



COUNTRY STUDY

AUSTRIA

Country Monitoring Report

Austria is among the better performing European countries when it comes to education. However, Austria's education system is still characterized by low achievement of disadvantaged youth and insufficient market relevance of qualifications. A large proportion of young people, particularly those with a migrant background, lack adequate basic skills and there is a strong link between educational performance and socio-economic background.

Recommendations

- improve educational outcomes, especially for young people coming from different socio-economic backgrounds
- develop an explicit national strategy including all sectors on validation of non-formal and informal learning
- create equal opportunities based on social equality for all Austrian pupils and eradicate the high segregation in Austria's education system





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1. Promoting access and participation in LLL

Adult participation in lifelong learning is among the highest in the EU. With rates between 13 % and 14 % in the last five years, this is above the EU average of 10.5 % in 2013. More precisely, the participation rate for younger people aged 24-35, Austria has maintained a high level of participation of 22.5 % (against an EU average of 15.2 %); whereas the middle-aged people (35-44 years) have a participation rate of 13.9 % against an EU-average of 9.1 %). Finally, regarding the older cohort (45-64 years), the participation rate is 11.5 %, compared to an EU average of 8.7 %. Austria has also been catching up with the participation rate of foreign-born individuals, which was only 0.5

percentage points lower in 2013 than the overall figure¹.

According to our Austrian members however, it will be a challenge to integrate asylum seekers in the education system and labour market. Although there are a lot of highly qualified people, there are also people who do not have any experience with education system. Too less money is dedicated to offer language courses to every migrant. Another challenge is that young migrants have only the possibility to start school as long as they are under 15 years. After that age they are no longer allowed to visit high school. However, 15 years old migrants cannot attend adult education either, as there are too less places and students must be at least 16 years old. The actual problem is therefore the gap year between high school and adult education for 15 year old migrants who cannot attend any educational institution until they are at least 16 years old.

2. Vocational Education and Training

Austria has a very well-developed system of vocational education and training (VET) and it plays a significant role in Austria's education system. In 2013, 75.3 % of upper secondary students participated VET, which is well above the EU average of 50.5 % and represents the highest rate in Europe. The high incidence and quality of VET translates into an employment rate for recent upper secondary graduates which is also one of the highest in the EU (88.7 %, as compared with an EU average of 75.6 %) and a NEET rate (not in employment, education or training) that is one of the lowest (8.7% against an EU average of 17% in 2013)².

There is a strong framework in place for quality assurance in the content of VET. In work-based learning, the concrete contents of the training are

1 European Commission (2014). Education and Training Monitor 2014 Austria

2 European Commission (2014). Training and Monitoring Report 2014 – Austria.



regulated for every apprenticeship in a training regulation (Ausbildungsordnung), which includes the 'in-company-curriculum' – a type of curriculum for the company-based part of apprenticeship training³.

Moreover, Austria also invests in specific coaching measures for VET apprentices and trainers to reduce dropout rates and ensure that the training is suitable for young people. A telling example is the AusbildungsFit (Fit for Training) programme which addresses young people at risk of exclusion from education and work.

3. Validation of NFIL

Austria has no uniform legal framework to regulate validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL). Also, there is no general right for individuals to access validation initiatives as the access requirements for each initiative are defined separately. The development of an explicit national strategy including all sectors on validation of non-formal and informal learning has started only recently.

Nonetheless, in the education and training system, different Acts and Regulations include mechanisms and arrangements that enable formal education and training institutions to recognise learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings. Various ministries and institutions have developed measures and initiatives for identifying and formally recognising competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. For example, in 2011, Austria adopted the joint strategy on Lifelong Learning 2020, which is based on a set of guiding principles, benchmarks for 2020, and ten action strands, including concrete operational measures for LLL implementation. The development of a coherent approach towards validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is a central element in

³ European Commission (2014). Training and Monitoring Report 2014 – Austria.

this strategy.

Validation of NFIL has gained importance in Austria since 2010 and the issue has been increasingly addressed in public debate and supra-regional political initiatives can be identified⁴.

4. Early-school Leaving

Austria is performing very well in terms of early-school leaving (ESL). As a matter of fact, their already above EU-average rate fell from 8.3 % to 7.3 % between 2010 and 2013, and now stands both below the national Europe 2020 target of 9.5 % for 2020 and the 2013 EU average (12 %). Furthermore, the Austrian government successfully narrowed the gap between early school leaving rates among foreign-born and native-born individuals. However, the former remain three times more likely than the latter to leave school early⁵.

Nevertheless, improving educational outcomes and hence the employability of young people with low socioeconomic status, in particular those from migrant backgrounds, remains a challenge. Education outcomes are below average among 10-15 year olds. More than one in four young people aged 15 has poor reading skills; and the results are only slightly better in mathematics. Education underachievement remains significant among disadvantaged youth.

Currently, the Austrian school system is highly segregated and there is a strong link between the parents' education as well as income level and the academic success of the child. Children from households with high incomes are more likely to obtain a high school diploma and social selection in the Austrian education system happens as early as the age of ten, when children are separated into different schools according to their educational level⁶.

⁴ European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Austria.

⁵ European Commission (2014). Training and Monitoring Report 2014 – Austria.

⁶ European Commission (2014). Training and Monitoring Re-



5. NEETs

Austria's NEET rate (not in employment, education or training) is one of the lowest in the EU, with a rate of 8.7%, as compared to an EU average of 17 % in 2013. This may be explained by its very well developed vocational education and training system, as well as the Youth Guarantee in place.

Austria's Youth Guarantee is combined with the Future for Youth programme (Zukunft für die Jugend). All young people up to age of 18 have a right to vocational training. Up to the age of 25, unemployed young people registered with the employment services are entitled to a vocational training placement, job or further training within three months⁷. Another important measure is the above mentioned AusbildungsFit (Fit for Training) programme which especially targets NEETs. The low-threshold programme focuses on young people with poor reading skills and poor results in mathematics. It provides training in basic qualifications and soft skills, an intensive vocational orientation, the opportunity to complete compulsory schooling, and consistent socio-pedagogical support⁸.

6. Citizenship education

Citizenship education is not a separate subject at either primary or secondary level in Austria, but is offered as of grade eight combined with other courses such as history, contemporary history, law and economics. However, it is taught as citizenship education, a subject in its own right, in vocation colleges.

Citizenship education is defined as a principle of teaching for all types and at every level; the content parameters are decreed as a basic principle. This means that every teacher can be called upon to teach citizenship education⁹.

port 2014 – Austria.

7 European Commission (2014). Training and Monitoring Report 2014 – Austria.

8 European Commission (2014). Training and Monitoring Report 2014 – Austria.

9 European Commission (2014). Training and Monitoring Re-

7. Council recommendations

Austria has improved educational outcomes in all categories as measured by the OECD's 2012 students' skills survey, but reading achievements still remain below the EU average and the socio-economic background continues to have significant influence on educational achievements. The Council has recommended Austria for the last years to improve educational outcomes and hence the employability of young people with low socioeconomic status, in particular those from migrant backgrounds. This could be achieved by enhancing early childhood education and reducing the negative effects of early tracking as well as by enhancing measures to reduce dropouts¹⁰.

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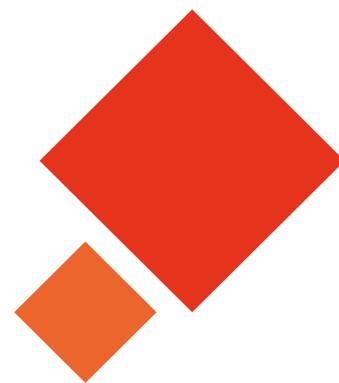
10 European Council (2014), *Council Recommendation of 8 July 2014 on the National Reform Programme 2014 of Austria and delivering a Council opinion on the Stability Programme of Austria*. European Council (2015), *Council Recommendation of 14 July 2015 on the 2015 National Reform Programme of Austria and delivering a Council opinion on the 2015 Stability Programme of Austria*.





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SOLIDAR, together with our national members and partners, has developed 15 case studies in 2014, presenting innovative, effective, sustainable and tailor made models to promote social inclusion, the social economy and quality job creation by adapting a social investment approach. In their daily work, SOLIDAR members and partners anticipate new or unmet needs of socio-economically vulnerable people and empower them to actively participate in society and to access the labour market.

These case studies gather strong evidence of the social impact of the activities undertaken by our members and partners to help Member States making progress towards the achievement of the social and employment objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the implementation of the Social Investment Package.

SOLIDAR Foundation in cooperation with national members and partners has gathered an examples of national programmes and initiatives that present the innovative and successful approaches that contribute to the process of building inclusive learning societies. The case studies are centred on themes of lifelong learning, civic and citizenship education, the validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and NEETs (young people Not in Employment, Education or Training).

