESF.

Lernsprung (Learning Leap) was a large project like this. It was a basic education scheme for migrants.

*How is it possible to reach people who are living in hidden poverty?*

**Thienel:** Hidden poverty is not just a matter of income poverty but of access poverty, too. People are often ashamed of unemployment and poverty, and go into their shells.

**Edthofer:** Lernsprung is a good example. The first phase was about engaging with the migrants. The location is crucial for a project like this – you have to go where your target group is. Lernsprung was based at Hebbelplatz, in Vienna's tenth district.

**Thienel:** You have to design the services so that they will find acceptance, and news of them will travel by word of mouth. The grapevine is especially vital.

**Edthofer:** We handed out flyers to members of the migrant communities.

*How can you combat poverty by creating employment?*

**Thienel:** Employment creation comes down to the following.

Firstly, you have to use social enterprises and community employment projects, as well as support from advice centres to integrate the long-term unemployed into the labour market.

Secondly, new jobs have to be created in the economy.

Thirdly, employment has to be shared out more justly.

*How would you define the "secondary" and "tertiary" labour markets?*





**Thienel:** I'm not very keen on these terms. At Caritas we prefer to speak of the "extended" labour market. That carries less of a stigma. These expressions basically relate to people's differing capabilities and qualifications, and the fact that these are not necessarily required by a given labour market.

For various reasons, not everyone has the skills and qualifications demanded by the so-called "primary labour market".

*In 2010 there was an ESF annual meeting on the fight against poverty. What is the ESF's role in this area?*

**Edthofer:** It plays a very central role. The ESF has encouraged networking. Combating poverty forms part of the ESF programme, and thanks to its size it can address a very wide range of problems.

*One subject of this meeting was prevention. Is it possible to prevent poverty from the outset?*

**Thienel:** The keys to that are education and training.

*What would not have happened in Austria without ESF funding?*

**Thienel:** A lot of innovative projects and approaches would never have seen the light of day, as they were sparked by ideas and money from the ESF.

*The Austrian unemployment figures keep climbing. Has the ESF failed in its mission of helping to create jobs?*

**Thienel:** I don't think so. The ESF and its programmes keep spawning new ideas for easing access to the labour market for people who are disconnected from it.

**Edthofer:** The ESF has not been a flop. On the contrary, it's making a valuable contribution. The ESF makes it possible to pilot new approaches

*Despite the ESF the European Union has a cold-hearted, neoliberal image. What could be done to change that?*

**Thienel:** It's important for the wheels of the economy to keep turning so that people have work, but uniform welfare and environmental standards matter just as much. The EU should step back a bit from its obsession with money, and add social welfare and the environment to its core concerns.

*What have 20 years of EU membership brought the Austrian people?*

**Edthofer:** They have brought the European nation states closer together, and given us an opportunity to study and work wherever we want.

**Thienel:** Freedom of movement, and education and training exchange programmes.

**Edthofer:** We should also mention the transnational partnerships.

*What three things would you like Europe to do to combat poverty?*

**Thienel:** First, develop common social standards. Second, enforce equal pay for equal work – especially for women.

**Edthofer:** Third, open the labour market to recognised refugees and migrants.

**Thienel:** Reducing and simplifying the bureaucracy would be very good for Caritas, the ESF and the EU in general – especially when it comes to accounting for projects.

**Edthofer:** We hoped that the new programme would bring more lump sum payments and other simplifications.

< The Leopold-Ungar-Haus Caritas centre in Vienna



A group of five people are on a wooden boat, looking upwards towards the sky. In the foreground, an older man with white hair and a dark jacket looks up with a thoughtful expression. Behind him, a man in a blue jacket, a woman in a beige jacket, a man in a blue shirt, and a woman in a white jacket with glasses also look up. The boat is on a body of water with a cityscape and trees in the background under an overcast sky.

“IN 2011 WE EVEN WON THE  
ESF INNOVATION AWARD  
FOR THE JOB AHOI AND  
ALBATROS PROGRAMMES”

MARTIN HAGEN



# FROM STORMY WATERS TO A SAFE HAVEN

JOB AHOY! WORK ON THE HORIZON! THE JOB AHOI LOW-THRESHOLD EMPLOYMENT PROJECT OFFERS YOUNG PEOPLE WITH TURBULENT PASTS AND FLAGGING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES THEIR FIRST – OR EVEN ONLY – OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD INDEPENDENT LIVES WITH BRIGHTER PROSPECTS.

**Interview with Managing Director Martin Hagen.**

*Klaudia Blasl: The Job Ahoi & Albatros programmes – what lies behind these nautical names?*

**Martin Hagen:** The Job Ahoi programme focuses on getting young people fit for their first job or a fresh start. The whole project is based on voluntary participation and young people interested in taking part are able to start paid work immediately in either a boat or design workshop. All too frequently young people – the majority from dysfunctional families or migration backgrounds, who have experienced severe personal setbacks or other disadvantages – haven't completed compulsory education or an apprenticeship and are therefore excluded from the regular job market. Since 1992 Offene Jugendarbeit Dornbirn (OJAD) has been committed to ensuring that these people have the same opportunities and the same level of access to education and employment as those from middle-class backgrounds.

Because they are at a disadvantage from the very outset, many of our participants haven't developed a constructive outlook that is compatible with their personal situation, so they need training in how to approach the world of work. Our target group is 15- to 25-year-olds, and many of these young people don't really know how to deal with the usual expectations that employers have. They're not used to having to be on time or working fixed hours. At Job Ahoi, if they arrive late or leave early, they're just not paid for those hours. This helps them to develop a sense of personal responsibility and the ability to gradually organise their lives. And they can complete their compulsory education on our Albatros education and training project on site at the general secondary school next door. 27 people completed their compulsory education in 2014 alone, and three of them were serving prison sentences.

*Can you give us an idea of how boats sailed on Lake Constance and designer bags are giving young people access to the job market?*

**Hagen:** Let me put it this way, the defining feature of Job Ahoi is that people on low incomes are working on products for the well-off. Maybe the classic approach for an employment initiative would be to clean up the waste left behind by a prosperous society; so cleaning work or folding cardboard boxes for instance – low-value work that society doesn't really appreciate. One of my roles is to try and act as a kind of interpreter as well as an intermediary between different social classes. We value the young people who come to us, and they also work with valuable materials. Take the fair-trade mahogany on the Bösch ZH2462 that we have in our workshop right now – a real masterpiece. It's a rare boat that's over 50 years old and has been expertly restored by roughly a hundred young people under the supervision of an experienced boat builder. The project required about 2,000 hours of work. Our participants spend up to 15 hours a week for a maximum of one year on restoration, overhauling wooden masts and so on. As well as putting some money in their pockets, it gradually develops the sort of attitude they'll need for success in the job market. And generally their work is also making a valuable contribution to the preservation of cultural heritage, like Lake Constance's historical boats.

Our design workshop functions in a similar way. Young women make trendy bags, hats, scarves and other accessories from high-quality fabrics and recycled materials – based on designs from well-known designers. They also get the chance to be creative – just like in the boat workshop – as they can play a part in the design and development process, which is quite rare nowadays in our country. But it works extremely well. We even won the ESF Innovation Award for the Job Ahoi and Albatros programmes.

*The young people arrive as hip hoppers and leave as boat builders. How did this all happen?*

**Hagen:** The idea came about because I'm actually an enthusiastic sailor and have my own wooden fishing boat. The sanding and varnishing work that's required to maintain it was taking up an awfully large amount of time. Some other boat owners were in the same position. So it began with the idea of using an unemployed boat builder and a few young people who needed some money – because for people of this age almost everything revolves around money. Then we just had to find the funding for this low-threshold education and training project, and that required infinite patience, stubborn determination and unswerving dedication to the idea. We received support from the Vorarlberg provincial government, the city of Dornbirn, the HIT Stiftung foundation, the Rotary Club, the AMS employment service, the Austrian Boy Scouts and Girl Guides and the European Social Fund (ESF). Bregenz council also let us use a berth for our AUTONOM II boat. We're very proud of this handsome little wooden vessel, which was built in 1957 and now has a 24-volt solar-powered motor. It still belongs to our organisation and our boat builders love to take her out for a spin, for trips with young people or on special occasions.

*Job Ahoi is also part of a comprehensive package for young people, isn't it?*

**Hagen:** Yes, certainly. The woodwork takes place in tandem with the training and development opportunities offered by the Albatros scheme, as well as support, advice and coaching from social workers and a programme of free-time activities. We even have our own herb and vegetable garden, we repair bicycles, have published a cookbook, run youth centres and a culture-café, and organise concerts





featuring 150 bands a year. We also take part in initiatives related to energy policy and the environment. So we're not just helping the participants to acquire professional and social skills, we're also improving their lives as a whole and promoting the development of individual personality structures. And our success has proven us right time and again. Many of our participants have been classified as "unsuitable for schooling" or "unsuitable for an apprenticeship", and then these very people, who have been excluded by society or on account of their personal circumstances, sometimes even complete dual apprenticeships as well as getting a school-leaving qualification. Social idealism pays dividends in the real economy, even though this is news to some people.

*What are your hopes for the future?*

**Hagen:** Well, I really hope that companies and private sponsors start to think about the value they place on social harmony. If some people don't get the feeling that they can play an important and valued role on the labour market, this can lead to serious unrest in the long-term. These young, socially marginalised people in particular could become a threat to the safety of the older, more prosperous generation. The precarious situation facing young people needs a total rethink. We need to strike a peaceful balance, because everyone deserves a decent place in society.

But that's not all – much more has to be done in terms of integrating refugees. Refugees need money, because families pay for everything for them and they depend on monthly trans-

fers, otherwise the children feel like failures – which then leads to tragedies rather than happy endings.

## A RESCUE BOAT FOR PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES HAVE RUN AGROUND

PUTTING DOWN FIRM ROOTS  
HUBERT FROM DORNBIRN

Hubert is young, good-looking and very polite. You wouldn't think he has endured a string of personal blows, difficulties and serious bouts of self-doubt. The things that he has experienced and had to contend with would probably be too much for four lifetimes, let alone one. As an orphan, he was brought up by foster parents and – having failed to complete his carpentry apprenticeship or compulsory schooling and without much stability in his life – started to travel far and wide when still very young, mostly to Eastern Germany. He had friends in Leipzig and Mecklenburg, but was dogged by loneliness, low self-esteem, a lack of direction and feelings of helplessness. And especially the latter sometimes became grim reality. Like when he returned from a trip to find the police waiting at his door to arrest him for car theft. When the alleged crime took place he was not even in the country – and he couldn't drive anyway. As a marginalised member of society without an education or a family, he was a convenient scapegoat for the community. "Job Ahoi rescued me," he explains today. It was like his very own "bridge over troubled water". "The people here were patient with me, treated me like part

< Job Ahoi: reaching out for a better future together



of a family, gave me confidence and helped me to start moving in the right direction.” Hubert now works in a bicycle shop, where he repairs and sells bikes. He has his own apartment, completed his compulsory education on the Albatros scheme and is gaining more and more stability in his day-to-day life. As he continually emphasises, this is all thanks to the long-term support of Job Ahoi, where he worked on a motorboat belonging to a prince and the first solar boat. And where, after keeling over numerous times in life, he finally made it to a safe haven. He gradually seems to be achieving his ambition of feeling at ease in today’s society. Anyone who meets Hubert will wonder why society waited so long to embrace a person who has so much to give with open arms.

LIFE’S NOT COMPLETE WITHOUT  
AN EDUCATION AND A JOB  
SOULEYMANE BAH FROM GUINEA

Born in Africa, Souleymane has lived in Austria for two years now. He is well integrated, speaks German, attends school and is still waiting for the deci-

sion on his asylum application. He is also a member of the group of young men who are crafting the valuable mahogany for the Bösch boat restoration in the afternoons after class. If you ask Souleymane about his plans for the future, they sound very realistic and firm. “I want to get my school-leaving qualification here and then learn a technical or mechanical trade, because I feel that I’m in good hands here,” he says, since life just isn’t the same without an education or a job. Hopes and wishes that for some would be a walk in the park. But for this young man from Africa the road ahead will be littered with obstacles. It’s a road he is determined to travel on though, as long as he has the opportunity. Souleymane comes across as that rare type of person who pursues his own goals but also wants to do right by those around him. He loves working on the boats, and he really values the teamwork, his workmates and the cooperative atmosphere because “we only make real progress by working together”. It becomes crystal clear that he finds the work – and the income – very rewarding when he politely asks: “Is that all you need, or can I get back to work? Because I’d like to start with the second coat now.”



Multinational “girl power” in the design workshop

I WANT TO MAKE IT TO UNIVERSITY  
ANGELA TAIMÆVA FROM CHECHNIA

Angela clearly has style, taste and a good eye for colour coordination. The design workshop where she has been working for the last year is certainly a place where she can give her creativity and fashion design skills free rein. Her skilful work helps to bring the creations of well-known designers such as Carmen Frank, Sabrina Vogel or Reinold Knapp to life. “My job is really exciting and very varied,” she enthuses, “and I’m extremely glad to be working here.” Originally from Chechnya, she has also lived in Austria for two years, and is awaiting the outcome of her asylum application. This makes it even more impressive that Angela is able to focus

on the future despite the bureaucratic question mark hanging over her. “I want to do something for women,” is her ambitious goal, “and get a place at university to study gynaecology.” “Girl power” certainly isn’t in short supply in the design workshop. All of her colleagues are female, and they appear highly motivated but also very relaxed as they work on designs, fabrics, lace, straps, buttons and patterns. “It’s just great fun here,” says Angela, and everyone else agrees. With this colourful workshop the Job Ahoi programme has accomplished something very special: integrating people with very little education and training into a healthy working climate. And what’s more the products are sold on the open market. This is all thanks to the excellent work of OJAD in Dornbirn.



**“JOINING THE EUROPEAN  
UNION CREATED A NEW  
FEELING OF OPTIMISM”**

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CHRISTINE TEUSCHLER





# 198 REAL SUCCESSFUL STORIES...

BASIC EDUCATION, COMPULSORY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE, MATRICULATION EXAMINATION: FOR MORE THAN 45 YEARS, BURGENLAND'S ADULT EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (VHSs) HAVE BEEN GIVING PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD A SECOND CHANCE.

## VHS Burgenland – Interview with Managing Director Christine Teuschler

*Klaudia Blasl: VHS Burgenland: facts, figures, philosophy and successes?*

**Christine Teuschler:** Burgenland's VHSs have been active as public benefit institutions in adult education for more than 45 years. Over the years much has changed, both in teaching content and in teaching approaches. But the basic goal has remained the same: a broad and affordable range of further education courses for those interested.

More than 950 courses and 200 events take place all over Burgenland every year and are attended by around 10,000 course participants and about the same number of visitors. In 2015 there were also 461 people who took advantage of their second chance by completing bridging courses. Of these, 198 were people who successfully passed examinations completing their compulsory education or vocational matriculation, or who satisfied tertiary education entrance requirements. This makes the Burgenland VHS the adult education provider that in all of Austria's regions currently offers the most comprehensive integrated range of second chance education under one umbrella.

## *European Social Fund (ESF) projects in the VHS?*

**Teuschler:** ESF support has enabled the Burgenland VHSs to extend their intensive educational activities. Currently, 28 percent of the teaching hours are funded by the ESF. This has made it possible to reach out to educationally more disadvantaged target groups, people for whom the costs of longer-term courses could not otherwise have been financed. VHS teaching is not only about making up for the educational opportunities people were deprived of, but also about integration and inclusion through education. Especially the basic education courses and those making it possible to complete compulsory education offer Austrians, and immigrants and refugees new chances and options to advance to further education.

## *Burgenland and its VHS in relation to Europe – how difficult is it to reconcile regional needs and a European focus?*

**Teuschler:** Burgenland is a rural region composed of small districts and villages, and was in an unusual political situation until 1989, when the closed border was dismantled. With a history of emigration, it has always had to face numerous challenges. Before Austria's accession to the EU,



Every reason to celebrate: successfully grasping the second chance for a better life

its average income and employment levels were lower than those of Austria as a whole. Joining the European Union and gaining access to EU funding created a new feeling of optimism.

## *Strengths and weaknesses of the ESF?*

**Teuschler:** One of the major strengths of the ESF is its willingness to use trial and error projects initially, on the basis of which high quality, longer-term programmes can subsequently be developed and implemented. In addition, the range of options for different target groups is far wider than in other grant programmes. On the other hand, what took a while to get used to were the sometimes extremely

complicated regulations and invoicing procedures, which we now understand as forming part of the quality procedures. One fundamental problem is still that in principle only organisations with an adequate financial base can undertake the larger EU projects. Small organisations without sufficient financial resources can generally not cope satisfactorily with the burden of preparatory work that is not funded, the need to prefinance expenses that will in the end be paid for, the complicated administrative procedures and the level of professionalism required in the work. These things can push even medium-sized organisations like Burgenland's VHS to the limits of their capacities.





Amir Alizadah wants to help people by becoming a doctor



Karin Jäger hopes for more opportunities for older people across Europe

## END-OF-TERM CELEBRATIONS 2014/15 – AN IMPRESSIVE DEMONSTRATION OF ABILITIES

### EUROPE IS BETTER

AMIR ALIZADAH FROM AFGHANISTAN

And Austria is part of Europe. Amir speaks with the maturity of a person who had to leave his country to save his life, an experience that robs you of your youth before it has run its time. But Amir, who looks so slight but radiates such strength, is not only mature but also ambitious and full of empathy. He has just completed his compulsory education, and now says proudly: “I am very pleased to have got such good marks in a different country. It is enormously important to me.” Amir is visibly

happy to be living in Austria and to be allowed to learn. In Afghanistan he experienced fear, in Iran racism. Here he feels free, free to do what he really wants, because he already knows what he wants for the future. “I want to become a doctor so that I can help people,” he explains, “not just with words, but with deeds – and with medicine.”

At bottom, it is almost shaming that so many of these young people who have suffered so much want to use their second chance to pursue callings with social commitment. Nurse, social worker, doctor – they are all eager to help, because they were helped.

### AND THIS AT MY AGE

KARIN JÄGER FROM AUSTRIA

Karin Jäger is also beaming, in keeping with the happy occasion. What with family and work, for decades her own life plans had always to take second place. Time was in short supply, and money too. But one day she gathered up her courage and took control of her life and career herself. “I would never have believed it possible to have achieved everything I have achieved,” she says now, “because the only time I had for study was the night.”

Her dedication has paid off, in every possible way. Friends admire her, her children are proud of her, and her employer has honoured her achievement not just financially, but has promised her a promotion to branch manager.

Karin now has every reason to be pleased about her completed vocational training, career advancement and increased self-respect. “It has really paid off, taking all this on at my age.”

She sees her future prospects in a much rosier light now than a few years ago. “I’m earning more money, I have a better job, and I’m more independent.”

Karin is grateful for all the opportunities that opened up for her “even at my age.” She has only one other wish: “Older people must have more opportunities, everywhere in Europe.” She had good luck and support, but not everybody is as lucky.





Ina Xite believes in a solid, all-round education

IF YOU WANT TO, YOU CAN DO IT  
INA XITE FROM ALBANIA

With Ina's good looks – our grandmothers might have said – she wouldn't need a career, she would be married in no time. But luckily for her, she comes from a progressive and cosmopolitan family, where they take equal rights seriously.

Ina has now been living in Austria for three-and-a-half years, speaks excellent German, and has just completed her compulsory education, while at the same time bringing up two children. An impressive achievement. Her son is already

going to school, and in the meantime she is already able to help him with his homework. "It is such an enormous pleasure, when he asks me 'Mama, what does this mean?'; to be able to give him the right answer."

Ina, too, has derived lasting benefits from her second chance. Nor will it be her last one, because as a young woman she believes in a solid, all-round education. And she hopes to get it: "Where I come from, there is no opportunity to make anything of your life, but in Austria, if you want to, you can do it," she says simply, as she folds away her certificate.



Mohammad Taqi Nazary is a perfectionist and wants to hone his linguistic skills

NO PEACE WITHOUT LANGUAGE  
MOHAMMAD TAQI NAZARY  
FROM AFGHANISTAN

"Without education and willingness to learn the language, there can be no real life and no real friends. And no work either," says Mohammad, whose tie, and freshly pressed, snowy white shirt, and suit are visual proof of how seriously he takes his schooling. He has successfully completed his

compulsory education. In addition to which, he speaks not only German but six other languages as well, and has mastered the local dialect, in whose snares he at first became hopelessly entangled. But that's all in the past, and today he is rarely at a loss for words. And for good reason: "if the people where you live don't understand you, life won't be half as easy," he is firmly convinced. Which is why he tirelessly hones his linguistic skills.

EPILOGUE



# ORIGINS

There are many different sides to the European Social Fund (ESF) in Austria. Over its 20 chapters, this book gives you an insight into some of the ESF's activities. The notion of diversity is also reflected in the make-up of the team that initiated the book, with their individual specialisms and experience providing the ideal complement to each other.

## STATE AND FEDERAL STATE

The idea to publish a book to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the ESF in Austria came up as part of the ongoing cooperation between the ESF Managing Authority at the social ministry and the regional management of the province of Burgenland. This collaborative approach demonstrates how cooperation at federal and provincial level generates valuable synergy effects and leads to creative outcomes.

Dagmar Olszewski is a communications officer for the ESF at the social ministry and initiator of the book. Despite, or perhaps thanks to, her young age she fought her way bravely through the bureaucratic jungle and contributed with her drive and flair the book to come about. At her side was Sonja Seiser, an experienced PR manager working for regional management in Burgenland with

a hands-on role at Europainformation. It was Ms Seiser's dedication and tireless enthusiasm that helped her to put together a strong team and made this successful cooperation possible in the first place.

## AUTHORS

An outstanding writing partnership, in the shape of Gerhard Loibelsberger and Klaudia Blasl, lovingly brought together the chapters of this book. A conscious decision was taken to appoint one male and one female author who would go on to travel through Austria and talk to the different interviewees and cover the various projects from the past two decades of the ESF in their own way.

Gerhard Loibelsberger had already contributed several publications on the EU structural fund when he was approached. He is the author of the *Liebe Grenzenlos* book and Burgenland regional management's 11x11 and 7x7 publications. A native of Vienna, he has also penned several reference and gourmet books and crime novels. His interviews for the book succeeded in highlighting some of the successes of the ESF, while also encouraging the individuals at its heart to take a critical look at the ESF's work. Klaudia Blasl, born in Styria, is a columnist, crime writer and food critic. She vis-



Dagmar Olszewski, Sonja Seiser, Klaudia Blasl, Gerhard Loibelsberger and Lukas Beck  
(from top left to bottom right)

ited numerous projects throughout Austria for the book and her personable approach enabled her to come up with a touching series of portraits of the people supported by and in charge of the various projects.

## PHOTOS

Lukas Beck is a freelance artist, celebrated photographer and director. He is known for his perceptive portraits of people from the worlds of theatre, music and art. His works focus on people and their idiosyncrasies. Lukas Beck took portrait photos of the people of the ESF for *The Social Face of Europe* book, adding a human face to the bureaucratic framework.

PHOTOS: ERICH JANSCHITZ, DANILA AMODEO PHOTOGRAPHY, ANDREAS SCHMIDT, KARIN SCHIEFER

# CREDITS

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Commemorative volume in celebration of  
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