

ISSN 2979-3343 (Online)

National Policies of Adult and Lifelong Learning and Education

Volume 3, Number 1
Austria



Author
Thomas Pfeffer

Series Editors
Michael Osborne and Shalini Singh

Introduction

This report on national policies of adult and lifelong learning is one of a series commissioned by Research Network 4 of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Lifelong Learning Hub. It is published by the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CR&DALL), University of Glasgow, School of Education, 11 Eldon St, Glasgow G3 6NH, UK. It is a collaboration between the ASEM LLL Hub, CR&DALL, and the PASCAL Observatory's Centre for Lifelong Learning Ecosystems, Adi Shankara Institute of Engineering and Technology, India.

Author

Thomas Pfeffer, 2026.

The right of Thomas Pfeffer to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Series Editors

Michael Osborne and Shalini Singh

Design

Front and Back Cover Images ©Catherine Froy

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this Report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CR&DALL, the University of Glasgow, the PASCAL Observatory or the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub.

Citation

Pfeffer, T. (2026). National Policies of Adult and Lifelong Learning and Education: Austria. In the Series: Osborne M. and Shalini S. (2026). *National Policies of Adult and Lifelong Learning and Education*, Volume 3, Number 1, Glasgow: Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning.

A catalogue record for this report is available from the British Library.

First published 2026

ISSN 2979-3343 (Online)

NATIONAL POLICIES OF ADULT AND LIFELONG LEARNING AND EDUCATION: AUSTRIA

Author: Thomas Pfeffer ¹

Series Editors: Michael Osborne, University of Glasgow, UK and Shalini Singh, Helmut Schmidt University/ University of the Federal Armed Forces, Germany

General Historical Background of ALE and LLL

Starting after the completion of obligatory education with the 9th grade at the age of 15, adult and lifelong learning (ALE) in Austria encompasses all forms of continuous learning and its certification throughout life for personal or professional development. From an institutional perspective, it is useful to distinguish

1. Academic education at the upper secondary and tertiary levels
2. Formal vocational education and training at the upper secondary and tertiary levels
3. Non-formal adult learning and training

Traditionally, descriptions of national education systems focus on academic education at upper secondary and tertiary levels, since academic education normally has a homogeneous sequential degree structure, which dominates the perception of policymakers and the general public.

Similar to Germany and Switzerland, Austria also has a strong formal sector of practical vocational education, which exists in parallel to, but separate from, the academic education system. The Dual System, a form of basic vocational formation that combines practical training at the workplace with part-time schooling, is the most prominent example in this sector. There also exist examples of higher vocational qualifications. However, the titles for these qualifications differ strongly, since they are applied to distinct professional fields only. The fragmented governance and the lack of a homogeneous title structure impede the systematic integration of the heterogeneous field of higher vocational education and, therefore, its visibility for policymakers and the general public.

¹ *University of Krems, Krems an der Donau, Austria.*

There also exists a wide variety of offerings for non-formal adult learning and training. Some of them serve the purpose of private self-development, some as forms of second-chance education to acquire formal degrees, and some as non-formal opportunities to acquire vocationally relevant skills. With respect to this latest goal, non-formal provisions are often used as flexible instruments for labour market or social policies.

Without much discussion or reflection upon the structure of ALE, the Austrian Lifelong Learning Strategy (LLL:2020) aims at mending some of its deficits, such as lack of equal opportunities, problems of orientation among career opportunities, and limited permeability between education formats. Attempts to collaborate across fragmented responsibilities for education and training faded away. Fragmented responsibilities foster self-referential behaviour of distinct institutional actors (e.g., different federal Ministries) and a lack of cross-cutting coordination.

Current relevant national legislation pertaining to adult and lifelong learning (ALE) and lifelong learning (LLL)

The Austrian understanding of lifelong learning (LLL) covers the entire lifespan of the individual, from pre-school education to retirement age. For distinguishing adult and lifelong learning from the totality of LLL, one could start after the 9th grade, when compulsory education ends (see Figure 1). Here, it is useful to acknowledge the differentiation of education and training in Austria into three sectors:

1. Academic education at the upper secondary and tertiary levels
2. Formal vocational education and training at the upper secondary and tertiary levels
3. Non-formal adult learning and training

In the core of academic education, there exist Academic Secondary Schools, which prepare mainly for studying at (public or private) universities. Colleges for Higher Vocational Education combine academic schooling with training for basic vocational skills. At the tertiary level, the Universities of Applied Sciences represent a more vocational form of academic education. The schools and the Colleges for Teacher Education are steered by the Ministry of Education, while the other three sectors of academic higher education are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Science.

The core of formal vocational education is the Dual System, a practical form of basic vocational formation at the upper secondary level that combines Apprenticeship Training in

the workplace with the part-time attendance of Vocational Schools. Following this practical career path, the exams for master craftspersons are higher vocational qualifications, which are based on the validation of informally acquired competences. Other forms of formal vocational education are more curriculum-based, e.g., Schools for Intermediate Vocational Education or Schools for the Training of Assistant Healthcare Professions. Political responsibility for vocational education is highly fragmented and involves, for example, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, etc. There exist modest attempts to consolidate higher vocational education and to transform the fragmented field into an integrated system, in parallel to but separate from the higher academic education system. (Pfeffer, 2026)

There also exists a plethora of offerings for non-formal adult learning and training. They can range from further vocational training, in-house training for staff development, forms of second-chance education to acquire formal qualifications, language courses, leisure time activities, sports, preventive health care, spiritual or confessional orientation. Often, non-formal learning and training are used as a complementary measure of labour market or social policies (e.g., up- and re-skilling of unemployed, integration of migrants, etc.). In particular, with respect to vocational training and to the specialised qualifications in the public sector (administration, police, military), the boundaries between formal and non-formal can sometimes be blurred. Providers of non-formal education and training can range from social partner institutions, public interest groups, private training providers, confessional institutions, etc.

Given this complex and fragmented situation in Austria, it would be beyond the scope of this text to provide a comprehensive list of all national policy initiatives, strategies, regulations, and legislation pertaining to LLL and ALE in one way or the other. Therefore, we will start by describing the Austrian LLL:2020 strategy as the most comprehensive concept of the last decades and add some other relevant initiatives.

Lifelong Learning:2020 strategy in brief

In 2011, the Austrian government published its Lifelong Learning 2020 (LLL:2020) strategy. In international comparison, the strategy came late, but it realised the EU-LLL policies in an exemplary way, since it coordinated various stakeholders and activities across otherwise distinct areas of responsibility, it covered the entire lifespan from early childhood to retirement age, and it comprised all areas of life and contexts for learning. This holistic approach is also reflected in the five guidelines of the strategy:

1. Life-phase orientation

2. Putting learners at the centre
3. Life-long guidance
4. Competence orientation
5. Promotion of participation in LLL

To make the strategy operational, ten lines of action were defined. In the last comprehensive monitoring of the strategy (Hefler et al., 2018), implementation results have been reported by following the structure of these lines of action:

1. Strengthening pre-school education: Action line 1 aimed at providing a comprehensive supply of free pre-school education and at establishing standards. Only small steps could be taken to expand the supply across the different states of Austria, and agreements between the federal government and states on quality standards were still pending at this time.

2. Providing basic education and equal opportunities within the school system: Action line 2 is aimed at basic schooling and primary training. Measures for youth coaching contributed to progress in lifelong guidance, and it was reported that all-day care places at schools could be expanded. The early distinction at the age of ten between Academic Secondary School (lower cycle) and Middle School, which has to be regarded as a pre-selection between academic and vocational career paths (and as an unequal selection by social class) remained unchanged. The Organisation of the General Higher Education Entrance Examination at the end of Upper Secondary School became standardised across the whole country to guarantee equal treatment and fair conditions for all school-leavers, as well as easier comparability of qualifications.

3. Providing second-chance education free of charge, helping to ensure basic competences for adults: Action line 3 comprised initiatives that aimed at adults by offering second-chance education for gaining basic educational qualifications, such as the Compulsory School Leaving Certificate, the Vocational School + Apprenticeship Training Certificate (*Lehrabschluss*) and the General Higher Education Entrance Examination. Support for these offerings expanded, but a nationwide guarantee of supply could not be achieved.

4. Expanding alternative transition systems to the world of work for young people: Action line 4 had the goal to reduce premature termination of training and/or education. In 2016, Compulsory Education or Training until the age of 18 years was introduced, together with a national strategy for avoiding premature termination of training.

5. Offering guidance to improve reorientation in education and vocation: Action line 5 focused on support for adults in acquiring post-secondary or tertiary qualifications. Measures comprise counselling services for continuing education and the recognition of foreign degrees, increased supply of part-time study programs, suggestions for the validation of non-formal and informal competencies, as well as support for non-traditional students in higher education.

6. Strengthening ‘community education’ approaches through community services and civil society organizations: In action line 6, performance agreements with universities and with associations represented in the Conference of Adult Education Austria (KEBÖ) could be signed.

7. Promoting learning-friendly work environments: Action line 7 could claim the consolidation of funding initiatives for in-house training and improved coordination with the public employment service as successes. However, a more comprehensive reform of respective funding schemes and improved awareness for the workplace as a site for informal learning could not be achieved.

8. Providing continuing education to promote employability and competitiveness: Action line 8 comprised case management for individuals, who were disadvantaged in the labour market, scholarships for skilled workers (in particular in areas of labour shortage), as well as educational leave and part-time arrangements to allow for further education.

9. Enriching quality of life through education in the post-occupational phase of life: Action line 9 settled for a few geragogic pilot projects and basic research on the topic.

10. Introducing procedures for validation of non-formal and informal competences in all educational sectors: Action line 10 comprised large measures, such as the establishment of the National Qualification Framework (2016) and the publication of a National Validation Strategy (2017).

Emergence, implementation and finalisation of the LLL:2020 strategy

Even if the first major EU policy documents on lifelong learning were published by the European Commission in 2001 (Memorandum on Lifelong Learning) and 2002 (European Area of Lifelong Learning) already, it took until 2007, when guidelines for a coherent LLL-strategy in Austria were commissioned and the social partners agreed on a joint position paper. In 2008, the Ministry for Education, Art and Culture published a comprehensive analysis of the status quo in Austria (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2008), containing

questions for the consultation process with all stakeholders. In 2010, results of this process were summarised in an expert's report (Chisholm et al. 2010). Finally, in 2011, four ministries of the federal government (Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK); Science, Research and Economy (BMWF); Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK); Family and Youth (BMWFJ)) signed the LLL:2020 strategy to coordinate lifelong learning across their distinct areas of responsibility (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur et al., 2011).

To communicate with all relevant actors during the implementation of the strategy, a national platform was initiated. In operational terms, the implementation was led by a task force composed of representatives of the four federal ministries.

The process was accompanied by evaluation and monitoring activities. The last of the monitoring reports was published in 2018, analysing results which had been achieved until 2017. Since the process faded out without being formally terminated, the final report envisioned for 2020 never came into existence. Still, the LLL:2020 strategy can be regarded as a success since many of its goals could be achieved, and lasting awareness for lifelong learning was established.

Beyond the LLL:2020 strategy

The LLL:2020 strategy cut across the responsibilities of different ministries of the federal government, of the states, and of other stakeholders. The complex coordination it required could only be sustained for a while, until the vested interests of the different institutions became dominant again. Still, some policy developments for lifelong learning beyond the end of the LLL:2020 can be observed. However, these developments became more particularistic, promoted by individual stakeholders. Rather than listing individual laws or initiatives, we describe some general trends or patterns of these developments.

Competence orientation: While the LLL:2020 explicitly refers to the eight EU key competencies as the general framework for lifelong learning, formal education in Austria is rather hesitant in introducing competence orientation. Legislation for compulsory schools introduced competence-based curricula as late as 2023. Legislation for higher education has been comparatively faster since qualification profiles for study programs had already been a requirement since 2002. However, the term “learning outcomes” became part of the legal terminology only in 2021. In both cases, no overarching competence framework is used in practice for communication within the education sector.

Independent of these developments in the formal education sector, the public employment service has been working on breaking up integrated characterisations of occupations into bundles of skills to allow for easier placement by shifting between different vocational fields and for targeted training measures to support job mobility.

Formalisation of non-formal and/or vocational education: Several examples of the formalisation of non-formal and/or vocational education can be observed in Austria:

- The introduction of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) in 2016 allows classification of not just formal educational qualifications but also occupational qualifications within a sequential, formal structure. This is of particular interest for degrees from vocational schools and for regulated occupations and/or professions (e.g., nursing services, master craftspersons).
- Passed in 2023, the law on advanced occupational education (*Höhere Berufliche Bildung - HBB*) allows for the development of new, practical qualifications at the level of tertiary education. In an attempt to tackle labour market shortages, advanced occupational education should compete with academic higher education. Both types of qualifications should be different in character, but comparable in status through attribution to one of the eight levels of the NQF. In the spring of 2025, the first qualifications within the framework of the new law are still under construction.
- In the past, academic continuing education in Austria used to offer non-formal education programs. Over time, these offerings have increasingly emulated the structure of regular academic programs, and also offer opportunities to accumulate short programs or courses to stackable degrees. The traditional distinction between degrees from either academic continuing education or regular academic programs has become increasingly blurred, at least regarding the recognition of degrees and certificates.
- In some fields of the public sector (e.g., administration, military, police), continuing education within higher strata has been upgraded to allow the award of formal academic degrees.

Validation and recognition: As part of the LLL:2020-strategy, a national strategy for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning was published in 2017. It articulated some concrete goals, which have not yet been realised so far, such as the promotion of procedures for a comprehensive documentation and assessment of skills and the funding for the institutionalisation of the validation strategy. Once more, a transversal issue could not be implemented in a context of heterogeneous responsibilities.

Already independent from the LLL:2020-strategy, amendments to higher education laws in 2021 significantly improved the legal basis for validation and recognition in this domain. Most importantly, it substituted the traditional focus on “equivalency of inputs” as a prerequisite for the recognition of externally acquired skills with a newly introduced focus on “significant differences in learning outcomes” as a prerequisite for the rejection of applications. This fundamentally shifted the burden of proof from the applicant to the higher education institution.

Social dimension in HE: The Bologna Process has raised awareness of the social dimension in higher education. In 2017, a National Strategy for the Social Dimension in Higher Education in Austria (Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Wirtschaft, 2017) was published. It was developed by the responsible federal ministry in collaboration with all sectors of the higher education system and the social partners. The strategy has a time horizon until 2025 and comprises three target dimensions and nine action lines:

- Target dimension I: More inclusive access
 - o Action line 1: Improve quality and accessibility of information materials
 - o Action line 2 Outreach activities and diversity-sensitive course guidance
 - o Action line 3: Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal competencies
- Target dimension II: Avoid drop-out and improve academic success
 - o Action line 4: Ease entry into higher education
 - o Action line 5: Structures of study programmes and quality of teaching
 - o Action line 6: Increase compatibility of studies with other areas of life
- Target dimension III: Create basic parameters and optimise the regulation of higher education policy
 - o Action line 7: System-related issues in higher education systems
 - o Action line 8: Integrate the social dimension into strategic planning for higher education and create appropriate governance structures
 - o Action line 9: Further develop student support schemes

Skills initiatives: Skills initiatives in the context of social or labour market policies are often triggered by immediate needs or quickly changing trends, both at a national and at a European level. They often lead to measures for non-formal or informal learning, which are - at best - only loosely coupled with formal education. Here are some examples:

- **Competence Check for refugees:** The influx of large numbers of refugees to Austria in 2015/16 created information deficits both on the side of labour market authorities, who did not know what to expect from this new target group, and on the side of refugees, who did not know how to locate themselves and their competencies in their new host country. Therefore, the competence check for refugees was created as a tool for the comprehensive, formative validation and documentation of all educational and work experiences of any given individual (Pfeffer, 2017).
- **Digital competencies initiative:** Following the Digital Decade policy program of the European Commission, four federal ministries jointly developed the Austrian strategy for digital competencies (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Wirtschaft et al., 2022). The strategy has three main goals: to bring basic IT skills to all adult citizens, to double the number of IT experts until 2030, and to establish a national version of the European DigComp framework.
- **Green skills:** In Austria, most focus on the development of green skills for experts and technicians, even if the transition towards a greener world requires green competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) of the entire population. To raise awareness of this problem, the 2nd voluntary national report of Austria to the United Nations on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) dedicated an entire chapter to the topic of Austrian skills initiatives for achieving the SDGs. (Bundeskanzleramt, & Bundesministerium für europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten, 2024; Pfeffer & Gössl, 2023).

Extent of devolution of powers in ALE and LLL to regions and cities, and to social partners

Differences between general and vocational education, on the one hand, and between the levels of the school system, on the other, have substantial implications for the political responsibility for individual schools or school sites. Municipalities and the states are responsible for the organisation and funding of Kindergarten, Primary School, Middle School, and less prestigious forms of vocational education, while the federal state mostly takes care of Academic Secondary Schools and Colleges for Higher Vocational Education (see figure 1). However, Austrian schools do not enjoy much freedom, since curricula, teacher training, as well as administrative and quality control mechanisms are rigidly regulated by the federal ministry.

Similar to other German-speaking countries, vocational education and training at Secondary Level II in Austria is strongly developed and highly differentiated, which links to the strong tradition and high status of practical occupations, in particular in the trades and crafts. This also leads to a strong involvement of social partners, in particular the Chamber of Commerce, in the licensing of occupational entitlements and in the provision of vocational education.

In the past, higher education used to be a monopoly of the federal state. In the 1990s, Austria was a latecomer in introducing Universities of Applied Sciences and Private Universities. Both policies led to a devolution of powers to regions and, to a smaller extent, to private actors.

Influence and/or policy linkages to supranational organisations

In the 1990s, international comparisons based on OECD statistics led to the foundation of a vocational higher education sector. After the turn of the century, PISA results were hotly debated in Austria due to methodological errors and party politics. However, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), and the like contributed much to the emergence of competence orientation.

Also in the 1990s, Austria ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), which was developed by the Council of Europe and the UNESCO for the European Region. The LRC is a key legal instrument regulating the recognition of higher education qualifications from abroad.

Austria was among the first countries to join the Bologna Process in 1999, which led to a fast transition towards the new degree structure and fostered other trends in higher education, such as increasing international orientation of the sector, strengthened institutional autonomy and external quality assurance, but also awareness of lifelong learning.

The European Union (EU) bundled and further developed many of these international trends, e.g., with its Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 2000), the Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning (European Parliament, & Council of the European Union, 2006), the European Qualification Framework (European Parliament, & Council of the European Union, 2008), and with its sequence of economic and labour market strategies,

which always come with implications for education and lifelong learning. Sometimes, Austria has been slow but also ambitious in implementing these policy recommendations.

Financing of ALE and LLL

The state in Austria has no general obligation to fund ALE. However, there exists a legally documented willingness to contribute to the funding of continuing education and of public libraries. As a result, the funding of ALE comes from a mix of different sources. Some of this funding is based on formal agreements between the federal government and the states.

For 2018, a study by Vogtenhuber et al. (2021) estimated €2.26 billion of direct investments in non-formal vocational and general adult education. From this total, 12% can be attributed to the state (federal state, states, or municipalities), and 14% to qualification measures for adults by the public labour market service. The study estimated 31% as the share invested by companies for in-house training, and 42% as invested by private households.

In the same year, spending on primary to tertiary education made up 4.69% of the Austrian GDP (OECD, 2021). These figures do not contain the € 2.26 billion of direct investments for continuing education mentioned above, since they are usually attributed to expenditures for social or labour market policies. One can calculate them as 0.56% of the Austrian GDP of € 385.27 billion in 2018.

To understand the peculiar situation of academic continuing education in Austria, it is necessary to know that public higher education institutions are entitled to charge tuition fees for ‘extraordinary’ continuing education programs only, while they are prohibited from doing the same for ‘regular’ academic programs, at least for citizens of Austria or other EU member states. This peculiar situation allowed for the emergence of highly differentiated, market-driven supply and even for the foundation of a specialised higher education institution for continuing education, namely the University for Continuing Education Krems.

The role of sectors and involvement of community stakeholders

Formal education

Institutions of the school system: Obligatory schooling in Austria comprises nine years of formal education and starts at the age of six. In addition, Austria introduced the obligation

to attend at least the final year of kindergarten prior to schooling (in 2009), and the obligation to participate in further education or training until the age of 18 (in 2017).

The Austrian school system is structured in three different levels, which comprise up to 14 grades or school years (see also Figure 1):

- Primary Level (grade 1-4)
- Secondary Level I (grade 5-8)
- Secondary Level II (grade 9-12/14)

Comprehensive schooling in Austria exists on the Primary Level only: When pupils enter Secondary Level I, a first decision for either Middle school or the lower cycle of Academic Secondary School must be made. In principle, both types offer general education and entitle for all forms of education at Secondary Level II, but in practice, chances are much better for those who attend the Lower Cycle of Academic Secondary School to proceed to the Upper Cycle of Academic Secondary School or to a College for Higher Vocational Education, which both directly lead to formal entitlement to apply for higher education. Traditionally, Middle School has been regarded as a preparation for less academic forms of vocational education and training, such as the School for Intermediate Vocational Education, or - in particular - the dual system of combining part-time vocational school with Apprenticeship Training in a company. Due to the wide range of vocational occupations, schools and colleges for vocational education offer highly differentiated curricula.

Institutions in Postsecondary and Tertiary (Higher) Education: Universities are the oldest providers of higher education in Austria and the only institutions entitled to provide PhD programs. By comparison, Universities of Applied Sciences are younger and more vocationally oriented. University Colleges of Teacher Education are a third, distinct type of higher education institution that still operate as subordinated units of the Ministry of Education. While universities and Colleges of Teacher Education are exclusively funded by the federal state, the states contribute to the funding of Universities of Applied Sciences.

In most cases, postsecondary education is offered to adult learners by Colleges for Higher Vocational Education or other vocational schools, in addition to their programs at Secondary Level II. The completion of a qualification on Secondary Level II also serves as an access requirement to these forms of non-academic postsecondary education. Examples for this category are VET Colleges for people in employment, schools for master craftsperson, or post-secondary VET Courses. In some cases (e.g., master craftsperson), the respective certificates also require and recognise vocational experience.

Non-formal and informal education

Based on definitions by Eurostat, one can regard formal learning contexts as part of the sequential degree structure of national qualification systems. In contrast to that, non-formal learning is still organised, but its certificates come without a clear reference to this sequential qualification structure. Informal learning can take place outside designated organisations or specified learning contexts, and without aiming at certification (Pfeffer & Skrivanek, 2018). In principle, organisations (e.g., universities) can cater for all three types of learning opportunities. In practice, they tend to specialise in one of the three types (see Figure 1). Along the continuum from formal to non-formal and informal learning, the diminishing extent of formalisation also leads to a decrease in documentation and statistics. As a result, the most comprehensive overview of non-formal and informal education is a tentative typology on types of provision and suppliers, undertaken by Heilinger (2000).

Public sector institutions: Public sector institutions, such as the public administration, police, military, etc., frequently organise their own qualifications. One example is the Federal Institute for Adult Education (BIFEB), which is subordinated to the Ministry of Education and aims at professionalising adult education. Often, the distinction between formal and non-formal is blurring, even if there is a trend to increasingly transform non-formal qualifications into formal ones, which can be integrated into a sequential degree structure.

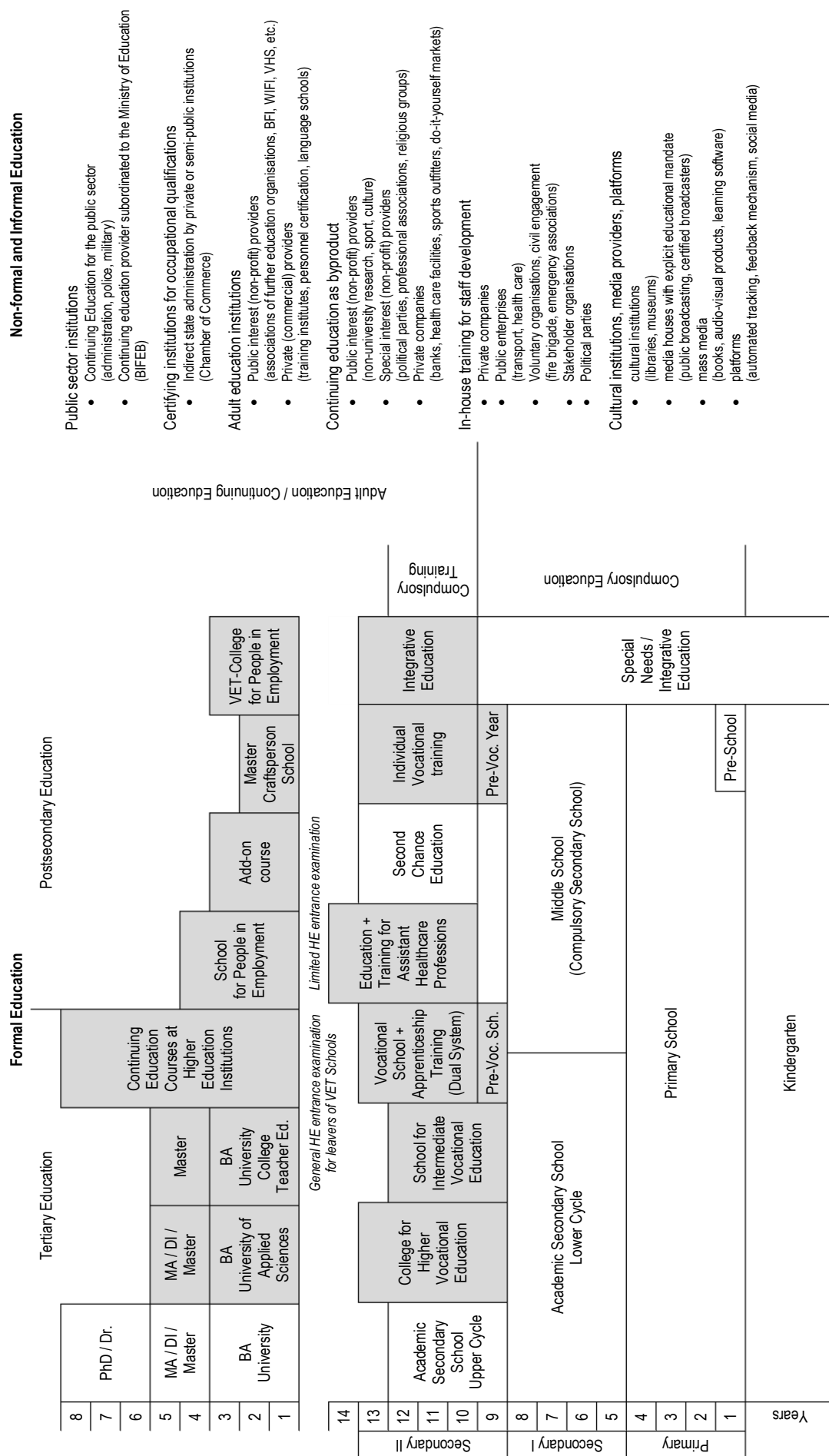


Figure 1 Formal, non-formal and informal education in Austria, types of institutions

Note: Grey blocks represent institutions of the vocational education and training system, while white blocks are regarded as general education institutions

Sources: based on OeAD (2024), Heilinger (2000), own figure

Certifying institutions for occupational qualifications: In some regulated occupations (e.g., the trades and crafts), the certification of qualifications is largely based on professional experience. As a form of indirect state administration, the respective certification procedures have been delegated to private or semi-public institutions (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce), which act on behalf of the state.

Adult education institutions: There exists a wide range of adult education institutions, which offer non-formal certificate or uncertified forms of adult/continuing education and skills training as their core activity. By tendency, most of them offer smaller, non-formal certificates or even uncertified courses. Some of these organisations are public interest institutions; others are private providers.

Continuing education as a byproduct: Public interest providers (e.g., research or cultural institutes, sports clubs), as well as special interest groups (e.g., political parties, professional organisations) and private companies (e.g., banks, health care facilities, sports outfitters) can offer lectures and courses as outreach activities, alongside their core businesses.

In-house training for staff development: Private companies, public enterprises (e.g., transport or health care sector), voluntary organisations (e.g., emergency organisations), and stakeholder organisations address their employees or members with in-house training for staff development.

Cultural institutions, media providers, platforms: The use of media products is of particular relevance for informal learning. At least public broadcasting and certified media houses have explicit educational mandates in Austria. The same applies to cultural institutions, such as libraries and museums. Far more media products (e.g., books, audio-visual media, learning software, automated performance tracking, feedback mechanisms enabled by social media) are produced without such a mandate.

The tracking of the effective implementation of policies

The quantitative indicators of the LLL:2020 strategy and the national strategy on the social dimension of higher education may serve as examples for the effective implementation of policies.

Lifelong Learning: 2020 strategy, quantitative goals and indicators till 2020

The monitoring report by Hefler et al. (2018) assessed the likelihood that the quantitative goals could be achieved by 2020 as follows:

- *Reducing by half the percentage of pupils at risk of illiteracy (from 28% to 14%):* even if progress is made, the goal will not be achieved, due to an increased percentage of pupils from migrant backgrounds.
- *Reducing premature termination of training and/or education (intended level of 6%):* the introduction of compulsory training and/or education until the age of 18 will lead to a successful reduction below the intended level.
- *Increasing the proportion of apprentices who gain a university entrance qualification (from 4% to 10%):* increases are observable, but 10% seems unlikely
- *Reducing the share of NEETs among the 15-24-year-olds (to less than 6.4%):* the target value seems to be achievable
- *Increasing the rate of employment among elderly (55-64-year-olds) persons (to 50%):* it seems very likely that the target value will be achieved.
- *Increasing participation rates in non-formal continuing education in rural areas:* the target value seems to be achievable, but the indicator is not very useful to assess the supply of continuing education in rural areas
- *Enhancing participation in in-house training for low-qualified employees (to 15%):* available data do not allow assessing this indicator
- *Increasing the number of higher education graduates among 30-34-year-olds (to 38%):* the target value will be achieved, but a reformulation of the indicator is recommended
- *Increasing general participation in continuing education among 25-64-year-olds within the last four weeks (to 20%):* increases are observable, but 20% seem unlikely. A reformulation of the indicator is recommended.
- *Increased share of the GDP for education (to 6%):* many investments in continuing education are regarded as labour market measures or social policies and are therefore not reflected by this indicator.

National strategy on the social dimension of higher education, quantitative goals till 2025

1. Increase the number of “educationally disadvantaged” students in higher education by reducing the probability factor for admission to higher education from 2.25 to 2.20
2. Widen inclusive access, increase the number of non-traditional admissions from 4,000 to 5,300

3. Promote gender balance in all degree programs (minimum of 10% men/women in any program, halving the number of programs with less than 30% men/women)
4. Widen participation, increase the percentage of second-generation immigrants to 30%
5. Widen participation, increase the percentage of students admitted to higher education to 47%
6. Increase the percentage of students whose parents have no university entrance qualification in international student mobility to 18%
7. Increase the number of vocational places at universities of applied sciences to 50%
8. Increase the number of self-supporting students receiving maintenance grants to 15,000
9. Increase the percentage of admissions of students whose parents have no university degree in medical/dental courses to 50%

References

Bundeskanzleramt, & Bundesministerium für europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten. (2024). *Österreich und die Agenda 2030: 2. Freiwilliger Nationaler Bericht zur Umsetzung der Agenda 2030 und der Nachhaltigen Entwicklungsziele/SDGs in und durch Österreich (FNU)*. Bundeskanzleramt; Bundesministerium für europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten.

<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/themen/nachhaltige-entwicklung-agenda-2030/berichterstattung-agenda-2030.html>

Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Wirtschaft, Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, Bundesministerium für Finanzen, & Bundesministerium für Kunst, Kultur, öffentlichen Dienst und Sport. (2022). *Digitale Kompetenzoffensive für Österreich* (Vortrag an den Ministerrat vom 2. Dezember 2022).

Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur. (2008). *Wissen - Chancen - Kompetenzen: Strategie zur Umsetzung des lebenslangen Lernens in Österreich* (Konsultationspapier).

Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Wirtschaft. (2017). *National Strategy on the social dimension in higher education: Towards more inclusive access and wider participation* (Brief summary).

Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung, Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz, & Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Familie und Jugend. (2011). *Strategie zum Lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich: LLL:2020*.

https://pubshop.bmbwf.gv.at/index.php?rex_media_type=pubshop_download&rex_media_file=442_IIIarbeitspapier_ebook.pdf

Chisholm, L., Lassnigg, L., Lehner, M., Lenz, W., & Tippelt, R. (2010). *Wissen - Chancen - Kompetenzen: Strategie zur Umsetzung des lebenslangen Lernens in Österreich* (ExpertInnenbericht zum Konsultationsprozess, Working Paper).

European Commission. (2000). *A memorandum on lifelong learning* (Commission Staff Working Paper SEC (2000) 1832).
<https://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/MemorandumEng.pdf>

European Parliament, & Council of the European Union. (2006). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 394, 10-18.

European Parliament, & Council of the European Union. (2008). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 111, 1-7.

Hefler, G., Luomi-Messerer, K., Steinheimer, E., & Wulz, J. (2018). *Wissenschaftliche Begleitung und Monitoring der Österreichischen Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen LLL:2020: Monitoringbericht für die Jahre 2016 und 2017*. 3s Unternehmensberatung.

Heilinger, A. (2000). *Die Qualifizierung von ErwachsenenbildnerInnen*. Verband Österreichischer Volkshochschulen.

OeAD. (2024). The Austrian education system. <https://www.edusystem.at>

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2021). *Education at a glance 2021: OECD indicators*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>

Pfeffer, T. (2017). *Identification and documentation of competencies to familiarise refugees with regional labour markets* (Host Country Discussion Paper - Austria, Peer Review on "Competence Check for the Labour Market Integration of Female Refugees"). European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

Pfeffer, T. (2026). *Höhere berufliche Bildung in Österreich: Strukturen, Potentiale, Stakeholdererwartungen* (Schriftenreihe Weiterbildung und lebensbegleitendes Lernen). University of Krems Press. <https://doi.org/10.48341/d3cs-9027>
Mit finanzieller Unterstützung der Wirtschaftskammer Österreich, der Wirtschaftskammer Niederösterreich und des Landes Niederösterreich. Schriftenreihe Weiterbildung und lebensbegleitendes Lernen, Krems.

Pfeffer, T., & Gössl, A. (2023). *Skills für 2030 zur Erreichung der Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. University of Krems Press.

Pfeffer, T., & Skrivanek, I. (2018). Why is the recognition of credentials not just a matter of good will? Five theories and the Austrian case. *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, 5(4), 389-422. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23254823.2018.1489673>

Vogtenhuber, S., Juen, I., & Lassnigg, L. (2021). *Finanzierung von Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung in Österreich und in ausgewählten Vergleichsländern*. Institut für Höhere Studien.

