

# National Report Austria

## LLL 2010 Sub-Project 1<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction: Historical background to Lifelong Learning (LLL)<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to primary, secondary, and university education, the Austrian state has not traditionally intervened in adult education. Since the 1860s and 1870s, Austria's classical liberalism era, models of state intervention have been powerful---at least for certain time periods---in nearly all other fields of education, economic and social policy. However, a classical liberal ideology free of influence by the state has remained in adult education. Absence of state intervention also means absence of public finance (to a large extent). Individuals and private organisations traditionally finance adult education. Only on a community basis, public institutions may take a role in supporting adult education initiatives. Municipalities are therefore engaged in the support of adult education as part of the general provision of cultural activities from theatres to summer festivals.

After the founding period of the general adult education institutions in the second half of the 19th century, the second key period was marked by the developments after the post World War II foundation of the Second Republic. This period consists of three principle phases (Göhring 1983).

In the *first phase (1945-1960)*, the main aim was to overcome the national-socialist system. The focus was on establishing a system to educate people who had been influenced by the National Socialists' propaganda. This task was assumed by the *Volkshochschulen* (VHS, "General Adult Education Centres"), by the institutions of Catholic adult learning, and by the representative employee institutions. The main characteristics of the *second development phase (1961-1970)* are co-operations between the free associations and a growing focus on vocational education and training (Lenz 2005). Demands for an improved status of adult education associations led to the third phase. The *third phase* can be characterized by stronger coordination and started in 1971 with a declaration by Austria's Federal Chancellor, Dr. Bruno Kreisky. He emphasised the growing importance of adult education that led, among other things, to the implementation in 1972 of the *Konferenz der Erwachsenenbildung Österreichs* (KEBÖ, "Austrian Conference of Adult Education Institutions"). At its founding, the *Austrian Conference of Adult Education Institutions* consisted of seven general and vocational education associations, while today membership has expanded to 10 associations. Seven associations focus on general education, while the others are vocational

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education associations. The three main players and associations were and still are the training organisations of the social partners<sup>3</sup> and the traditional *Volkshochschulen*.

### *Recent developments*

The following measures (Schneeberger, Petanowitsch 2004, OECD 2003, Lenz 2005) illustrate recent developments on national level.

- 1994 Establishment of the *Danube University Krems* as a university-level institution of continuing education.  
Establishment of the legal basis for the introduction of *Fachhochschule* (University of Applied Science) courses for people employed.
- 1997 Introduction of the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (examination providing general access to higher education for skilled workers and graduates of three- to four-year full-time Vocational Education and Training (VET) schools) to increase permeability of the education system (Federal Act).
- 1998 Introduction of the *Bildungskarenz* (a Federal Act on educational leave)  
Increase of activities of the General Directorate for Adult Education in the *Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur* (BMBWK, “Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture”, in the following often referred to as “Ministry of Education”) and launch of the *EB-Aktionsprogramm* (“Adult Learning Action Programme”), especially for second-chance education and educational counselling.
- 2000 Introduction of a 9 percent tax-deduction allowance (followed by an increase in 2002 to 20 percent) for training in enterprises (Federal Act, see also section 8).
- 2001 Comprehensive consultation process of the European Commission's *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*.

### *Demography and Migration*

Education, particularly adult education, is influenced by demographic conditions. Immigration is increasing and the proportion of immigrants is currently above nine percent (Statistik Austria 2005). This creates a need for more language programmes. The population is aging. In 2004, about 62 percent of the Austrian population was in the main working age between 15 - 59 years. Demographers from *Statistics Austria* forecast a reduction of 9 percent within this age group by the year 2050 (Statistik Austria 2004b). Furthermore, the amount of the young (15-29) and middle-aged (30-54) working population is heavily decreasing, while the working population aged 55-64 is disproportionately increasing (Industriellenvereinigung Österreichs 2004). These demographic developments show the necessity of focusing on adult education and learning as a lifelong process.

## **1. Theoretical Perspectives**

There is no overall or systematic discussion about lifelong learning in Austria. As in many other countries, the scientific discussion about education can be found in different disciplines ranging from sociology (e. g. Kolland 2005), pedagogy (e.g. Gruber 2005), psychology (e. g. Spiel 2006), to informatics (e. g. Derntl 2005) and others. Because there is no common theoretical discourse on lifelong learning, we refer to various developments in Austrian research.

In the 1970s, a political rather than a scientific debate took place around adult education, with discussions focusing on the main purpose of adult education. The traditional view, which is especially held by the *Volkshochschulen*, is holistic and sees the mission of education to liberate people, by helping them to develop their own ideas of humanity, human dignity, and peace (Schneeberger, Petanowitsch 2004). The creation of conditions for a democratic society is seen as their overall aim. In contrast, an economic view of education, as an instrument for qualifying the workforce, developed and was adapted by, among others, the *Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut (WIFI*, “Institute for Economic Promotion of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber”). The structure of the *Austrian Conference of Adult Education Institutions* still reflects this discussion, which was strongly influenced by the term *Weiterbildung* (“further education and training”) <sup>4</sup>, which was first used by the *Deutschen Bildungsrat* (“German Advisory Council for Education”) in 1970 (Lenz 2005).

In regards to adult education research, the differences between academic and non-university research must be emphasized. Although a strong base of university research on adult education does not yet exist (Lassnigg 2005), this is changing at the moment because of the 2005 establishment of a new university department<sup>5</sup>. The non-university institutions often focus on applied research that strongly relate to policy development. In the Austrian *European Research Overview Report* (Lassnigg 2005) around 75 institutions are mentioned as currently fulfilling at least one of the five descriptors for the selection of VET research in Austria. As primary research associations and networks, the *Arbeitsmarktservice (AMS*, “Public Employment Service”)– research network<sup>6</sup> and the *abf-Austria*<sup>7</sup>, an association of the five main VET-Research organisations, were identified. Both initiatives are quite new and still in the initial stages.

Recent developments give reasons for hope in the Austrian research landscape on lifelong learning. Already prior to the establishment of a new department at the *Danube University Krems* in 2005, the *Danube University Krems* published a paper on research needs in lifelong learning (Jütte 2005). Based on that paper, a (loose) national *research network on adult learning*<sup>8</sup> came into being. The network will actively take part in the first national conference on vocational education and adult education, which will take place in summer 2007. In addition, three Austrian universities<sup>9</sup> have recently established a joint doctoral programme in lifelong learning. The Ministry of Education is planning to support an online journal on adult education<sup>10</sup>, because the only relevant national journal *Erwachsenenbildung in Österreich* (“Adult Education in Austria”) ceased to exist a decade ago.

## 2. Influence of Conceptualisations & Drivers on LLL Policy & Practice

The political debate on lifelong learning is mainly held in the context of a human capital perspective, which strongly links lifelong learning to economic issues. The beginning of this close contact can be seen in the adult education discussion of the late 60s (see Section 1). Knowledge society (see Section 4), new technologies, increasing qualification requirements, and demands for qualified employees are often discussed and can be summarised under the key concept of *employability*.

In the 1998 Austrian EU-Presidency, the ministry stressed the fact that education is not only about employability and promoted the slogan “Education is More” (BMBWK 2001, 10). Education was considered as the aim to support the entire personal development by supporting individuals with general knowledge, skills, competence, values and creative and musical education. During the 2006 Austrian EU-Presidency, education was discussed in a broader context as well: “Education is more than employability, it conveys values and social skills that are required for citizens to become actively involved in our democratic society.”<sup>11</sup> By considering education as more than an instrument for employability, a shift towards the idea of civic society is obvious. The term active citizenship is rarely used in Austria, more often the term *politische Bildung* (civic education or education for democratic citizenship) is applied. One practical example is the enlargement of the responsibilities of the *Servicestelle für Politische Bildung* (“Centre for Political Education”)<sup>12</sup>. Until 2000, their task was to give advice on projects regarding civic education only in schools. Since 2000, the *Centre for Political Education* also offers their advice to adult education organisations.

Education for personal development can not be placed within the civic society or the human capital perspective. There is a recent tendency for general education organisations as well as vocational education organisations to offer more courses regarding personal development (Lenz 2003). The issue of personal development within adult education may be seen as a future link of the diverse adult education concepts that exist since the 1960s.

Although most political documents on lifelong learning argue that “Education is More” (BMBWK 2001, BMBWK 2006), the main focus within policy and practice is still on employability. The concepts of active citizenship and personal development are often mentioned but mostly unrealised.

### 3. Understanding & Operationalisation of LLL

The concept of lifelong learning has changed in the last decade, both in the national as well as in the European discourse. Although the *European Year of Lifelong Learning 1996* addressed a wide range of topics from ‘the importance of high-quality general education’ to ‘the promotion of vocational training leading to qualifications for all young people’, the activities in Austria were mainly used to underline the importance of further education and training.

In the *Memorandum of Lifelong Learning* (hereafter: *Memorandum*) the European Commission once again confirmed a broader concept of lifelong learning by stating “learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts.” (European

Commission 2000) In the Austrian consultation process to the *Memorandum*, again a shift to adult education can be observed. The process was co-ordinated by the department responsible for adult education in the Ministry of Education and although other ministries have been involved, the main contributions came from providers of adult education or their respective umbrella organisations (BMBWK 2001, 5 & 9).

Lifelong learning therefore has at least two different meanings, which you find on the national (as well as on the European level).

1. lifelong learning = adult learning
2. lifelong learning = a guiding principle for all different characteristics of learning at any age

To better understand the concept of lifelong learning in Austria and how it is implemented, one has to know that the department within the Ministry of Education, where, so far, all lifelong learning policy activities have been delegated, has rather restricted responsibilities (see section 5) and a very small budget (approximately two percent of overall education expenditures).

This leads to the situation that, on the one hand, Austria is very keen to adopt EU lifelong learning policy rhetoric; but, on the other hand, there is no implementation of this policy at the national level. There is no independent Austrian lifelong learning policy and it is hard to identify any important measures, which are directly initiated by this policy. The official documents will not state this (see section 8), but in interviews with experts and stakeholders in the field, they confirm that the real impact of the *Year of Lifelong Learning*, the consultation of the *Memorandum* and the *OECD country review* (OECD 2003) is rather low – although these were the core of Austria’s lifelong learning policy.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning only plays a minor role in Austria, in comparison to other EU member states, both on the level of pilot projects and expert discussions. Several reasons have been given on why that is the case; e.g. because the Austrian education system focuses on initial education and alternative learning pathways have no tradition; or, because the dual system already incorporates a high amount of informal learning, so that there is no need to have additional procedures to recognize this form of learning. Certainly there are many more good reasons for introducing a system of recognition of non-formal and informal learning (see section 9), but so far nothing has been developed on a national level. There are at least some pilot projects experimenting with recognition of individual competencies (Markowitsch, Jonach 2005). Austria’s present certification policy can be summarised as “external examination”: almost all degrees (from the school system and dual system, but not university degrees) might be obtained without participating in the relevant programmes or courses, but not without passing the same exam (external examination) as required in the regular system.

Beside the lack of a national system for the recognition of informal learning, Austria’s educational policy and practice has limited differentiation in formal, non-formal and informal learning. The main structure of adult learning usually would encompass the following categories and providers:

- a) training in enterprises (mainly financed by the enterprises and offered by the enterprises themselves or by private training providers, above all the *WIFI*);
- b) vocational and non-vocational adult education (often strictly separated, mainly financed by the individuals and offered by private training providers as *WIFI*, *BFI*, *Volkshochschulen*);
- c) labour market programmes for the unemployed (financed by the Public Employment Service and offered by private training provider, above all the *BFI*); and
- d) second-chance programmes, and courses at universities of applied sciences and universities (financed mainly by the Ministry of Education and offered by schools, universities of applied sciences and universities).

Only the latter one (d) provides formal training<sup>13</sup>. Both in terms of participation rate and financing, this is the smallest part of adult learning in Austria and is almost totally independent of the other parts. Also, the other parts (except a and b) are rather independent from each other due the fact of different financing structures (private, public, PES).

## 4. Significance of Key Concepts in LLL Policy

### *Learning citizens – active citizen - civic education*

The notion of “learning citizens“ is hardly used in Austria, probably also due to the fact that there is no sounding translation. However, there is a whole range of terms which might be discussed in place of learning citizen such as active citizen(ship), civic education, education for democratic citizenship, and so on. The key term used in Austria is *politische Bildung* (education for democratic citizenship or civic education, see also section 2) that in most schools is an integral part of the curriculum. The law states “Austrian schools have to make appropriate provision for the civic education of their pupils and students. Civic education is a prerequisite both for individual development and for the development of society as a whole...”<sup>14</sup>

### *Knowledge society - Learning Society – Employability*

In the last decade “Knowledge society” has certainly been and still is the central concept in arguing the necessity of lifelong learning in Austria (see also section 2). At a conference during the *Memorandum* consultation process in 2001, the general director and national coordinator of the consultation process titled his opening speech, “Towards the knowledge society. Lifelong learning in Austria” (Gruber 2005). Consequently, the conceptual liaison of knowledge society and lifelong learning has been strengthened. In their 2004 strategy paper on lifelong learning<sup>15</sup> (which, by the way, is the only official political strategy paper on lifelong learning so far), the *Industriellenvereinigung Österreichs* (“Federation of Austrian Industry”) introduced lifelong learning mainly by referring to the *Wissensgesellschaft* (which they translated “knowledge-based economy”). From the political perspective, *employability* is always mentioned at the same time as lifelong learning. (*Industriellenvereinigung*

Österreich 2005) In contrast, labour representatives explicitly stressed in the consultation to the *Memorandum* that orientation towards active citizenship and social inclusion should be as equally important as employability (Bauer 2001). Beside “knowledge society” often the terms *Lernende Gesellschaft* and *Bildungsgesellschaft* (learning society) are used, presumably if the economic dimension should be less emphasized.

### ***Learning districts, cities and regions***

Learning region is not a central concept in lifelong learning policy, and there is no national policy position concerning learning regions. Despite the lack of co-ordination at national level, there is a large number of initiatives on a project base, partly steered by the communities, often co-financed by EU-funds (Steiner, Egger-Steiner 2004). Very recently, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water<sup>16</sup> took up the challenge of bringing together some of these initiatives; however, by doing this, there is a drift to re-interpret the concept into “learning in rural settings”. Apart from recent developments under the category of learning regions, it must be stated that there are various initiatives within the community development tradition.

### ***Learning organisations***

The concept of learning organisations has slowly but surely found its way into Austria’s educational discourse. Wenger’ concept of communities-of-practice (Wenger 1999) provided a missing link for debates on learning in enterprises and learning in educational institutes and also inspired the work which has been done on informal learning. Though the learning organisation concept is widespread in Austria, within educational policy it would mainly come in connection with informal learning. The concept certainly does not play a significant role in lifelong learning policy. It might be occasionally referred to in regards to initiatives for fostering training in enterprises.<sup>17</sup>

## **5. Legislation & Policy**

In 1975, when the only existing law<sup>18</sup> on general adult education was enacted, its main function was to provide a legal basis for the central state’s financial support for general adult education. Autonomy of the traditional adult education sector was secured by designating an umbrella organisation, the *Austrian Conference of Adult Education Institutions* to allocate public funds among individual institutions. In 1975, adult education funding was part of the increasing state support for cultural activities in general and political education in particular (e.g. by initiating, in 1972, funding for educational institutions of the political parties).

As a result of this law and of the historical background described in the introduction, a rather complex structure of actors and networks in adult education can be found. Above all, non-governmental organisations are of central importance both in general and vocational further education and training. These organisations include the *Volkshochschulen*, organisations of the social partner (e.g. *BFI*, *WIFI*) as well as churches (see also the introduction and section 2). In the past two decades, in addition to the big traditional organisa-

tions, a great number of profit and non-profit training providers have developed (Markowitsch, Hefler 2006). Among the public actors in lifelong learning, the most important are discussed in the following section.<sup>19</sup>

The Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (subsequently: Ministry of Education) is responsible for general adult education. Within the ministry, the unit “Adult Education” is responsible. The unit is rather small (seven persons in the core staff) and has a limited operating budget. A federal institution *Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung* (Federal Institute for Adult Education)<sup>20</sup> is attached to the ministry, but has lost influence over the years. Another ministry activity in the field of adult education is the provision of second chance programs (normally evening classes) within the federal school system.

In 2000, the former Ministry of Higher Education and Research became part of the Ministry of Education again (for the first time since 1972). The establishment of the Danube University Krems as an institution of post-graduate education, a sharply increasing number of post-graduate offers by universities in general, and the increasing provision of programs for employed students at universities of applied science make the higher education part of the Ministry of Education a new player in lifelong learning policy.

A unit of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour is responsible for the regulation of competence profiles and job profiles in the dual system. The unit is also in charge of continuous vocational training in enterprises, but this specific policy field has been neglected so far. Since 2000, this ministry is also in charge of labour market policy, which has developed as the main field of state activity in further education and training within the last three decades.

In Austria, labour market policy has been of major importance since World War II. From the 1970s till the middle of the 1980s, labour market policy has been mainly understood within the framework of the so-called *Austro-Keynesianism* that fights against unemployment mainly by anti-cyclical enlargement of public investments. In the 1970s, institutions for vocational training have been founded to overcome imbalances of supply and demand of qualifications of the workforce. Originally, retraining programs have been offered mainly for employed and unemployed in declining occupations (e.g. mining), therefore a legal foundation has been enacted (i.e. in 1968: *Arbeitsmarktförderungsgesetz*, “Labour Market Promotion Act”). In the 1980s, programmes were established to reduce long-term unemployment.

When Austria joined the EU, the *Austro-Keynesianism* policy lost its influence. Active labour market policies, focusing on the employability and activation of the unemployed, have become, step by step, the major factor within employment policy. Further training of unemployed is therefore crucial. Austria is completely in line with *European Labour Market Policy* (MISEP 2002). The number of people in training measures has increased consequently from 12 000 (yearly average of participants) in 1990 to 49 000 in 2005. Public spending on training for unemployed is around a fifth of the total spending on further training in Austria and 25 times as much as public spending on general adult education. Given the number of participants, training of the unemployed has become a major point



of reference for lifelong learning in the public discourse, associated mainly with negative attributes such as compulsory participation and inefficient training.

The responsible ministry and the independently organised *Public Employment Service*, therefore have the potential to become, by far, the most important actors in lifelong learning policy. However, actual labour market policy-orientated training is not influenced at all by a broader lifelong learning policy perspective. Although on a rhetorical level, European lifelong learning policy, together with arguments coming directly from the EU employment policy, is used to argue for increasing public spending for unemployment training.

In regards to EU policy influence, higher education has adopted EU policies (e.g. the *Bologna Declaration*) more quickly than vocational education and general education. A major task at all policy levels is participating in EU programmes and using EU funds. Certain OECD projects, e.g. the PISA programme, and certain reviews also have an impact on the national education policy, though daily policy issues are not very affected by OECD policies or indicators.

## 6. Main Patterns of Provision & Participation

Due to the lack of time series data, no statements can be made about the major developments of participation in adult learning. The data on the Austrian labour force indicates qualifications have improved greatly in the last three decades. The fact that it is more likely for higher-qualified people to participate in trainings, suggest that there also has been an increase in the participation in adult learning (for recent figures see also section 8).

In September 2005, EUROSTAT, with reference to data collected in 2003 (Statistik Austria 2004), noted that 89 percent of the Austrian population aged between 25 and 64 years were active in the field of continuing education within the last 12 months. This high proportion (average EU-25: 42 percent) is mainly caused by the high rate of informal learning (86 percent, average EU-15: 33 percent) and more specifically, in how educational broadcasting is understood in Austria (Markowitsch, Hefler 2006). Twenty-five percent of the observed age groups participated in non-formal learning – either general or vocational – within the last 12 months (average EU-25: 16,5 percent).

The data indicates that the higher the educational level, the higher the participation in non-formal learning (high level of education: 45 percent; low level of education: 9 percent). Furthermore, employed people (30 percent) take part in non-formal education more often than the unemployed (25 percent) and the inactive (11 percent).

About three percent of the Austrian population aged between 25 and 64 participate in formal education, which leads to a higher level within the educational system (e. g. general qualification for university entrance). This rate is below the European average of 4.4 percent.

Since there are hardly any adults in formal education and the current data regarding informal learning is skewed, (Markowitsch, Hefler 2006) the focus here is on participation in non-formal education.

Table 1: Participation rates in non-formal education in 2003 by gender and age

Age	non-formal		non-formal vocational		non-formal general	
	men	women	Men	Women	men	women
25-34	32.4	29.6	21.3	17.0	6.8	8.1
35-44	31.4	29.5	21.4	17.7	5.5	7.4
45-54	25.1	23.8	17.3	13.1	4.8	7.0
55-64	12.4	12.1	5.5	2.6	5.9	8.8
65+	4.3	3.8	0.2	0.2	3.9	3.6
Overall	22.4	19.4	14.2	10.0	5.4	6.8

Source: Statistik Austria 2004

Participation by *men and women* aged 25 and over shows slight differences. Between the ages of 25 and 54 it is more likely for men to participate in non-formal vocational education than women. This gap can be explained by the “gender-specific percentage of gainful employment”. (OECD 2003, 29)

Age is a major factor for participation in non-formal education. As different surveys show, a significant drop occurs for people aged 50 and over (OECD 2004). This decline in participation presents one of the major challenges for Austria, especially because the employment rate among people aged 55+ is, compared to other European countries, relatively low.

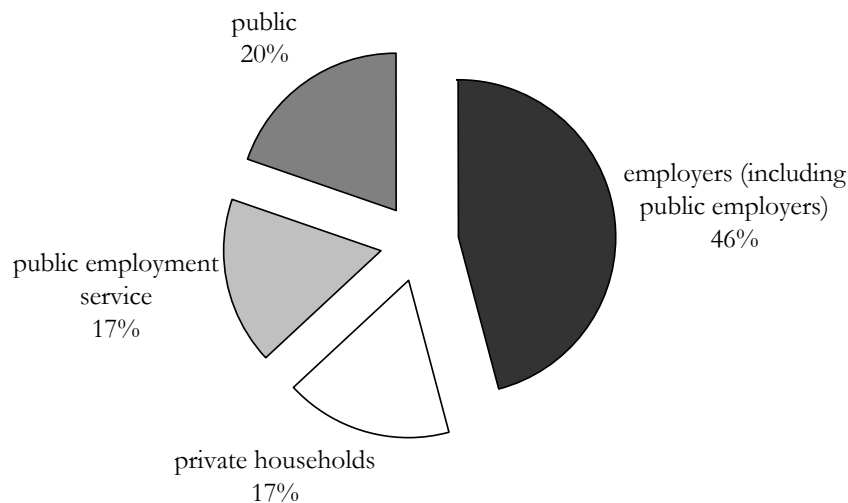
The two largest *minorities* in Austria are people with origins in the former Yugoslavia and Turkey. For those over 15 years old, relatively few members of these ethnic minorities participate in education programs. While 22 percent of all Austrians over 15 years old participate in non-formal education, only 11.7 percent of people from former Yugoslavia and 12.6 percent of people from Turkey participate.

The *Mikrozensus 2003* (Statistik Austria 2004) found that 15 percent of the Austrian population over 15 years old had attended ICT-courses within the last 12 months. To improve the *participation in ICT*, the Ministry of Education has started specific programmes<sup>21</sup>, but they mainly address the formal system, i.e. schools and universities.

Each year about 40 percent of a youth cohort finishes secondary school and achieves the *Reifeprüfung* (upper secondary school leaving exam which provides general access to higher education), which is the main route to higher education. For people coming from the dual system, the *Berufsreifeprüfung*<sup>22</sup> was implemented in 1997 and is mainly offered by adult education organisations.

The estimated *expenditure* on further education in Austria for 2004 is 1,480,000 Euro. This sum is spent by the employers (46 percent), by the public (20 percent), by private households (17 percent) and by the state's employment service (17 percent).

Figure 1: Estimated expenditure on further education and training in Austria



Sources: 3s research laboratory, different data sources of different years, rated for 2004.

Since Austria did not participate in the IALS (Adult Literacy Survey), there is no valid data about illiteracy available in Austria. The UNESCO estimates that one to three percent of an industrialized country's population is illiterate. This would mean that there could be up to 300,000 illiterate persons<sup>23</sup> in Austria. Experts in the field of illiteracy estimate that Austria has a much higher number: 600,000<sup>24</sup>.

In 2003, at the start of the worldwide literacy period by the UNESCO, a literacy network was founded in Austria<sup>25</sup>. Members of the network are educational organisations, which offer classes for illiterate persons.

Until recently, data on adult learning has been rather poor. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, there is insufficient data for a time series analysis. Furthermore, illiteracy has long been a taboo subject in Austria, and data regarding illiteracy still does not exist. Very recently, with European surveys (such as the *Ad hoc Module on Lifelong Learning* within the Labour Force Survey or the *Continuing Vocational Training Survey*), the amount of data has improved.

## 7. Broader Social Policy & LLL

Putting aside labour market policy, which has already been discussed in section 5, social policy is characterized by a traditional division of responsibilities. The central state has the

responsibility to enact legal frameworks. The regions (“*Länder*”) and, to a certain extent, the municipalities are responsible for administration and detailed regulation.

At the same time, many fields of social policy have been developed in close co-operation and confrontation between public administration and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Some NGOs have partly taken over public functions (e.g. to support people with special needs) and are therefore at least partially publicly financed. Some NGOs are rather large, have a fairly high degree of autonomy, and are able to pursue their own policies (e.g. the Catholic Church’s social work organisation, Caritas).

For example, in regards to *migration policy*, no central state institution is responsible for *social inclusion*. The central state only sets general regulations such as residence rights and work permission. Administration and supervision of the laws are partially the responsibility of the central state and partially the regions. The central state only has a broader obligation for refugees. Integration policy for migrants has been partly adopted by the municipalities (e.g. by Vienna, where more than a fifth of the local population has a migrant background).

In January 2006, a new integration directive was passed into law<sup>26</sup>. The main goal of the integration directive is that immigrants acquire a basic knowledge of the German language, especially the ability to read and write and the ability to participate in Austria’s social, economic and cultural life. This skills should be developed by participating in a literacy course (if necessary) and/or a *German Integration* course. The government provides the immigrant a voucher for these courses.<sup>27</sup> These courses have been criticised by many experts, firstly because the courses are compulsory and secondly because too little time is spent in the courses.

When implementing integration policy, NGOs play a central role in providing a supporting infrastructure for migrants. The range of organisations is extremely broad, ranging from large confessional organisation (e.g. Caritas) to small initiatives founded by migrants of specific origins. The influences of lifelong learning policy on integration policy can only be understood by looking at the institutional networks. In the same way, lifelong learning as it relates to issues of gender, addressing social disadvantages and integration of people with special needs, can only be analysed by considering different social institutions.

A comparable picture, but with a different legal background, can be drawn for the policy fields of *ethnicity and religion*. Historically, ethnicity has been a main topic after World War II. Given the fact that ethnic (actually: language) minorities have been heavily mistreated during the National Socialist control of Austria, guaranteeing political and cultural rights to all ethnic minorities has become a founding principle of the Second Republic and a necessary premise for regaining independence in 1955. The *Volksgruppengesetz* (“law on ethnic minorities”) from 1976 guarantees ethnic minorities the right and the necessary public support for an independent general education in their mother tongue as well as means for a broad field of cultural activities including adult education.

Due to the historical circumstances, relations between the state and religious communities also have a complex legal basis. On the one hand, the model case of the Concordat with

the Catholic Church (1934, modified later on) is important; on the other hand, the experiences of Austro-fascist period (1934-1938, a fascist dictatorship with strong cleric influence) (Talos 1985) make neutrality of the state in religious questions an important matter. The state co-finances confessional schools and the costs for religious education. Activities of churches in the field of adult education are also co-funded directly or indirectly.

To sum up: in all the previously mentioned social policy fields, no central actor exists. European or national lifelong learning policy has to interact with networks of public and private bodies that are active in particular fields of social policy. In further analysing the relation between lifelong learning policy and broader social policy, the following three issues should be considered.

Firstly, providing education and further education has been an intrinsic goal of nearly all fields of social policy, but these learning activities are completely autonomous and independent from any lifelong learning policy, even when certain political actors cite them as examples.

Secondly, for local actors – communities as well as NGOs – various European Community funds have become a major resource for financing their activities. Independently chosen goals are partly reformulated using the rhetoric coming from lifelong learning policies.

Thirdly, in recent developments, an actual interrelation between social policy initiatives and lifelong learning policy can be observed. Examples include the efforts within the last decade, by all regions (“*Länder*”) to develop initiatives to co-finance vocational training of individuals. Originally, these initiatives had a strong emphasis on employment policy and regional business development. However, simply supporting lifelong learning has now become a motive within these policies.

## 8. Effectiveness of LLL Policies

Austria fully supports the Lisbon process and the Brugge-Copenhagen process aiming at a ‘greater co-operation in the area of vocational training’. Beside these European goals, the Austrian government stated in a short paragraph of the Regierungsprogramm 2003-2006 (“government programme 2003-2006”) the following goals: “making certificates comparable, national steering group for lifelong learning, initiatives for second-chance education, initiatives in the field of e-learning, new tax initiatives to foster lifelong learning, improvement of quality management” 28. These national goals are clearly compatible and correlate with the European goals. It is remarkable that for each of these goals, initiatives can be found<sup>29</sup>, except for the “national steering group for lifelong learning”. There have been several attempts to establish a Task Force on Lifelong Learning, but it has not yet been put in place.

The Austrian government’s approach to the EU objectives can be best explained by looking at the structural indicator for lifelong learning.<sup>30</sup> The Maastricht report (Leney 2004, 60) states, “Regarding the period 1999-2002, those EU15 countries with low rates of par-

ticipation have not improved much, with the exception of Luxembourg, and decreasing participation rates were reported for Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden and Portugal". For Austria the values are:

- 1996: 7.9 percent
- 1999: 9.1 percent
- 2002: 7.5 percent

Because of the 2003 methodological changes of EUROSTAT (which limits comparability with previous years' data<sup>31</sup>), the Austrian figure jumped to 12.5 percent (for some countries the values have even doubled). Ignoring this fact, the Austrian government proudly announced, that Austria has reached the goal determined for the year 2010 already in the year 2003 (Statistik Austria 2004).<sup>32</sup>

This is indeed a fortunate situation, because as argued in section 3 and 5, there would neither be the money nor the co-ordination structure available for actively influencing this participation rate at least not by the Ministry of Education responsible for the lifelong learning policy. This example also shows the main dilemma of the Austrian lifelong learning policy: Austria's only lifelong learning policy on both a political and institutional level has been set by the European Commission and it is only a virtual one, building on rhetoric and not on measures. Important influences on and developments for lifelong learning are actually initiated in other policy areas such as finance, economics or labour policy without any deliberate intentions to shape lifelong learning policy. Certainly, the Ministry of Education later quotes these measures as part of their lifelong learning policy. This makes it extremely difficult to judge from the official policy documents whether an initiative stems from deliberate concern for lifelong learning or from other areas not actively co-ordinated or linked with lifelong learning policy.

In the following paragraphs we will cite some illustrative examples of developments for lifelong learning initiated in different policy areas, and then conclude with a short overview of initiatives which can certainly be linked to the lifelong learning policy or the general education policy. The following description notably differs from the official policy documents.

The Austrian *Education and Training 2010 Report* (BMBWK 2005) quotes under the section "Invest more in Education and Training" the regional initiatives of training vouchers the so-called *Bildungsfreibetrag* ("tax-free allowance for training"). Since 2000, employers have been able to claim a tax deduction of nine percent of their costs for employee training. In 2002, the tax deduction was increased to 20 percent and the scope has been broadened so that it can be claimed also for in-house training. In addition, a sort of training bonus of six percent for companies with losses or low profits has been introduced (BMBWK 2005, 8). This initiative has clearly been negotiated between employer organisations and the government in the course of a general tax reduction package for companies. No educational policy makers or experts have been involved and there is no evaluation or even interest in an evaluation of the impact of this measure on lifelong learning participation.<sup>33</sup>

Similar to that, another measure that has been cited as policy to invest in lifelong learning, the so-called *Bildungssparen* (a loan with low interest for learning activities) comes from

another policy area. Since 2004, the use of a low interest loan backed by the state has been widened from housing to learning and health care. The reason for this initiative of the *Federal Ministry of Finance* was not (at least not explicitly) to raise participation in adult learning, but to offer new markets for the building and loan associations.

Even money that was directly foreseen to promote lifelong learning activities, namely parts of the *ESF budget period 2000-2006* has primarily been spent on school and university projects. Less than 20 percent of this budget was spend on adult learning (BMWA 2004).

Although there are no big changes in the field of adult learning and little has happened in the overall co-ordination of lifelong learning policy in the last decade, Austria, in line with the EU targets, has strengthened and introduced a number of measures promoting learning in other educational sectors; e.g. in higher education, the *Bologna Declaration follow-up group* has been established and for almost half of the higher education programmes the three cycles (bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees) have already been introduced. In regards to primary education, the so-called *Zukunftskommission* (“committee for the future development of the Austrian system of education”) has been established and, in 2005, submitted a final report. Based on this report, a “school package” (several specific reforms) has been introduced. These reforms included, for example, the introduction of the five-day week for all 6 to 14-year-olds and promotion of early language study. Furthermore, initiatives to increase access to education and to improve quality of education by the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)<sup>34</sup> were continued and an initiative to promote literacy<sup>35</sup> in the 5th and 6th school year has started as a response to the mediocre PISA results. In vocational education and training, the *EUROPASS* has been successfully introduced and an internal quality management systems in the school-based vocational education system has started its implementation phase.

This list could be easily supplemented by looking at the *Austrian Education and Training 2010 Report* (BMBWK 2005), but to shortly summarize this section we can state the following. While there have been many reforms and initiative in the Austrian education system in the last years which all correlate with the EU objectives, little has happened in the area of adult education and the co-ordination of lifelong learning activities and policies. Furthermore, measures are mainly described from the input side and there is little empirical evidence of improvement according to national or European objectives.

## 9. Policy Recommendations

The *OECD Thematic Review of Adult Learning* (OECD 2003) has underlined some strengths of the national adult education system such as the large amount of upgrade training or the expansion of second-chance programmes. However, the OECD review team points out some areas for further improvement that also should be mentioned in this report. As a main problem, the lack of a coherent national policy linking the independent “spheres” of adult education in terms of target groups, funding streams and policies was identified. In detail, the review team suggests:

- a) to better link education and labour market programmes, which also presupposes a better cooperation of the Public Employment Service and the Ministry of Education,
- b) a balance between vocational and non-vocational adult education, as vocational forms seem to have become a higher priority in the last decade,
- c) a co-ordination of priorities and funding between the national and regional governments (“*Länder*”),
- d) the establishment of a co-ordination council, e.g. the above mentioned *task force on lifelong learning*, and
- e) the need for system-wide information and counselling. In addition to that it was recommended to develop basic literacy programmes because “there is possibly a much larger problem of low-literacy adults than Austria has acknowledged” (OECD 2003, 38).

In autumn 2005, the Ministry of Education commissioned the *Danube University Krems* to develop a proposal for a coherent lifelong learning strategy for Austria. In a three-day workshop, a small group of experts met and worked out a substantial proposal for a lifelong learning strategy partly building upon the results of the OECD review. In the following, only some of the recommendations from this paper (Donau Universität Krems 2005) will be quoted.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Policy Co-ordination*

As the previous analysis has shown, there is a considerable lack of co-ordinated lifelong learning policy in Austria. Therefore, we recommend enacting a *law on adult learning* that would establish an *Adult Learning Council*, similar to the *Further Education and Training Council* (FETAC) in Ireland or the *Austrian Fachhochschulrat* (“Fachhochschul Council”). Tasks of this council should be setting standards, accrediting programmes and courses, and the professionalisation of teachers and trainers. Furthermore, we suggest the establishment of a *Lifelong Learning Council* that should co-ordinate, at a top level, the different educational segments and improve interfaces between them.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Financing*

The financing of learning should follow a “*system logic*”-*approach*. At the moment it is more expensive for parents to send their children to the kindergarten than to the university, and adults have to pay for second-chance programmes, whereas it is free of charge if one takes the “first chance”. Therefore, education for certificates at the upper secondary level (ISCED 3 and 4) should be free of charge for individuals independent of their age. Moreover, pre-school activities should be fully publicly financed, which is not the case at the moment and which is seen a specific problem for migrants and other disadvantaged groups. Degrees beyond a leaving certificate of the upper secondary level should be partly financed by the state, the individual, and enterprises. Although different models might be implemented, grants for specific target groups have to be guaranteed.



### *Promoting participation in lifelong learning and guidance*

An improvement in training provisions could be made by using existing possibilities, e.g. to offer a *dual system at different levels*<sup>38</sup> or co-ordinate different training providers on regional level by the development of regional learning networks (Donau Universität Krems 2005, 19). A specific recommendation concerning the last idea is to integrate programmes for the unemployed into publicly provided courses or at least to conduct those programmes in co-operation with schools and universities. Only providing more programmes will certainly not raise participation; the paper recommends along with financial incentives, the expansion of existing, *provider-independent career guidance* centres are essential and a general *professionalisation of guidance and counselling*.

### *Recognition of informal learning*

In this area, Austria basically starts from nothing, but new approaches seem to be possible with the *European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training* (ECVET) and the *European Qualification Framework* (EQF). The expert team welcomed any advances in recognition of non-formal and informal learning, either through individual competence portfolios or by a national system of recognition.

If we take seriously the *life-cycle perspective*<sup>39</sup> the expert team has chosen as a guiding principle for lifelong learning, we can sum up these recommendations by stating the following. The biggest policy deficits and at the same time the greatest impact and achievement expected for lifelong learning can be found in the area before entering primary education and training systems (that is the whole pre-school area) and after leaving it (that means all forms of adult learning). Although pre-school education is not the subject of this report, it should be added, that the OECD very recently rated Austria as performing very badly in early childhood education (OECD 2006).

Though these recommendation show that there is much to be done in Austria's lifelong learning policy and practice and especially in adult learning, the 2005 strategy paper and the willingness of the Austrian Ministry of Education to adopt a coherent lifelong learning strategy before the end of 2006 give reasons for hope of a better performance by 2010.

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- <sup>1</sup> This paper was produced within sub-project 1 of the project 'Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: The Contribution of the Education System' within the Sixth Framework Programme (Contract No. 513321)
  - <sup>2</sup> In this report, we mainly focus on adult learning according to the national interpretation of lifelong learning (see section 3)
  - <sup>3</sup> The *Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut* (WIFI, "Institute for Economic Promotion of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber", CVET provider institution of the Economic Chamber), which is the biggest institution for vocational training in Austria, and the *Berufsförderungsinstitut* (BFI, "Vocational Training Institute", CVET provider institution of the Chamber of Labour and the Austrian Trade Union Association)

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- 4 Now the term ‘further education and training’ is used more often to encompass all forms of ‘adult learning’. ‘Adult learning’ in Austria is often associated with general adult education or ‘Volksbildung’. If not explicitly stated, we use these terms as synonyms.
- 5 The *Department for Continuing Education Research and Educational Management* at the *Danube University*. The Universities of Graz, Klagenfurt and Innsbruck do some research in the field of adult education.
- 6 The AMS-research-network ([www.ams-forschungsnetzwerk.at/](http://www.ams-forschungsnetzwerk.at/)) provides a platform for labour market and vocational education and training (VET) research.
- 7 ABF-Austria ([www.abf-austria.at](http://www.abf-austria.at)) was founded mainly to carry out tasks of the *Cedefop Reference Network*
- 8 The network met a few times since 2004.
- 9 University of Graz, University of Klagenfurt and Danube University Krems
- 10 <http://www.erwachsenenbildung.at/fachthemen/fachthemen.php>
- 11 <http://eu2006.bmbwk.gv.at/en/education.htm>
- 12 <http://www.politischebildung.at>
- 13 That means certificates recognized in the national qualification system.
- 14 *Grundsatz'erlass zum Unterrichtsprinzip Politische Bildung vom 11. April 1978* (“Guidelines of the Ministry of Education concerning civic education of 11 April 1978”)
- 15 „Zur Sicherung des Wirtschaftsstandorts Österreich und damit unseres Wohlstands müssen aus Sicht der österreichischen Industrie die notwendigen Rahmenbedingungen geschaffen werden: Qualifizierte Mitarbeiter, die sich im Sinne von lifelong learning laufend weiterbilden (können), sind dafür ein Schlüsselfaktor“ [to be translated] (Industriellenvereinigung 2004).
- 16 See the presentation at the following conference:  
<http://www.leader-austria.at/regions/attransnational/news/news.2006-04-20.4207/de>
- 17 Such as the *Knowledge-award* ([www.knowledge.at](http://www.knowledge.at)) a state award for companies with outstanding HRD and CVT-concepts and *Investors in People* ([www.investorsinpeople.at](http://www.investorsinpeople.at)), which is still in an experimental phase in Austria.
- 18 *Erwachsenenbildungs-Förderungsgesetz* („Law for Promotion Measures in Adult Education“) (enacted 14.04.1975). In 2004, 11.8 Million € have been distributed according to this law. For comparison: Political education of the parties has been co-funded by 8.5 Million € in the same year.
- 19 It also has to be said that parts of the competencies for further training are spread over various different ministries not mentioned here.
- 20 In 2000, plans to close down the *Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung* (actually a large seminar hotel facility with only a small staff in the field of adult education and research, c.f. [www.bifeb.at](http://www.bifeb.at)) have been discussed. One reason not to close the institution, which is located on a huge campus directly on the shore of a well-known lake in Salzburg, has been that the very valuable real estate was sold to the federal state by a Jewish family after World War II under the legally-binding condition that the real estate must be used for supporting general adult education.  
(cf. <http://www.bifeb.at/bifeb/geschichte.html>).
- 21 Such as [www.efit.at](http://www.efit.at) and [www.virtual-learning.at](http://www.virtual-learning.at)
- 22 *Berufsreifeprüfung* is an examination that provides general access to higher education for skilled workers and graduates of three to four-year full-time VET schools. Although the *Berufsreifeprüfung* can be seen as success story in recent national educational policy, only a minority make use of this offer.
- 23 [http://www.netzschmiede.at/alfa/info/info\\_3.htm](http://www.netzschmiede.at/alfa/info/info_3.htm)
- 24 <http://science.orf.at/science/news/140104>
- 25 <http://www.alphabetisierung.at/49.0.html>
- 26 Verordnung der Bundesministerin für Inneres über die Integrationsvereinbarung (Integrationsvereinbarungs- Verordnung – IV-V) BGBl. II 449/2005

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- <sup>27</sup> <http://www.integrationsfonds.at/>
- <sup>28</sup> Regierungsprogramm der Österreichischen Bundesregierung für die XXII. Gesetzgebungsperiode, p. 24, available at: <http://www.oevp.at/download/806.pdf> [Accessed 16th May 2006]
- <sup>29</sup> Many initiatives have already been in practice or started at that time, e.g. the *Diploma and Certificate Supplement* (making certificates comparable), the *eFit initiative*, which started years before with the project “eLearning in notebook classes” (initiatives in the field of e-learning) or the *Bildungsfreibetrag* (tax benefit).
- <sup>30</sup> “The European Union average level of participation in lifelong learning should be at least 12.5 percent of the adult working age population (25-64 age group)” (European Commission 2005a, 8).
- <sup>31</sup> See the information note at the relevant EUROSTAT website  
[http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?\\_pageid=1996,39140985&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL&\\_screen=detailref&language=de&product=STRIND\\_EMPLOI&root=STRIND\\_EMPLOI/emploi/em051](http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=1996,39140985&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&_screen=detailref&language=de&product=STRIND_EMPLOI&root=STRIND_EMPLOI/emploi/em051) [Accessed 16th May 2006]
- <sup>32</sup> The most recent values are: 2004 12 percent, 2005: 13.9 percent (Eurostat).
- <sup>33</sup> First indications of our own surveys showed that there is no direct impact on participation in companies, because training decisions are not facilitated by this indirect measure.
- <sup>34</sup> The *eFIT initiative*: [www.eFIT.at](http://www.eFIT.at)
- <sup>35</sup> The *LESEFIT initiative*: [www.lesefit.at](http://www.lesefit.at)
- <sup>36</sup> As the author was part of this expert group and co-author of the quoted lifelong learning strategy paper, it can hardly be differentiated between recommendations in this report and his personal view. In the following “we” means the author and other experts.
- <sup>37</sup> A similar council has been established for science and research recently: *Österreichischer Wissenschaftsrat* (“Austrian Science Board”) (see: <http://www.wissenschaftsrat.ac.at/english/default.htm>).
- <sup>38</sup> At the moment the dual system (apprenticeship system) is restricted to initial vocational education, there are hardly any equivalents in the sector of continuing vocational education and training. The same is true for Higher Education: There are hardly any dual offers, equally combining learning in enterprises and in higher education institutions .
- <sup>39</sup> In brief: putting the learner in the centre and building learning provisions around the different life-cycle of learners

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