

M15.4: Internationale Entwicklung

Diana Zein, Mara Janßen, Samed Ilias, Allahyar Ibrahim, Artur Liebrecht

Hello, we are Diana, Mara, Samed, Allahyar, and Artur. We are all currently studying social work at the University of Applied Sciences in Emden. Diana and Mara are in their second semester. Artur, Samed, and Allahyar are now in their sixth semester. We all participated in the "International Development" seminar and were abroad for it. The topic of the seminar was "Changing Social Work through Participation and Service User Involvement." This topic addresses the transformation of social work through greater user involvement in the decision-making process and in the design of social services. It explored how user participation and involvement can improve the success of social interventions. An important aspect was comparing different international models that promote such user involvement. There were a variety of countries to choose from, and we decided on Austria. We chose Austria because it has a social and political system comparable to Germany's and, at the same time, pursues innovative approaches to social work, which we were very interested in. Austria has interesting models, particularly in the area of user participation, which we wanted to better understand in an international context. For the project, we visited the university in Sankt Pölten, Austria, for five days from March 31, 2025, to April 4, 2025. We all travelled together by car. In total, we drove for about 11 hours per trip, including breaks. The organization on site was clear and easy to understand. We received a clear overview before our arrival.

We were well accompanied throughout the days and there were new and eventful things to do every day. The University of Sankt Pölten welcomed us from Germany, as well as all the other students from various countries. We found it particularly noteworthy that our physical well-being was always taken care of and that we always had a warm, complimentary meal available. The days were very structured and always filled with various options. It was also of high priority to create leisure activities after the actual unit day to get to know the other students.

We would like to take a closer look at the workshops we selected and attended, which were analysed in more detail by various lecturers from the participating countries of the International Week in St. Pölten, and which allowed us to learn something for our studies.

Participation in the International Workshop on Social Work:

Participating in the international workshop on Social Work was a deeply formative and enriching experience for us as a group. We were particularly impressed by the thematic diversity we were able to explore in depth including migration, recovery and self-care, music education, as well as social work with children and young people. In the following, we would like to share our collective impressions and insights from the individual workshop sessions.

Migration:

The topic of migration stirred many emotions and sparked intense discussions among us. In our international groups, we learned about different perspectives on migration, causes of flight, and integration processes. Especially moving were the personal stories some participants shared about their own or their families' migration experiences. It became clear to us how differently support systems function around the world and how important it is to have an open and culturally sensitive approach in social work. We learned to see migration not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity for mutual learning and social diversity.

Recovery – Being There for Others Without Losing Yourself:

In the part of the workshop focusing on recovery, we learned how important it is for professionals in social work to take good care of themselves. The practical exercises in mindfulness and self-reflection showed us that self-care is not a luxury, but a necessary condition for staying capable and empathetic in the long run. The international exchange on this topic was especially interesting – in some countries, there are already established structures for psychosocial support for professionals, while in others, this remains a greatly neglected area. We've made a commitment to give this issue more attention in our future professional practice.

Music education:

A special highlight for many of us was the music education workshop. Here, music was understood as a universal language that connects people regardless of origin or language skills. We learned about various methods that can be especially effective in working with traumatized children or young people. Through making music together, we experienced how music creates closeness, expresses emotions, and can even

foster healing. We definitely want to integrate these experiences into our future practice.

Social Work with Children and Young People:

Another key topic was social work with children and young people. Together, we explored issues such as children's rights, youth participation, and the prevention of violence. Comparing international approaches was very educational for us. It became clear how much potential lies in promoting self-efficacy and the active participation of young people. At the same time, we also saw how many challenges exist in this field – particularly in relation to structural inequalities and a lack of resources. The international workshop not only provided us with new professional impulses, but also broadened our perspective. We experienced the power of working together across cultural and national boundaries. Social work connects us through shared values – such as justice, solidarity, and humanity even if our contexts differ. This experience was incredibly valuable for our personal and professional development, and we hope that such international encounters will continue to be supported and made possible.

Reflection on the Week in Austria

The week in Austria was an enriching and inspiring experience for all of us. Not only did we deepen our understanding of social work in an international context, but we also grew closer together as a group and learned a lot from each other. The opportunity to engage with students and lecturers from different countries opened new perspectives for us and showed how diverse and adaptable social work can be across cultural and national boundaries.

Through the workshops and conversations, we became more aware of the significance of participation and the active involvement of service users in shaping their own support. This experience encouraged us to critically reflect on how we can incorporate these approaches into our future practice. We also learned the value of looking beyond our own borders and questioning established ways of thinking and acting. The insights we gained will certainly accompany us throughout our studies and into our future careers as social workers.

Moreover, working and living together as a group strengthened our teamwork and gave us the chance to support and motivate each other throughout the trip. The international encounters also deepened our understanding of cultural differences and

commonalities, reminding us how vital open-mindedness and respect are when working with people from different cultural or social contexts.

In summary, the trip to Austria strengthened not only our professional competencies but also our personal growth. It inspired us to continue pursuing social work as a practice rooted in solidarity, openness, and mutual respect. We are grateful for this opportunity and hope that future students will also be able to benefit from such international exchanges.

We have included some pictures from our visit to St. Pölten in the appendix.



