

## 10.8 Current debates and reforms

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## Forthcoming policy developments

### Continuous development of the Austrian Youth Strategy

The [Austrian Youth Strategy](#) ([Jugendstrategie](#)) is designed as an ongoing process and thus subject to continuous further development. As of 2020, the Austrian Federal Government has decided to continue the Youth Strategy. Based on the fields of action, youth goals were created. In a next step, measures are now aligned or newly developed. In 'Reality Checks', these youth goals are reflected with young people and it is considered whether the youth goal contributes to the implementation of a European Youth Goal.

### Media literacy and digitalisation

Particular attention is currently paid to the **field of action 'media and information'**, in the context of fake news, disinformation, and media literacy. Youth policy strives to **actively use digitalisation** as an opportunity. In many ways, young people are at the forefront of digitalisation and the acquisition of new technologies and media. Precisely for this reason and because of their phase of life, they are also exposed to special risks. The Austrian Youth Strategy places particular emphasis on measures aimed at **strengthening the media literacy of adolescents, families, youth workers and other educational practitioners**. These include strengthening information literacy and providing information that is relevant to youth, especially in times of cyberbullying, hate speech and 'fake news'.

## Ongoing debates

### COVID-19 and Youth Work

In March 2020, Austrian Youth Centers and Youth Work spaces responded quickly and comprehensively to the pandemic. Most of them **moved the majority of their operations to digital services** from the first lockdown onwards. Since autumn 2020, an exemption for personal counselling and information sessions allows limited work on site.

In line with an emerging public debate, the nationwide network Open Youth Work' ([bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit](#), bOJA) in February 2021 published a paper ([Positionspapier von bOJA Feb '21: 1 Jahr Corona Krise - Potentiale der Offenen Jugendarbeit in der Pandemie](#))

calling for an **increased consideration of young people's concerns in the pandemic response**. The ongoing pandemic and its continuous contact restrictions have heavily affected young people, some of which are reaching their psychological limits. An increase of depression, withdrawal behaviour and anxiety disorders has been noted among young people. Furthermore, educational deficits may only become apparent in the aftermath of the pandemic and the worsening youth unemployment provides a scary outlook for some young people. **In times of crisis, young people need outside social contacts more than ever** - whether exchanges with their peers, stable and sustainable relationships with adults and the opportunity to make use of youth work. Therefore, calls for further opening steps (under strict conditions such as regular testing, use of FFP2 masks, smaller groups, outdoor work) in open youth work have been made. Moreover, an increased consideration of youth perspectives and interests in the pandemic and a better equipment in terms of digital resources is advocated for.