

Second Annual Report: Regional Network Styria (Upper Styria East) STVG– Austria

Reporting period: January 2024 – December 2024

Overview

The second annual report describes the activities of the Styrian regional network in the period between January and December 2024. During this time, several network meetings were held in plenary as well as in smaller groups, and a regional symposium was organised. Most importantly, three new Reality Check formats were developed, prepared, and – in some cases – already intensively tested.

More in detail and chronologically, the activities of 2024 were organised as follows:

- **16th April 2024:** Third network meeting in Mixnitz – discussion and further development of pilot ideas (*Bring your child to work day*, *MINI-MINT*, *Jobs out of the Box – MINT*).
- **18th June 2024:** Fourth network meeting in Leoben – presentation of first feedback on *MINI-MINT* and *Bring your child to work day*; planning of the next steps for *Jobs out of the Box – MINT*.
- **3rd October 2024:** Fifth network meeting in Neuberg an der Mürz – presentation of the evaluation report on *Bring your child to work day*, in-depth discussion of *MINI-MINT*, and conclusion of the preparation phase for *Jobs out of the Box – MINT*.
- **3rd October 2024:** Regional symposium “*Reality Check – School meets Business*” with over 30 participants from schools, companies, regional management, and educational institutions; during a World Café, participants discussed students’ strengths and weaknesses, the requirements of the labour market, and new ideas for Reality Checks.

The year 2024 can be regarded as very successful overall. The network carried out the planned activities, adhered to timelines and agreements, and accompanied the pilot phases with structured feedback and reflection. In particular, the two formats *MINI-MINT* and *Bring your child to work day* received strong interest and appreciation from students, parents, teachers, and companies. *Jobs out of the Box – MINT* completed its preparation phase and is scheduled to start in 2025.

At the end of its second year, it can be stated that the Styrian regional network has further advanced its content, significantly deepened the cooperation between schools, companies, and regional partners, and set important impulses for practice-oriented career guidance through its pilot initiatives.

Third Network Meeting

Date & Time: April 16th, 2024 – 13:30–17:00

Place: Naturwelten Steiermark, Mixnitz

Participants: 10 representatives of industrial companies, regional management, WKO/industry, BFB and STVG

Description / Minutes:

The third company meeting of the Reality Check network in Upper Styria East took place on April 16th, 2024, at Naturwelten Steiermark in Mixnitz. The focus was on the presentation and discussion of concrete pilot ideas for RealityChecks.

After a short recap of the previous meeting and an overview of the project status, three examples were presented and discussed in plenary:

- **RealityCheck 1: “Bring your child to work day”** – Children aged around 9 and 13 gain authentic insights into everyday working life by accompanying their parents or close relatives. Complementary ideas (e.g. bringing the best friend, involvement of grandparents) as well as safety and age limits in companies were discussed.
- **RealityCheck 2: MINT-Box** – Companies develop practice-oriented exercises on STEM topics for use in schools. Examples included paper production (Norske Skog), wind power models (Heldeco), and Scratch programming (Pankl). The concept was positively received, as it directly supports the Upper Styria East STEM strategy and can be sustainably integrated into lessons.
- **RealityCheck 3: Interactive job presentation** – Apprentices present their work vividly at schools or fairs. Although the idea was of interest, it was postponed in order to focus first on the implementation of the MINT boxes.

In addition, new proposals such as a digital scavenger hunt (e.g. using Actionbound) were suggested.

Next steps:

Companies agreed to prepare two MINT exercises by the next meeting – one for primary school and one for secondary school level. These should be submitted at least one week before the meeting on June 18th, 2024. The next meeting will take place at the Down Syndrome Center “Beniva” in Leoben.

Fourth Network Meeting

Date & Time: June 18th, 2025 – 13:30–16:30

Place: Beniva Center, Leoben

Participants: 12 Representatives of companies (AT&S, Pankl Racing Systems, voestalpine, Heldeco, RHI Magnesita), Regionalmanagement Upper Styria East, STVG, BFB, and three schools (VS Langenwang, VS Turnau, MS Leoben)

Description / Minutes:

The fourth network meeting of the Reality Check network Upper Styria East took place on June 18th, 2025, at the Beniva Center in Leoben. The focus was on the continuation and concrete design of the three pilot formats.

- **RealityCheck “Bring your child to work day”** – Experiences from the first implementation phases were presented. The initiative was rated as highly successful in offering children authentic insights into workplaces and in strengthening the parents’ role in career orientation. The discussion focused on the most effective registration process (via schools or BFB), with consensus leaning towards coordination through schools to ensure clarity and efficiency. Companies emphasised the added value of the initiative for their family-friendly image.
- **RealityCheck MINI-MINT** – After initial pilot runs in primary schools, feedback highlighted strong enthusiasm among pupils and teachers. The experiments were well suited for integration into lessons, though additional teaching materials and clear guidance were requested. Suggestions included motivational incentives such as small certificates to further engage children.
- **RealityCheck “Jobs out of the Box – MINT”** – Still in the preparatory phase, this format was discussed in detail with regard to its implementation in autumn. Attention was given to designing tasks in multiple difficulty levels to reflect the diverse abilities of students. The involvement of apprentices as supervisors was seen as a key factor for authenticity and practical orientation.

Overall, participants confirmed that the pilot initiatives complement school-based career guidance and strengthen cooperation between schools and businesses in the region.

Next steps:

- Launch of the “Jobs out of the Box – MINT” format in autumn 2025.
- Continuation and evaluation of MINI-MINT and “Bring your child to work day.”
- Establishment of a feedback system for participating schools, companies, and parents.
- Ongoing coordination of further network meetings to ensure structured reflection and joint development.

Fifth Network Meeting

Date & Time: October 2024, 13:30–14:30

Place: Naturparkschule Neuberg an der Mürz

Participants: 13 representatives from schools (VS St. Marein/Mzt., VS Trofaiach, MS Neuberg), companies (voestalpine, Pankl Racing Systems, RHI Magnesita), BFB, and STVG.

Description / Minutes:

The fifth network meeting took place within the framework of the regional symposium, thus underlining the growing visibility of the Reality Check network in the region. In retrospect, it was emphasised that the pilot projects demonstrated the added value of cooperation between schools, companies, and parents and met with strong resonance from all parties involved.

- **Bring your child to work day:** The presented report and evaluation confirmed the great success of the format. The authenticity of the insights and the strengthening of the parents' role in the career orientation process were highlighted. Children rated the day very positively, teachers emphasised the good integration into the school routine, and companies saw it as an enrichment of their family-friendliness. Organisationally, registration via the schools proved to be the most efficient solution.
- **MINI-MINT:** This format has already been intensively tested in primary schools. The children's enthusiasm was great, and simple experiments were easy to integrate into lessons. Teachers requested additional accompanying materials; the use of small certificates to increase motivation was also discussed.
- **Jobs out of the Box – MINT:** This format is at the end of the preparation phase. The start of the first implementations is scheduled for the coming weeks. The necessity of tasks with different levels of difficulty was discussed, as well as the involvement of apprentices to ensure practicality and authenticity.

Next steps:

Agreements were made to adapt information materials for *Bring your child to work day*, to expand the materials for MINI-MINT, to launch the MINT boxes, to introduce a feedback system, and to continue the network meetings for joint reflection and further development.

Regional Symposium: Reality Check – Upper Styria East

“Schools meet Companies”

Date & Time: October 3rd, 2024 – 15:00–18:00

Place: Naturparkschule Neuberg an der Mürz

Participants: 35 representatives from schools, companies, regional management, BFB, STVG, and other regional stakeholders

Description / Minutes:

The regional symposium of the Reality Check network Upper Styria East marked the highlight of the network’s work so far. It took place on October 3rd, 2024, at the Naturparkschule Neuberg an der Mürz and was organised in close cooperation between STVG, the career guidance coordinators (BFB), and regional management. Participants came from within the network as well as from schools, companies, and institutions in the region.

The symposium pursued three main objectives:

1. to present the results of the Reality Checks carried out so far;
2. to gather the assessments and feedback of the participants;
3. to initiate a joint reflection on the future of career guidance and the role of regional networks.

The programme was divided into three phases:

- After the welcome and an introduction to the network’s activities to date, the three Reality Checks (MINI-MINT, Jobs out of the Box – MINT, *Bring your child to work day*) were presented (approx. 40 minutes).
- This was followed by an interactive World Café, in which participants discussed students’ strengths, missing competencies, possible measures for school-work cooperation, and ideas for new Reality Checks at four stations (approx. 60 minutes).
- Finally, the results were compiled and commented on in the plenary (approx. 20 minutes).

Results of the World Café

The discussions at the four stations produced a multifaceted picture and revealed key observations that are crucial for the further development of career guidance measures in the region.

- **Strengths of students:** Social skills such as teamwork, communication, helpfulness, and creativity were particularly emphasised. Many young people have a strong curiosity and are willing to try new things. Initiative and enthusiasm were also frequently mentioned – qualities that ensure motivation and commitment in internships or first work experiences. Some participants pointed out that these strengths are often underestimated, although they play a major role in everyday

working life. It also became clear that young people are increasingly approaching adults openly and assertively when appropriate spaces are provided.

- **Missing competencies:** On the other hand, gaps in basic school skills, especially in German and mathematics, were critically highlighted. These deficits make it more difficult to start vocational training and to cope with more complex requirements in companies. In addition, low frustration tolerance was mentioned: young people sometimes give up too quickly when faced with obstacles. Unrealistic ideas about working life – for example regarding working hours, resilience, or earning opportunities – also lead to disappointment. It was discussed that earlier, more systematic preparation is necessary to give young people a more realistic picture of the requirements and to prepare them better for the transition from school to work.
- **Measures for preparation:** Strengthening the link between school and practice was identified as a central task. In addition to theoretical knowledge, schools should increasingly integrate practice-oriented elements, whether through regular company visits, internships, or project-based learning. Closer cooperation with companies was also demanded to continuously bring students into contact with the reality of working life. The involvement of parents was also considered important, as they have a decisive influence on their children's career choices. Structured feedback loops were also proposed, allowing experiences to be systematically evaluated and incorporated into future measures. Many discussants also saw the need for clearer communication of expectations between schools and businesses, so that mutual expectations become more realistic and transparent.
- **Developing own RealityChecks:** Particular attention was paid to creative ideas for new RealityChecks. These included, among others, speed-dating formats with companies, in which young people can get to know different professions in short conversations. DIY elements where young people actively create or try things out were also proposed, as well as playful learning settings and interactive job fairs. It was considered crucial that such offers are designed to be low-threshold, easily repeatable, and regionally anchored so that they can be sustained. Participants agreed that emotional experiences and personal encounters generate the strongest learning effects.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The symposium made it clear that the Reality Check network offers significant added value for the region. Close cooperation between schools, companies, and parents is seen as a key factor in preparing young people for training and work in a practical way.

The results of the World Café underline that Reality Checks create authentic experiences that are appreciated by students, teachers, and companies alike. At the same time, they highlight challenges such as the long-term involvement of companies, the realistic expectations of young people, and the question of the network's sustainability.

The following next steps were agreed upon:

- Systematic evaluation of feedback from pilot projects and the symposium
- Further development of the formats MINI-MINT, Jobs out of the Box – MINT, and *Bring your child to work day*
- Establishment of a structured feedback system for schools, companies, and parents
- Greater visibility of the network in the regional context, including through additional events

