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## Disadvantaged Youths on the Job Market: Youths without Vocational Education

Selected results of an ibw-öibf study<sup>1</sup> about 20 - 24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree

**T**he study of the educational progression, qualifications and competencies of 20 - 24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree (i.e. who have only completed compulsory schooling) allows for a differentiated status quo analysis and shows any potential need for action and scenarios for reducing the dropout rate in the Austrian educational system: Focusing on strengths, qualitative and quantitative expansion of the educational guidance and career counseling, special measures for the integration of immigrants.

The relationship between vocational education and training (VET) and chances on the job market are evident: The unemployment rate of individuals who have only completed compulsory schooling was 16.4% in 2005 while the unemployment rate for those who completed some form of further education (apprenticeship, VET school, VET college, secondary school, university, university of applied sciences, post-secondary VET colleges) was below 7%.<sup>2</sup> Youths and young adults without VET can therefore undoubtedly be referred to as being particularly disadvantaged on the job market.

### **Description of the 20-24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree:**

According to the 2001 census, **17% of the 20 to 24 year-olds do not have an upper secondary school degree**, i.e. they have only completed compulsory schooling. **Strongly overrepresented** with regard to lack of further education are **foreigners**. While the percentage of 20 - 24 year-olds with Austrian citizenship who have (only) completed compulsory schooling is a mere 13%, the percentage for individuals who are not Austrian citizens is 47%. Just under a third (32%) of the 20 - 24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree are foreigners according to the 2001 census (Source: Statistik Austria + ibw-calculations).

The degree to which individuals with an immigrant background are disadvantaged in their access to education is made even more obvious if, as in an ibw survey of 20 to 24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree, instead of citizenship, the criteria of mother tongue is used as the distinguishing feature. Approximately half (51%) of the 20 - 24 year-olds surveyed who had only completed compulsory schooling had a mother tongue other than German.

**77%** of the 20 to 24 year-olds surveyed who did not have an upper secondary school degree had **at least begun**

**with further education after compulsory school**, whereby a **particularly low attendance rate** (merely 50% for the 20-24 year-old women without a upper secondary school degree and a mother tongue other than German) **for further education for women with a mother tongue other than German** can be seen.

### **So how are those surveyed distributed among the paths of further education that they began?**

32% of the 20 to 24 year-olds surveyed without an upper secondary school degree dropped out of an apprenticeship and a further 5% completed the apprenticeship but never took the final apprenticeship examination. 13% dropped out of a VET college, 11% out of a secondary school and 5% out of a VET school. In sum, it can be said that the **number of real "dropouts"** is **equally distributed** between the **dual system** (32%) and the **area of the secondary schools and colleges** (31%)<sup>3</sup>.

**A fifth** of those surveyed (20%) currently (i.e. at the time of the survey) **still attend a formal form of further education**. The majority attend VET colleges (8%) and apprenticeships (7%). 1% even attend university.<sup>4</sup>

Based on this ibw survey from 2005, the **composition of the 17% of the 20 to 24 year-olds** who (according to the 2001 census) **do not have an upper secondary school degree**, can be **estimated** (in a simplified summary) as follows:

- **4% did not begin any further education.**
- **5% dropped out of an apprenticeship.**
- **5% dropped out of a VET school or college.**
- **3% are currently still attending some form of further education** (predominately VET colleges and apprenticeships).

A total of about 40% of the 20 - 24 year-olds surveyed who do not have an upper secondary school degree have concrete plans to “make up” the final apprenticeship exam or the upper secondary school leaving exam in the coming years. 30% also plan to attend other trainings/courses.

**Cause for lack of secondary school degrees:**

The definitive **causes** for not having (yet) attained an upper secondary school degree are manifold. The main reasons are **frustration with school** in the form of the statement “I just didn’t want to go to school any more” (25% strongly applies), the **desire to earn their own money** (22% strongly applies) and **lack of an idea concerning educational desires and possibilities** (17% strongly applies). Last but not least, this shows the **necessity for educational guidance and career counseling that reaches all youths**.

Aspects of an **insufficient educational opportunities** play a comparatively smaller role. A portion could **not find a suitable apprenticeship position** (10% strongly applies) and a small fraction **could not find a suitable place in an upper secondary education** (2% strongly applies).

In general, it must be noted that there are also numerous other reasons for dropping out that have no relation to

learning problems or a lack of motivation (for example pregnancy, relocation of the parents, bankruptcy/shutting down of the company where the apprenticeship was being made, health problems/disabilities, etc.). Furthermore, for 5% of those surveyed it was (also) the wish of the parents that played a major role in the decision against further schooling.<sup>5</sup>

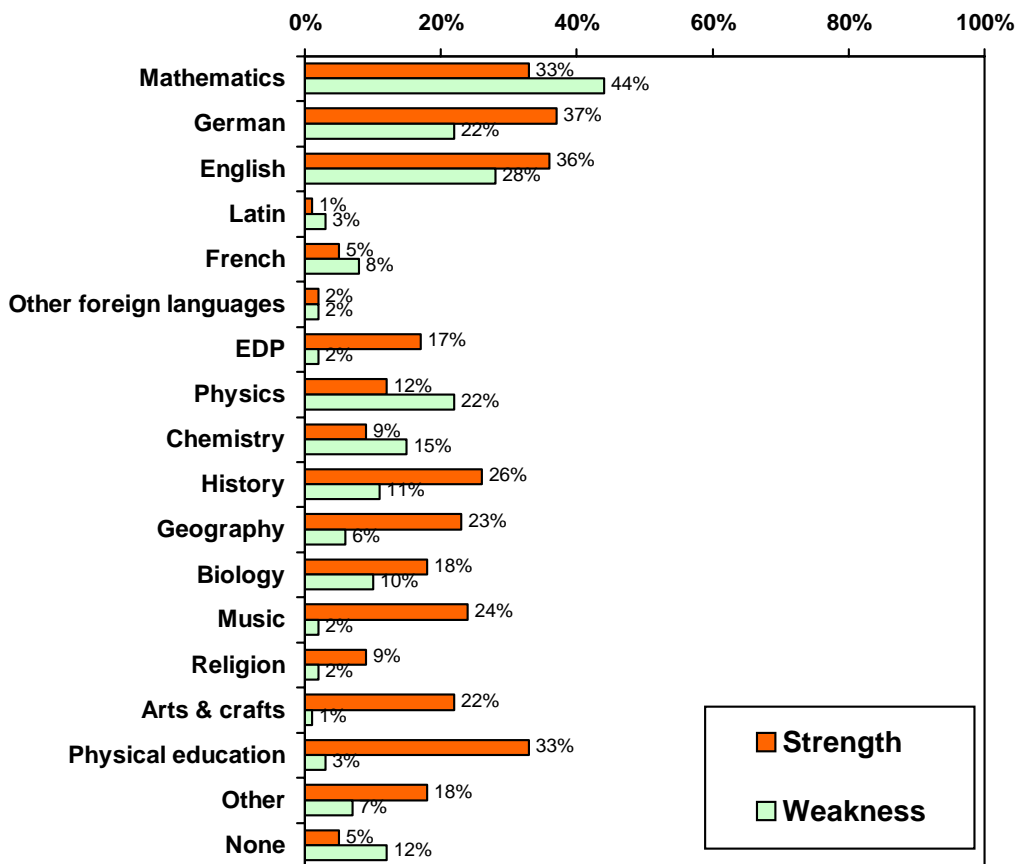
**Necessary change in perspective – from looking at deficiencies to developing potential:**

A core component of this study is made up of the analysis of the **competencies** of the 20 to 24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree. This is not only important in terms of evaluating the changes of this group on the job market, but also in terms of the idea that **promoting strengths** as a rule leads to **more success, more gratification and an upper degree of motivation than fighting weaknesses**.

The ibw survey clearly shows that the 20 to 24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree have also acquired a series of formal qualifications and possess a wide variety of formal and informal **competencies**. Even if only the skills as shown by school subject are considered, **the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses**.

ILLUSTRATION 1:

**Strengths and Weaknesses Analysis by School Subject**  
(multiple answers possible)



Source: ibw survey (n = 261 individuals between 20 - 24 years of age without an upper secondary school degree)  
Note: Total > 100% since multiple answers were possible. LAP = Lehrsabschlussprüfung (final apprenticeship examination).

Unfortunately many fail in their education due to single weaknesses since the Austrian educational system is **primarily concerned with avoiding weaknesses as opposed to promoting individual strengths**. This situation is very impressively supported by the **Strengths and Weaknesses Analysis by School Subject** (see illustration 1), in which the 20-24 year-olds surveyed without an upper secondary school degree were asked to think back on their time in school: even in the subject (mathematics) with the highest weakness percentage (44%), 33% of those interviewed felt this subject was one of their particular strengths. Only in five – rather formally structured – subjects (mathematics, physics, chemistry, Latin, French) do those interviewed more often report weaknesses than strengths. As a whole, **the strengths (e.g. even in German, English and EDP) clearly outweigh the weaknesses**. Only 5% for example, are unable to report a single subject in which they were particularly good, but 12% did not have any particular difficulties in any subject.

**Institutional imbedding:**

In relation to the analysis of the living and job situation of youths and young adults without a VET degree, the question of usability of resources and support offerings becomes of great importance:

The analysis of the institutional contacts (see illustration 2) provides information about the relationship to, and

support through, institutions. **The institute contacted most often** by the 20-24 year-olds surveyed without an upper secondary school degree was so far the **Public Employment Service (75%)**. This is also the institution from which a relatively large percentage (**28%**) of the 20 to 24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree reported **to have actually received help**. Viewed in terms of percentages however, only a good third of all those who contacted the Public Employment Service had the feeling that they we actually helped.

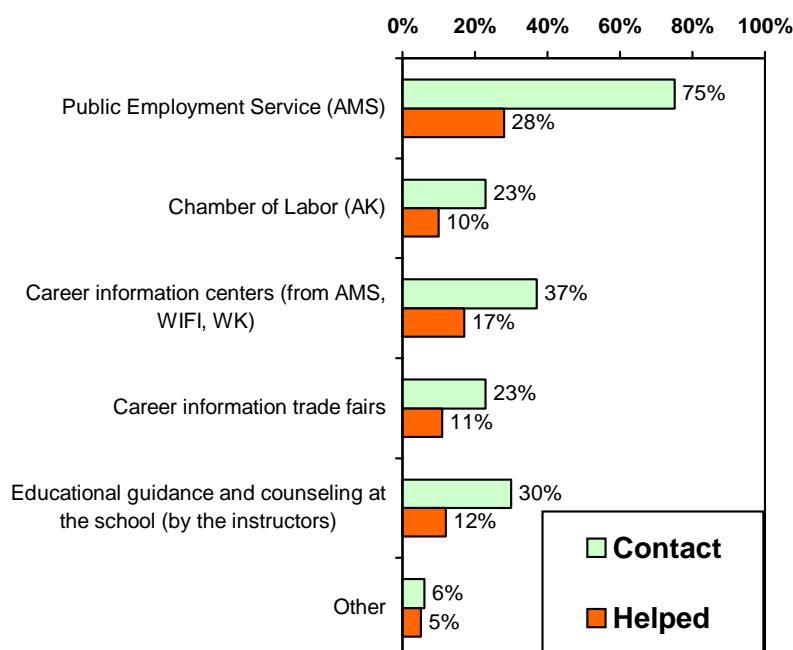
In second place, both in terms of how often they were contacted (37%) and number of who actually received help (17%), are the career information centers.

The educational guidance and counseling (by instructors) only ranks third. Only 30% report contact in this regard and only 12% report having actually received help. Looking at it the other way around, that means that according to their own estimate **approximately 70%** of the 20 to 24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree did not receive **any educational guidance or counseling at their school**.

In general it can be seen as problematic that as a rule, not even half of the individuals who had contact with institutions could be given the feeling that they had actually been helped there.

ILLUSTRATION 2:

**Institutional Contact and Support**  
(multiple answers possible)



Source: ibw survey (n = 261 individuals between 20 - 24 years of age without a upper secondary school degree)

Exact formulation of the question: "Today, the situation for youths and young adults in educational institutes and on the job market is often very difficult. There are however, various services that are responsible for supporting youths in this difficult phase. Which of these services have you already contacted at least once?"

"Which of the services you contacted was, in your opinion, able to actually help you?"

Further interesting information is revealed when contact with the various institutions is analyzed according to the mother tongue. The Public Employment Service and the Chamber of Labor are able to reach the group of 20 to 24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree more or less regardless of whether or not they come from an immigrant background, whereas for the career information centers, career information trade fairs and the educational guidance and counseling at the schools blatant differences exist based on the mother tongue of the individual. This is particularly drastic for educational guidance and counseling at the schools. 45% of those surveyed with a mother tongue of German, but only 14% of those surveyed with a mother tongue of a different language, received some form of consultation at their school. To a small extent, this could also be due to a brief attendance in the Austrian educational system. In any case, these results show a **drastic deficiency in the area of educational and career orientation and information for youths with an immigrant background.**

#### Conclusion:

According to the 2001 census, 17% of the 20 to 24 year-olds do not possess an educational degree beyond compulsory schooling. This, however, in no way concerns a homogenous group, just as the job market situation and perspectives also vary to a large degree. The ibw survey shows this broad spectrum of individual dismay that ranges from people with major health problems (including drug addiction) to successful professional soccer players or musicians and art students.

From a **job market perspective**, a quantitative differentiation to that effect can furthermore be seen (see complete study) in that approximately only one third can be considered satisfactorily integrated in terms of occupation (and regularly employed), while likewise another good third are unemployed or only have very irregular employment. Approximately one fifth were currently still attending a formal further education (mainly VET colleges and apprenticeships) at the time of the survey. The remainder are made up of individuals on maternity leave and those performing their compulsory military or civil service etc. The **percentage of true “dropouts”**, i.e. of individuals who neither wish to complete some form of education nor have the desire to work, among the 20 to 24 year-olds without an upper secondary school degree is however **low** (3%). These are predominately males with German as their mother tongue.

From an **educational perspective**, it can be determined that 77% of the 20 to 24 year-olds surveyed without an upper secondary school degree after all began a (formal) further education after completing compulsory school. The percentage of those who did not begin any form of further education is particularly high among women with a mother tongue other than German (50%). Furthermore, almost half of those surveyed attended a variety of non-formal training and further education courses. In their self appraisal as well, almost all of those surveyed could make it clear that they possess a **variety of competencies and personal strengths that are relevant for the job market.**

#### Recommendations:

Any considerations regarding an improvement of the (subsequent) integration of youths / young adults without occupational training into the job market, educational system and society, should above all focus on preventative aspects: the **educational system itself** – in particular the exclusion effect caused by the focus on the weaknesses instead of the strengths of the youths. A fundamental need for reform in order to reduce the number of dropouts can also be seen therein, to increase attribution and mobility in the entire occupational educational system (e.g. between apprenticeship and VET schools and colleges).

(Further) concrete **recommendations** for lowering the dropout rate in the Austrian educational system and for the improvement of the occupational integration of youths/young adults without an upper secondary school degree – such as **focusing on the promotion of competencies and strengths**, expansion of the educational guidance and career counseling, the recognition and further development of informally acquired competencies and partial qualifications (“dropouts”), special services for immigrants, the expansion / further development of innovative and alternative educational models and learning structures, case management, a lasting networking of all actors, etc. – can be taken from the complete study<sup>6</sup> upon which this article is based. In particular, explicit reference is made to the **necessity for an early, comprehensive, and high-quality educational guidance and career counseling (including career orientation) that reaches every youth** in the school through suitably qualified educational and job market experts.

The entire study is available for download from the ibw homepage:

[http://www.ibw.at/html/infos/pdf/benachteiligte\\_jugendliche.pdf](http://www.ibw.at/html/infos/pdf/benachteiligte_jugendliche.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> cf. Dornmayr, Helmut / Schlögl, Peter / Schneeberger, Arthur / Wieser, Regine (2006): Benachteiligte Jugendliche – Jugendliche ohne Berufsausbildung. Qualitative und quantitative Erhebungen. Arbeitsmarkt- und bildungspolitische Schlussfolgerungen, Wien.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Zajic, Barbara (2006): Arbeitsmarkt & Bildung – Jahreswerte 2005, AMS info Nr. 79

<sup>3</sup> 13% VET colleges, 11% secondary schools, 5% VET schools, 2% preparation course for the secondary school leaving examination.

<sup>4</sup> Courses of study at universities of applied science and art universities (that can be attended without a school leaving examination/upper secondary school degree).

<sup>5</sup> The statement “My parents did not want me to attend further education”, again applied mostly for women with a mother tongue other than German (14% strongly applies). To the contrary however, 73% of the women with a mother tongue other than German, emphasized that this cause did not apply to them at all.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Dornmayr, Helmut / Schlögl, Peter / Schneeberger, Arthur / Wieser, Regine (2006): I.c.