



# COUNTRY STUDY



## AUSTRIA

# Country monitoring report 2016

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### Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning

The participation rate of adults in Lifelong Learning (LLL) in Austria is one of the highest in the EU. Since 2010 the rates are gradually increasing from 13.8% to 14.4% in 2015, while the EU average in the 28 Member States is set on 10.7%. In Austria participation in Lifelong Learning strongly depends of the education level of individuals. 26% of people with a tertiary-level of education participates in Lifelong Learning activities, while for those with upper-secondary education level it's 10.7% and for lower secondary level the average is about 4.5%.

In February 2016, the *Austrian National Council adopted the Federal Act on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)*. The NQF intends to make qualifications more comparable to other European ones applied. Moreover it also aims to promote Lifelong Learning in all its forms; formal, non-formal and informal learning. It is expected that this will support the process of social inclusion through education and training of disadvantaged groups. Additionally, the objective of the education reform, launched in November 2015, is to provide resources to invest in education and training.

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not have any experience with an education system. According to SOLIDAR Foundation members in Austria, not enough resources are dedicated to offer language courses to every migrant, and accessibility to courses beyond the metropolitan areas. Another challenge, until mid-2016, was that young migrants only had the possibility to start school as long as they are under 15 years old (a new law has prolonged the obligatory education age to 18 years old). After that age they were no longer obliged to attend high schools. However, 15 year old migrants could not attend adult education either, as the number of places are limited, a certain level of German is required and the minimum age of the students is set on 16 years There is an expectation that the new law that will be launched for the 2016/2017 school year will address this "gap year" between high school and adult education for migrants who we unable to attend any educational institution between the age of 15 and 16 years old.

### Vocational Education and Training

The Austrian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is one with the highest participation level in the EU with 70% of upper secondary students participating, while the EU average is 48%. Its success is backed up by the equally high employment rates of VET graduates currently at 88.7%. High incidence and quality of VET has moreover an impact on one of the lowest rates of NEETs in the EU (young people who are neither in employment, education or training) with 9.3% against a EU average of 15.3% last year.<sup>1</sup>

There is a strong framework in place for assuring the quality of the VET's content. In work-based learning, the concrete contents of the training are regulated for every apprenticeship in a training regulation (*Ausbildungsordnung*), which includes the 'in-company-curriculum' – a type of curriculum for the

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef1602en2.pdf>



company-based part of the apprenticeship training.

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 good example is the *AusbildungsFit* (Fit for Training) programme which addresses young people at risk of exclusion from education and work. Moreover, efforts to support youth transition towards professional education were put in place. This is being complemented with a continuation of efforts to intensify youth coaching to help the design of educational pathways following the predispositions. Introduction of a transition year (Übergangsstufe) aims to facilitate transitions to vocational schools or colleges.

Since the beginning of the 2016/2017 school year, the new law on compulsory education and training came into force. Apart from prolonging the period of obligatory education until the age of 18, the Austrian state has introduced an obligation for young people to attend education or training after completing general compulsory schooling. As specified in the National Reform Programme 2016, this may include attending an academic or vocational upper secondary school, completing a dual education/training programme, or attending a recognised vocational or training institution, which should sufficiently prepare them for reintegration into continuing education and training offers.

This initiative could help to combat youth unemployment, reduce the number of youth in unskilled work and supply important low-threshold qualification offers. Unfortunately, young people who have not had a positive decision on their asylum application are excluded from the *Ausbildungspflicht*.

## Validation of NFIL

Thus far, no legal framework to regulate validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) has been put in place, neither a validation strategy was formulated in Austria. Nevertheless, it seems that preparatory steps have been taken. In 2016, the recognition of skills and competences has gained a momentum due to its usability in the context of migration. As a tool for enhancing labour market and educational integration. This is particularly relevant for vocational recognition. Migrants have a legal right on a valuation of foreign education qualifications and vocational qualifications, as specified in Recognition and Valuation Act AuBG from 11/07/2016<sup>2</sup>.

*“The responsible government authorities must adequately determine the qualifications of persons entitled to political asylum and subsidiary protection and process these qualifications according to the form of the respective qualification for the respective procedure, if the persons entitled to political asylum and subsidiary protection are not able, on account of their refugee situation and for no fault of their own, to submit the documentation required for the recognition and valuation of their foreign education qualifications or vocational qualifications and for the procedure of vocational authorisation. Suitable procedures can consist of practical or theoretical examinations, sample tests, work samples or expert reports.”* (Bundeskanzleramt, July 2016).

Overall, the validation procedures in Austria are not yet in place, and most probably Austria will not meet the 2018 deadline as stated in the Council Recommendation on validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. The consultations on the Austrian system have only started mid-2015, and national standards and procedures are still in need <sup>2</sup> <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Dokumentnummer=NOR40184806&Result-FunctionToken=2c4ba1d8-71f8-4d43-889d-c6532296d7d5&Position=101&Kundmachungorgan=&Index=&Titel=&Gesetzesnummer=&VonArtikel=&BisArtikel=&VonParagraf=&BisP>



to be developed.

## Early-school Leaving

Austria is among the high-performers when it comes to early-school leaving (ESL). While the EU has currently an average of 11% rate of early school leavers (10.1% native born, 19% foreign born), in Austria it is 7.3% (5.5% native born, 19% foreign born). This makes Austria to stand both below the national Europe 2020 target of 9.5%. Yet the challenge remains for the Austrian government on how to successfully narrow the gap between early school leaving rates among foreign-born and native-born individuals, as migrants are almost four times more likely to abandon education and training system than native born students. This challenge is relevant not only for the first, but as well for the second generation of migrants, and Austrian born children of foreign parents. As PISA 2012 results show<sup>3</sup>, there is an existing gap in educational outcome of young people with migrant background. One quarter of 10 year-olds do not meet national education standards, while another third meets the standards only partially. This of course has an impact on further chances in education and employability of young people.

To counteract this trend the Austrian Government has decided to invest in early intervention measures to improve educational outcomes of those pupils with disadvantaged backgrounds, by taking timely steps as soon as deficiencies arise and strengthening development of linguistic competences of non-native German speakers. The intention for these steps is to prevent any further segregation of students, given that social selection in the Austrian education system happens as early as the age of ten, the moment that children are separated into different schools according to their educational level.

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-at\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-at_en.pdf)

## NEETs

Austria's NEET rate (neither in employment, education or training) is one of the lowest in the EU, with a rate of 9.3%, as compared to an EU average of 15.3% in 2015. This may be explained by its very well developed VET system, as well as the proper implementation of the Youth Guarantee scheme.

Austria's Youth Guarantee is combined with a few elements. Firstly, the training guarantee ensures that everyone up to 18 years who is either socially disadvantaged or a slow learner and drop-outs or young adults up to 24 years, an apprenticeship position. If someone is unable to find an apprenticeship position in a company, he or she will have the option to enter into an apprenticeship programme in a supra-company apprenticeship training entity. Moreover there is a strong emphasis on the acquisition of social and practical skills to enhance NEETs' reintegration to education or the labour market, also support services such as youth coaching are offered.

The future for Youth Action programme (*Aktion Zukunft Jugend*) is an active labour market policy for young people. Launched in 2009, the programme is a wider-based training guarantee for young people between 20 and 24 years old aimed at opening up career perspectives through employment, targeted training or subsidised job offers. Through another programme "Ausbildung bis 18", similar measures are applied to people up until the age of 18 who aren't enrolled in education while obliged to do so. This particular programme intends to offer sustainable access to continued education and/ or training supported by comprehensive schemes dedicated to developing a sense of empowerment to complete the initial training.



## Citizenship education

Citizenship education has not been part of the curriculum, as a separate course, of either primary or secondary school till 2016, it has always been incorporated into other courses such as history or economics and was only taught from eight grade onwards. From the beginning of the 2016/2017 school year, Austria has introduced a modified curriculum including a compulsory module of civic education. The topic is part of the course on 'history and social studies' and will be part of the curriculum from sixth grade onwards and all types of schools. The overall aim of this decision is to prepare young citizens to exercise their right to vote as of the age of 16. The change in the curriculum will be supported by Pedagogical Higher Education Institutions who offer continuous education courses.

## Council recommendations

*"Austria has already exceeded its national Europe 2020 targets for education. In 2015, the early school leaving rate was 7.3 % and the tertiary attainment rate was 38.7 %. However, education outcomes depend heavily on socio-economic backgrounds. Inter-generational mobility in education is among the lowest of all OECD countries for which data is available. The drop-out rate of foreign-born pupils is almost four times higher than that of native-born and there is an additional challenge to integrate young refugees and migrants of the compulsory school age and above into the education and training system.*

*The high influx of refugees experienced in the past year has a number of social and economic consequences for Austria. While in the short run, the inflow of refugees is set to increase public expenditure and to create additional domestic demand, thereby raising the GDP, the medium-term effect on employment and growth hinges on refugees' successful labour market and social integration, also through educational support." (EUR-Lex, July 2016).*

Therefore the Council has recommended Austria to take steps to improve the educational achievements of disadvantaged young people, in particular those with a migrant background.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.LC..2016.299.01.0057.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:299:TOC>





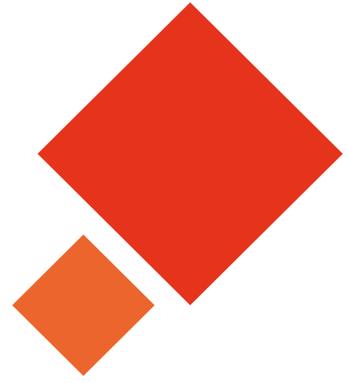
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As part of the Lifelong Learning Watch SOLIDAR Foundation has developed 13 country studies in 2016 covering the status in different Member States when it comes to; Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning, Vocational Education and Training, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (NFIL), Early-school Leaving, NEETs and Citizenship education in reference to 2016 Council's country-specific recommendations.

The SOLIDAR Foundation is the cooperation platform of SOLIDAR; a European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR brings together 60 member organisations based in 25 EU member states and in 6 candidate countries. We work together in Social Affairs, International Cooperation and Lifelong Learning. The Building Learning Societies pillar includes 23 members, covering 18 EU member states.

SOLIDAR Foundation engages through member and partner organisations citizens in EU decision making processes, empowers people through lifelong learning and VET, and voices their concerns to the EU institutions by carrying out active lobbying, project management and coordination, policy monitoring, research and awareness-raising.



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