



EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION
OF ADULTS

Country Report on Adult Education in AUSTRIA

Helsinki, 2011



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Introduction

This Report covers the situation of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Austria. It is divided into two sections. The section *Policy and Politics* gives an overview of the key policy currently in force, and also outlines the main legislation or political situation in the country. *Structure and Providers* gives a more detailed look at the organizational structures, and also outlines the main adult education providers, mainly looking at non-formal and informal learning.

We want to thank our members for their contributions to this reflection on the adult education situation in Austria as far as possible as of 2010/2011. Inevitably there will be new things emerging within the ever changing situation of adult education, but we believe the majority of the information provided will be relevant and useful for the foreseeable future. However, to keep the resource accurate and up to date we are open to suggestions to improve the texts. If you feel there is something you can add about your country please contact us via email at [eaea-info\[at\]eaea.org](mailto:eaea-info[at]eaea.org).



Overview

In Austria **public and private** providers offer a variety of complementary courses on personal as well as vocational topics for adults. The debate on lifelong learning in Austria is mainly held in the context of a **human capital** perspective, which strongly **links lifelong learning to economic issues**. Knowledge society, new technologies, increasing qualification requirements and demands for qualified employees are often discussed in relation to adult learning, especially related to the concept of **employability**.

The range of courses offered for the employed is **similar to those offered by secondary education**, and the objectives correspond to those of the respective schools and colleges. Regional non-profit organizations offer courses which impart key qualifications and provide people with **life skills**. Supply is here determined by demand. Further vocational training in enterprises is determined by the type and size of the respective companies and is often organized by the companies themselves. [1]

Politics and Law

During the 1998 Austrian EU-Presidency, the ministry responsible for education stressed the fact that education is not only about employability and promoted the slogan "**Education is More**". [2] Education was considered as the tool to support **personal development** by supporting individuals with general knowledge, skills, competence, values and creative and musical education. Nevertheless, it has to be said, that although most political documents on lifelong learning argue that "Education is More", the main focus within policy and practice is still on **employability** although the concepts of **active citizenship and personal development** are often mentioned. [3]

During the 2006 Austrian EU-Presidency, education was discussed in a broader context: "Education is more than employability; it conveys values and social skills that are required for citizens to become actively involved in our democratic society." By considering education as more than an instrument for employability, a shift towards the **idea of civic society** became obvious. However, the term active citizenship is rarely used in Austria; more often the term **politische Bildung** (civic education or education for democratic citizenship) is applied.

Contrary to school and university education, there is **no constitutional law** regulating adult education. The only federal law concerning adult education is the 1973 "Law for Promotional Measures" [Erwachsenenbildungs-Förderungsgesetz] which regulates financial support of adult education and public libraries.



Apart from providing support to adult education institutions - a task which rests with the department responsible for adult education in the **Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture** - the "Law for Promotional Measures" also contains provisions on the maintenance and management of Federal Centres for the Promotion of Adult Education [Förderungsstellen des Bundes für Erwachsenenbildung] within the **individual provinces**. [4]

Structure overview

The **Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture** is the main body responsible for general adult education, within which lies the 'Adult Education' unit. A federal institution **Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung** (Federal Institute for Adult Education) is attached to the ministry. Another role that the ministry has within the field of adult education is the provision of **second chance programs** (normally evening classes) within the federal school system.

Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education

'Non-Formal' Learning

- Bildungshäuser

The term "house" or **Bildungshäuser** (the general term *Bildungshaus*) is used to refer to institutions that provide the space for a variety of adult education activities. The "house" movement originated in Denmark, where it organized small farmers and provided them with an understanding of culture and history so they could act politically. Some of the Austrian *Bildungshäuser* are based on this Danish model. In Austria, the "houses" are buildings in which a **variety of non-profit organisations can offer their courses**, ranging across a broad spectrum.

- Volkshochschule

The *Volkshochschule* (VHS) or "**folk high schools**" have existed since the 19th century. Like similar institutions in Scandinavian countries, they provide a variety of courses in a variety of areas of **self-development** including languages, **non-vocational courses** in areas like art and music, courses in politics, IT and computer courses, and many other hobby-related areas. The VHS are sponsored in various ways, firstly at a federal level (the BMBWK), by the *Länder*, municipalities and the Chamber of Labour, however over half of their income comes from fees paid by individual course participants. The VHS have been in existence for a long period of time, and they almost always have a physical



building which means they are **usually very well known in their communities.**
[5]

- **Forum Katholischer Erwachsenenbildung in Österreich (FORUM)** (Forum for **catholic adult education** in Austria). As the federal organisation for Austrian adult education the Forum Katholischer Erwachsenenbildung is one of Austria's leading organisations on adult education. It serves the interests of more than 60 member organisations, provides catholic adult education programmes for around 1 million participants annually, and primarily operates through volunteers.

- Ländliches Fortbildungsinstitut (LFI) Rural continuing education institute

- Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke (RÖBW) Network of Austrian adult education institutes

- Volkswirtschaftliche Gesellschaft Österreich (VGÖ): Austrian Association for Education and Economics.

Founded more than 50 years ago, the VGÖ aim to offer connecting programs **between the end of formal education and the world of business.** The VGÖ and its regional network associates are involved on a local, national and European level to promote entrepreneurship and economic thinking. Their primary focus is on students and young adults, but also apprentices and stakeholders in the society.

- Verband Österreichischer Gewerkschaftlicher Bildung (VÖGB) Association of adult education for **Austrian trade unionists**

The Association of **Austrian Trade Union Education (VÖGB)** at the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) is mainly responsible for the education of workers' representatives, such as members of works councils. Through this they are supplied with the abilities, skills and knowledge necessary for their work within their companies. It also provides **training and development** for professional trade union officers and staff. The VÖGB offer seminars and events for workers' representatives which focus on currently important topics, such as social and economic policy, workers' participation, media, law, communication, languages, workforce representation, computer application, and European issues. Special courses are provided for specific target groups such as European Works Councils, Health & Safety Officers, employee representatives in supervisory boards, juries, members of youth councils, workers' representatives in social insurance, workers' representatives for the disabled, educational and cultural advisors and women.



Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

As in most countries **non-vocational adult education** is provided by a wide variety of voluntary and non-governmental organisations including religious groups, advocates for specific groups within the population (for example women, arts organisations, etc.). In Austria the big non-profit adult education institutions are members of an **umbrella group called KEBÖ** (Austrian Conference of Adult Education Institutions, the organisation of non-governmental providers of adult education), which includes BFI (*Berufsförderungsinstitut Österreich*, the Vocational Training Institute of the Chamber of Labour), WIFI (*Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut*, the Institute of Economy Promotion of the Austrian Economic Chamber to which all employers belong) and other 'non formal' providers as listed above.

Vocational Institutions and career-related training

- Foremen Courses

Foremen courses (*Werkmeisterschulen*) offer further job-related theoretical education for people who have completed initial training in the industrial and trade sector. Foremen courses can be considered as **one of the largest educational institutions** in this sector, only after technical and vocational schools and colleges. Foremen courses are mainly offered by **private institutions, training institutions of employers** (Institutes for Economic Development) and employees' organisations (Vocational Training Institutes); teaching is based on a **national curriculum**. Within the sector of regulated further education and training, foremen courses are nationwide the best represented educational facilities.

- Master Craftsmen Courses

Just as foremen courses, courses for master craftsmen (*Meisterschulen*) aim at enhancing technical knowledge and at preparing students for their **Master Craftsman Examination**. Master craftsmen courses are established at secondary technical and vocational schools and do not charge fees. Training at master craftsmen courses usually lasts for **2 years and ends with a final exam**. After two years of work experience graduates of master craftsmen courses may become self-employed. Master craftsmen courses are offered in the following areas: painting, sculpture, joinery and interior design, metal design, fashion design, ceramics and stove design, milling, baking and clothing, optometry and contact lens optics.



- Courses for Building Workers

The aim of further education and training of courses for building workers (Bauhandwerkerschulen) is to secure employment and to raise qualification standards of employees in **small and medium-sized enterprises**. New opportunities for raising seasonal workers' qualification standards during the quiet season are to be created, or existing ones are to be expanded. Courses for building workers offer further education and training for bricklayers, stonemasons and carpenters, they last for three years and are **held at colleges for engineering**.

- Schools and Colleges for Employed Persons - **Second Educational Pathway**

The second educational pathway provides adults with the opportunity to take **school-leaving certificates** of a secondary academic school or a technical and vocational school or college at a later point in their lives. Furthermore, it gives people with completed initial vocational training (obtained at a secondary technical and vocational school or through apprenticeship training) the opportunity to acquire higher qualifications. [6]

- Fachhochschulen

The **Fachhochschulen** (FHS) are a relatively new part of the formal education sector (established in 1994) which aim to expand **tertiary education in more occupationally-oriented forms than universities**. For the most part, FHS are oriented towards conventional-age full-time students preparing for employment. However, several FHS have developed programs for **part-time working students**, who attend in the evenings while they work full-time during the day, mainly aimed to retrain adult workers. The institutions with such programs appear to have roughly one-third of their students in such **evening programs**. As in other parts of the *Beruf*-oriented system, these are extensive programs lasting four years. In addition, the FHS have been designed to **work extensively with employers**; their programs generally combine classroom work with on-the-job experience, and they work with employers to build the content of the courses.

Universities

Most universities play **only a small role** in adult education (although of course adults may enrol). They have only recently started to recognise the potential of continuing education, or the education of professionals to keep up with developments in their field. Some universities are beginning to provide programs like master's degree programs for alumni, summer programs in areas like medicine and health, law, media, psychology and psychotherapy, philosophy, and other academically-oriented areas. There is also an association of university continuing education centres, the Austrian Universities Continuing Education and



Staff Development Network (AUCEN) although currently this makes up a relatively small proportion of the universities activities.

e-learning

Overall, distance learning and e-learning are **not well-developed** in Austria, with a few important exceptions. **Teachers and Students Councils** have opted for distance learning approaches in evening schools in rural areas; furthermore, there are pilot projects in some VHS. But apart from these exceptions, e-learning has not been extensively used.

References

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