

Austria

In Austria the debate on the topic of „Financial exclusion“ is especially characterized *inter alia* by following themes:

- no exist of any legal claim of obtaining a current account
- In the levy procedure the existing proceeding of debt settlement provides for a minimum rate of 10 %. The consequence is no debt relief for people with low income and high amount.
- 420.000 Austrian persons are caught in solidifying poverty and about one million people run the risk of poverty.

Politic has set up a national action plan for social inclusion to avoid financial exclusion. Besides the encouragement of participation in labour, the access of all humans to resources, rights, gods and services should help to avoid risks of exclusion. For this politics mobilises further actors from social and commercial fields and stays in continuous dialog.

For the moment ways of furtherance of financial inclusion are planned and set in practice by legislation and several activities of different actors as:

- To provide people with no current account with access to financial services the “*Zweite Sparkasse*” was created in Vienna and Innsbruck. More branches are planned in Salzburg, Carinthia (Klagenfurt) and Styria (Graz) in 2008. This “*Zweite Sparkasse*” is a step in right direction, but the “*working group debt advice*” (ASB) keeps on demanding a legal claim of obtaining a current account. The “*Zweite Sparkasse*” reaches only people in their region and those who fulfil the excluding condition of being a customer of debt advice.
- There is hope for a reform concerning the debt regulation process beginning 2009 who allows also the nearly 13 % debtors, who could not pay the 10 % minimum amount of the debited sum a fresh start.
- The government supports the debt advice services and the ASB and is supposed to improve the status of these advice centers opposite commercial suppliers by providing the centers with a seal of approval from beginning 2008.
- The Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) and the Chamber of Commerce of Austria have agreed upon a minimum level of 1.000 € of minimum wage for 2008. So minimum wage will be introduced by a collective agreement almost all over the country. So gainful employment has a considerable safeguard capacity in the prevention of financial exclusion.
- From 2009 we face a new concept regarding a “*needs-oriented guaranteed minimum income*”, which is intended to replace the current welfare aid. This measure may prevent further exclusion.
- We will give two examples of the many projects of debt prevention following the target “*improvement of financial knowledge*”: The project “*Klartext*” (to say it clearly) with website, seminars, workshops, “*debt suitcase*”
The project “*Finanzführerschein*” (financial driving licence) in Vorarlberg und Oberösterreich; the “*Finanz Scout*” in Niederösterreich with peer to peer knowledge taking.

The Austrian social state tries with all its efforts to reduce or avoid in long term poverty, risk of poverty and social exclusion. The taken measures are discussed controversial from participants of politics, science, commerce and social associations. The future will show, if the taken measures lead to the desired effects.