

CITIZENSHIP AND LIFELONG  
LEARNING MONITOR 2019

**AUSTRIA**





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# ABSTRACT

The following report represents one of eight national case studies feeding into the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2019. The purpose of the Monitor is to take stock of the developments at European and national level in terms of citizenship education policies and lifelong learning policies. The Austrian report is focused on the general three main themes: digital citizenship, citizenship education and intercultural dialogue. It accounts for challenges, governmental approaches to them, and civil society approaches to them for each of the three themes. The Austrian case study reveals gaps in the level of digital skills for citizens and in the support received by teachers to include ICT in the classroom, though it puts forward a comprehensive policy framework

to correct these wrongs. The country also experiences worrying trends in terms of early school leaving and academic performance for migrant background pupils. Though the CSOs are working together with the government on some of these challenges, and SOLIDAR Foundation members boast a large number of projects to combat these issues, there is a gradual exclusion of the CSOs. The diminution of funding for the third sector, the lack of enforcement of national initiatives on citizenship education and the limited avenues for cooperation among the government and CSOs point towards a worsening of the stance of the civil society at a time when it is more needed given the new challenges experienced by citizens when it comes to societal participation.

## INTRODUCTION

The population in Austria has been increasingly diversifying since the migration crisis. This renewed focus on intercultural education and dialogue occurs in a country that already had paid more attention to citizenship education since the lowering of the voting age in 2007<sup>1</sup>. With over half of the Austrian teachers working in educational units with over 10% of the learner body being non-native speakers<sup>2</sup>, awareness of multiculturalism and inclusion to ensure adequate participation in society for everyone are much needed.

SOLIDAR Foundation members report difficulties in implementing the robust policy measures that the government has laid out on this topic due to growing nationalistic tendencies, to governmental instability, to an aging teaching profession that is inadequately prepared for this topic. Similar concerns are underlined by our members for Austria's highly developed digital strategy for education.

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1 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (2019). Youth Participation in Representative Democracy – Austria [online]. *Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency*. Available at: <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/52-youth-participation-representative-democracy-austria>. Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

2 European Commission (2019). *Education and Training Monitor 2019*. P.25. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/volume-1-2019-education-and-training-monitor.pdf>. Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

# DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Austria experienced improvements in basic digital skills attainment for its citizens, **with 67% of the population aged 16-74 holding such skills**<sup>3</sup>. The country is behind Europe's top performers, but the steady increase reveals a successful approach to digitalization. **However, 35% of schools lack a Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN) in over 50% of their premises**<sup>4</sup>. Even more so, only 68.3% of the novice teachers report having 'ICT in the classroom' as an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) subject<sup>5</sup>, and, over the entire teaching population, only 40.7% received such training during ITE<sup>6</sup>. Only 20% of teachers report feeling at ease to use ICT tools in class, the lowest share in the EU<sup>7</sup>. The teaching profession in Austria is aging, with 47.6% of teachers above the age 50<sup>8</sup>. These two elements related to teachers, and the fact that they report feeling insufficiently valued, lowers the likelihood of teachers independently incorporating ICT in the classrooms. To address this issue, the government included digital competence frameworks as mandatory for ITE development<sup>9</sup> and developed a national definition of digital competences<sup>10</sup>. However, there is still no requirement for schools to develop a digital plan<sup>11</sup>.

The problems related to digital infrastructure and ICT training for teachers have been on the government's agenda since the 2016 publication of its [Digital Roadmap Austria strategy for 2025](#). The comprehensive plan looks at offering equal opportunities to learners transition-

ing from education to employment by ensuring that they have appropriate digital skills, and using media literacy and an enlightened information culture to eliminate hate speech. The strategy discusses the enhancement of active citizenship and democratic participation through digitalization, but it does not define digital citizenship. The comprehensive strategy aims to train journalists in media literacy, to develop a strong legal architecture to tackle cyberbullying, to facilitate the usage of digital cultural content in education, to combat functional illiteracy as a basis for the acquisition of digital skills. This has tied in the measures related to digitalization up until that point while beefing up the Austrian government's approach to it.

The 2018 [Masterplan for Digitalisation in Education](#) emerged as part of this strategy, and is being implemented as of the academic year 2019/2020. The plan has three strands: software, hardware and teachers. It aims to include new digitalized teaching and learning content to complement the reformed educational curriculum which now includes digital skills acquisition from primary school level through all levels of education. It will also address the digital infrastructure gaps, ensuring that all schools have appropriate tools and facilities and provide teachers with the needed training to participate in a digitalized education. The [eEducation](#) reform introduced digital education and information literacy at all levels of education as cross-curricular topics,

3 European Commission (2019). Country report Austria 2019. *Accompanying the document 2019 European Semester: Assessment of progress on structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011*. P. 54. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file\\_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-austria\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-austria_en.pdf). Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

4 Ibid. P. 37

5 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019. P. 28.

6 Ibid. P. 88

7 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor Austria 2019. P.5. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-austria\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-austria_en.pdf). Last accessed: 22 November 2019.

8 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019. P.19.

9 European Commission (2019). Digital Education at School in Europe. *Eurydice Report*. Pp.11, 47-49. Available at: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/en\\_digital\\_education\\_n.pdf](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/en_digital_education_n.pdf). Last Accessed: 21 November 2019.

10 European Commission. Digital Education at School in Europe. Pp.26

11 Ibid. Pp. 92

but also as a separate subject. The [digi.komp](#), the system of cascading digital competences, ensures a balance among hard and soft digital skills, as it focuses on the usage of digital tools, of the internet, on ensuring safety of personal and others' data, on devices' hardware components, simultaneously ensuring that learners' creativity and responsibility are fostered through creation of digital content, responsible digital communication, computational thinking, problem-solving thinking. The curriculum is accompanied by [digi.check](#), a tool designed to allow learners and teachers/educators to evaluate their digital skills, providing a much-needed reflective dimension to learning. All educational school levels test digital competences in Austria, making it one of only two European countries<sup>12</sup> to have this evaluated and measured on a regular basis.

The government collaborated with SOLIDAR Foundation member [BFI\\_OOE](#) to provide [MOOCs](#) for adult educators on digital learning possibilities and social media in adult training since 2018. By consulting with external actors and by taking a lifelong learning perspective to the digitalization strategy, the government shows commitment to develop digital competences for citizens.

However, SOLIDAR Foundation members draw attention to the fact that reform implementation is delayed in the context of the governmental crisis that enmeshed Austria earlier this year<sup>13</sup>, while the September national election was inconclusive<sup>14</sup>. As of the end of November 2019, Austria still does not have a government capable of continuing the digital vision. In this context, and of the reforms being new and not properly evaluated yet, SOLIDAR Foundation and its members will continue to monitor the situation and pressure the local and national authorities to follow-through their comprehensive digitalization plan. The work of the government is, currently, supplemented by the provision of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) on this topic.

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12 European Commission. Digital Education at School in Europe. Pp.65-68

13 BBC (2019). Heinz-Christian Strache: Vice-chancellor caught on secret video. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48318195>. Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

14 Weise, Zia (2019). Party of ex-Chancellor Kurz wins Austrian election. *Politico EU*. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/austria-election-sebastian-kurz-party-wins/>. Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

## CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [BFI OOE](#), the umbrella organization of vocational training for workers' organizations in Upper Austria, has closely engaged with cyberbullying and hate speech through its 24-months long, Erasmus+ funded project 'Schau Hin', for which they partnered with organisations from Germany, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Greece. The project developed training modules for educators on using digital media in education, promoting active engagement

on combatting cyberbullying and raising awareness on the issue. The project contributed to the development of <http://cyberhelp.eu/en> platform. This represents a repository of information related to cyberbullying, namely what it entails, how to recognize and eliminate it. The platform contains lesson plans and workshop formats for formal, informal, and non-formal education to be used in preparing learners to protect themselves from cyberbullying and to contribute to halting its perpetuation.



## CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, BFI OOE, has been partnering this year with [Grand Garage](#), an innovation hub, in Linz, to organize the [coders.bay](#). This initiative is a coding and programming school which begins with a 4 week initiation course that is afterwards followed by 5 months training in coding and network security. BFI OOE

runs the 5 months courses, ensuring also that it has a gender balanced team of trainers. Over 80% of the graduates of the first edition of [coders.bay](#) have found employment afterwards. The second edition is currently running, and learners benefit from funding to participate in these courses from the Austrian Employment Service.



Source: Coders Bay

## CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, BFI OOE, ran a similar project to Schau Hin, titled [dataAPP](#) for which it partnered with organisations from Germany, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Belgium and Slovenia. From 2015 to 2017, project partners ran research into their countries of origin on the awareness of parents/carers about data protection, and how this affects the safety of their children. Over 50% of the almost 900 respondents to a [survey](#) were unsure about how their data is used online, who ac-

cesses it, where it is transmitted further and which data is collected by apps from them. The project yielded guidelines on ensuring data protection and privacy and an interactive learning game for children to understand their digital footprint and how all this information is used in relation to them. The platform is aimed to bridge children with parents/carers in ensuring that adequate conversations relating data protection are had, to promote a non-formal learning of appropriate behavior online.



# CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Citizenship education is approached as a separate subject in Austrian curriculum, though some cross-curricular competences refer to it<sup>15</sup>. SOLIDAR Foundation members report that it is taught based on a civics education model that focuses more on knowledge transmission rather than skill development. The focus is on a country's history and geography, and system of governance and constitution. Our members report being pleased with developments made at policy level on citizenship education, but point out that there are issues with integrating digital citizenship in the curriculum, with offering due consideration to the European dimension and with ensuring that all policies are implemented given **the aging teaching profession and the nationalistic feelings currently mushrooming**. The governmental instability further worries SOLIDAR Foundation members as it delays the implementation of policies.

Civic education exists as a separate qualification for teachers in Austria, with the caveat that incoming teachers must specialize in one/two other topics, with most picking history as a secondary specialization<sup>16</sup>, which is still proof of how it does not receive the same standing as other topics in the curriculum. The most recent curricular reform for the topics of history and social sciences/political education has

increased the focus on political participation, while adding teacher competences related to political participation as part of ITE courses<sup>17</sup>. Media literacy represents a cross-curricular topic implemented at all educational levels since the 2012 revision of the '[Decree on the educational principle of media education](#)'. However, it is striking that this media literacy strategy has not been updated in the past 7 years, and raises questions about its relevancy and implementation in schools. The Austrian government shifted its attention from media literacy to combatting hate speech, where it has a more robust initiative. As most EU governments, it took part in the Council of Europe's [No Hate Speech Campaign](#) since 2013. In 2016, the [National No Hate Speech Committee](#) was set up to coordinate the campaign nationally. Its members are CSOs dealing with discrimination as well as governmental officials. The campaign continues to be strong in Austria, largely due to this Committee. The campaign provides informal education on topics such as media influence on EU decision-making, the distinction between hate speech and freedom of speech, while generally promoting active citizenship and supporting various other, smaller campaigns on hate speech. It currently fills up gaps from the formal education sector.

<sup>15</sup> European Commission (2018). Education and Training Monitor Austria 2018. P.5. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-austria\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-austria_en.pdf). Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

<sup>16</sup> European Commission (2018). Education and Training Monitor 2018. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/volume-1-2018-education-and-training-monitor-country-analysis.pdf>. Last accessed: 22 November 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (2018). 'Learning to participate' through formal, non-formal and informal learning – Austria [online]. *Education, Audiovisual and Culture Agency*. Available from: <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/57-%E2%80%99Clearning-participate%E2%80%9D-through-formal-non-formal-and-informal-learning-austria> Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

# INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

The early leaving from education and training (ELET) rate (% of population aged 18-24) places Austria below the EU average, at 7.3%. The rate has been decreasing since 2009, when it was 8.8%<sup>18</sup>, and it can be attributed to its successful system of early tracking for ELET<sup>19</sup>. Participation in adult education (% of population aged 25-64) is above the EU average, at 15.1%, increasing since the 2009 rate of 13.9%<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, in terms of NEETs, Austria is a best performer within the EU<sup>21</sup>. These numbers reveal an increased effort from the Austrian government to ensure learners' participation in education. This reflects a learner-centred approach, especially through their early tracking system, which is aimed at uncovering risk points, and tailoring the educational experience on the needs of at-risk students.

Austria has a comprehensive [National Plan for Integration](#) since 2009, being designed by over 150 stakeholders representing migration organisations, social partners, citizens, local, regional and national public authorities. The plan is centred on intercultural dialogue and on ensuring that schools and the media promote this. Two examples of how Austrian schools are implementing this are the inclusion of language awareness as a transversal learning objective at all levels of education<sup>22</sup> and of intercultural education as a cross-curricular theme<sup>23</sup> but also the development of a curriculum for teach-

ing migrant learners in their home language, the latter being something achieved only in Sweden, Finland and Austria across Europe<sup>24</sup>. The implementation of the plan is supervised by [Dialogue of Cultures Task Force](#), which has been established in 2007. As part of the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, it offers expertise on matters of dialogue and promotes the creation of national and international networks between dialogue partners. The Task force depends on an ever-expanding international network of religious organisations, CSOs, academic institutions, and members of the academia, culture, media and the economy. These dialogue initiatives have been supported in the early 2010s by Sebastian Kurz, in his role as Secretary of State for Integration. However, since assuming office as PM, SOLIDAR Foundation members reported a less systematic implementation of the Plan, blamed on the rise of the far-right party and of nationalistic rhetoric. In 2019, Austria passed a [Ban on Concealment](#) which is at odds with the intercultural dialogue approach promoted until that point, but in line with the fact that the far-right party was part of the government. **SOLIDAR Foundation members are looking forward to the formation of the new government, being confident that if the far-right movement will not find place in the next government, then the National Plan for Integration shall continue to be implemented.**

18 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor Austria 2019.

19 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (2019). Preventing Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) – Austria [online]. *Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency*. Available at: <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/63-preventing-early-leaving-education-and-training-elet-austria>. Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

20 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor Austria 2019.

21 European Commission. Country Report Austria 2019.

22 European Commission (2019). Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures. *Eurydice Report*. P.18. Available at: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/integrating\\_students\\_from\\_migrant\\_backgrounds\\_into\\_schools\\_in\\_europe\\_national\\_policies\\_and\\_measures.pdf](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/integrating_students_from_migrant_backgrounds_into_schools_in_europe_national_policies_and_measures.pdf). Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

23 European Commission. Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures. P.20.

24 Ibid. P.19.



## CASE STUDY

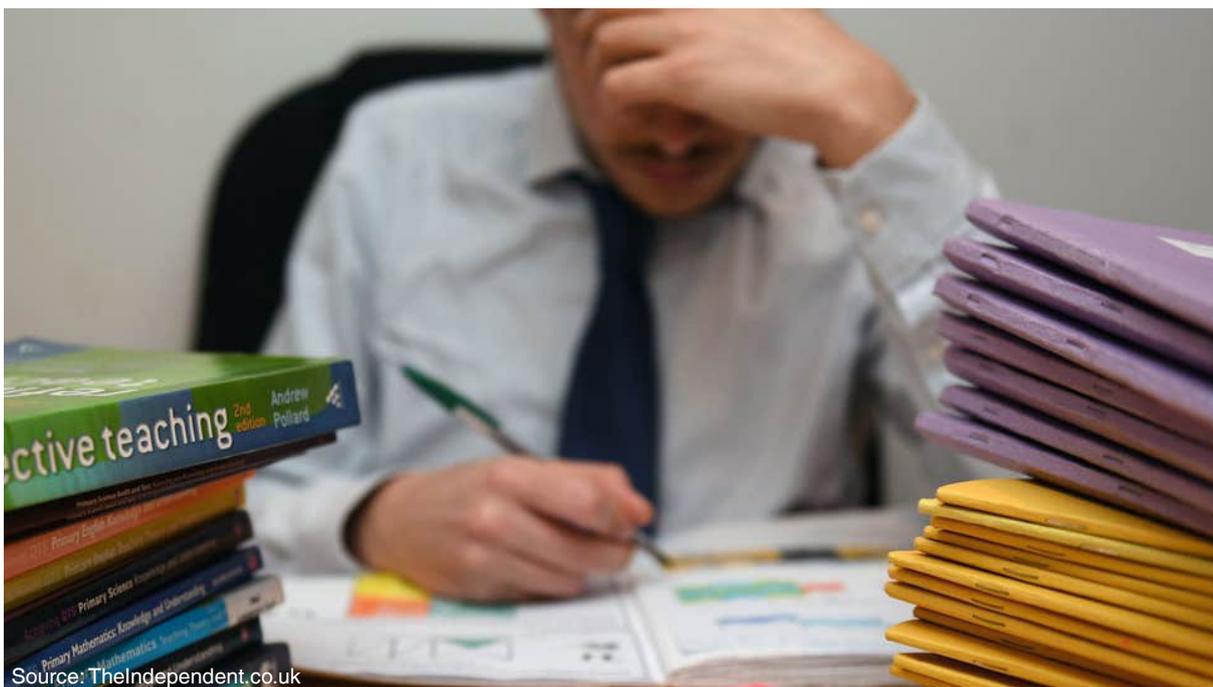
SOLIDAR Foundation member, [BFI OOE](#), has been ensuring that each of the learners qualifying in their courses take part in a mandatory component related to civic education and intercultural dialogue. Therefore, the learners are meeting European and national policy-makers and members of the parliament, are engaging in community service activities, and in cooking classes where their knowledge of various areas of the world is expanded. Furthermore, BFI OOE, provides support to people with

disabilities, ensuring that it contributes to the development of their psycho-social and emotional competences, as a way to meet their needs not catered for by formal education. The main activity through which they ensure this is their management of the largest sports club for people with disabilities in Austria, [Disabled Sports Club BSV BBRZ Linz](#). The club covers a wide range of sporting activities, boasts a number of 130 participants and has been operating for the past 30 years.



Similarly to the citizenship education curriculum, the policy level is well developed on intercultural dialogue, however, the implementation of this perspective in schools is lacking. This is striking especially since the school population is diversifying at a high pace, with more than half of the Austrian teachers already teaching in schools where 10% of learners are non-native speakers<sup>25</sup>. Segregation based on migrant background in schools is rampant, while less experienced teachers are sent to these schools, providing an inadequate support to those learners most in-need of pedagogical support<sup>26</sup>. The impact of this is clearly seen as the ELET rate for learners with a migrant background is three times higher than for the native learners<sup>27</sup>. PISA results reveal that learners with a migrant-background have scores that point to the fact that they are three school years behind native learners, which is the biggest gap in the EU<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, though the government has

set up a School Psychological and Educational Counselling Service Unit<sup>29</sup>, it mostly deals with psychological emergencies and it does not directly provide support staff in schools. **The ratio of support staff to teachers in Austria is 1 to 19, while the OECD average is 1 to 8<sup>30</sup>.** Students' psycho-social and emotional competence development is a part of the Austrian curriculum, however, the understaffed schools and the reporting of teachers that they do not receive sufficient training to operate in multicultural environments – with 15.1% of them saying so, one of the highest numbers in the EU<sup>31</sup> – makes the implementation of this and of the whole-school approach complicated to achieve. The situation is to worsen if the implementation of reforms and inadequacy in resource provision continues. SOLIDAR Foundation members and CSOs have tried to fill in the gaps by assisting learners with their more holistic needs by means of non-formal and informal education.



Source: TheIndependent.co.uk

25 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor 2019.

26 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor Austria 2019, P.4

27 Ibid.

28 European Commission. Country Report Austria 2019.

29 Eurydice (2019). Guidance and Counselling in Early Childhood and School Education – Austria [online]. *Eurydice*. Available from: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/guidance-and-counselling-early-childhood-and-school-education-1\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/guidance-and-counselling-early-childhood-and-school-education-1_en). Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

30 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor 2019.

31 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor 2019.

# FUNDING

Austria dedicates 4.8% of its GDP to education in 2018, a decrease from the 5.1% of 2009. However, across this period, Austria has been slightly above the EU average, by 0.2% in 2017 and 2018<sup>32</sup>. The decreasing funding is clearly insufficient, while it is also being reported that it is not targeted to the schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas or with a high population of learners with a migrant

background<sup>33</sup>. As a result, though investment in Austria is higher than in other countries, the academic results are more disappointing, revealing a misuse of resources<sup>34</sup>. SOLIDAR Foundation members report decreasing funding for CSOs on migration and cultural topics, and a frequent delay in the announcement of funding disbursements which affects the planning and organization of smaller scale CSOs.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



## DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

- ◆ Improve the constant evaluation of governmental policies on digital skills attainment and citizenship education, while ensuring their adequate implementation;
- ◆ Provide more ITE and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers on digital and multicultural topics;



## CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

- ◆ Increase funding for education and CSOs on topics related to citizenship education;



## FUNDING

- ◆ Provide targeted funding to the educational units with a predominant migrant background student population or most in need of additional funding;
- ◆ Increase support for NFIL in the context of difficulties in reforming formal education.

<sup>32</sup> Data from Education and Training Monitor Austria 2018 and Education and Training Monitor Austria 2019.

<sup>33</sup> European Commission. Country Report Austria 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

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*of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011*. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file\\_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-austria\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-austria_en.pdf). Last accessed: 21 November 2019.

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