

**UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

**Intersessional Seminar on Youth and Human Rights**

**Session 2: Challenges and discrimination faced by young people in the realization of their rights**

Monday, 12 April 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair,

This statement has been prepared in consultation with our United Nations Youth Delegate who is also present at today’s meeting.

We would like to particularly highlight three areas and set out how Austria addresses challenges of young people in realizing their rights:

First, **equal participation in political and public affairs**: In order to enhance the political participation of young people, which is a cornerstone of inclusive societies and a key ingredient for good governance, Austria decided in 2007 to lower the voting age in national, regional and local elections, as well as referenda, to 16 years of age.

Secondly, young people, especially those in conflict with the law, need specific attention in the **justice system**. States should set up specific juvenile justice systems in order to guarantee that justice systems are age-sensitive and respond adequately to the needs of young people. In Austria, the juvenile justice system does not only cover young people until the age of 18 (i.e. “children”), but some provisions also relate to “young adults” between the ages of 18 and 21, thereby acknowledging the specificities of the transition from childhood to adulthood. These specific rules for young adults relate to the severity of sanctions for criminal offences[[1]](#footnote-1), an enhanced possibility for alternative measures[[2]](#footnote-2), specific rules for pre-trial detention[[3]](#footnote-3), specific legal aid for juvenile offenders[[4]](#footnote-4) and other procedural safeguards. The overall goal of this system is to be preventive rather than punitive and enable the swift re-integration of juvenile offenders in society.

Third, **conscientious objection to military service** concerns young people more than any other group. In Austria, military service is compulsory for young men, but provisions exist in law and in practice to ensure that alternatives to military service are provided to those who want to make use of their right to conscientious objection. Today, around 45% of young men opt for alternative civil service in social, medical or philanthropic organizations in lieu of the mandatory military service.

I thank you.

1. § 19 Jugendgerichtsbarkeitgesetz (JGG) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. § 19 (2) iVm §7 JGG [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. § 46a Abs 2 iVm § 35 Abs 1 Satz 2 und 1b JGG [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. § 46a Abs 2 iVm §§ 49 Z 1 und 4, 50 JGG [↑](#footnote-ref-4)