

Austria introduction

Recently, the Austrian government has introduced a number of new policies; their main objective is to boost digital competencies, particularly in enterprise and the adult education sector. In the past year, adult education organisations have set up several events to increase awareness of learning opportunities for adults. They are now working to create more education offers that focus on upskilling. Even though there is funding allocated to different areas of the educational system, some priorities have to be revised to ensure the effectiveness of educational strategies.

Recent developments in Austria

At the moment the educational sphere is focusing mostly on digitalisation. The Pact for Digital Competence, created using the Digital Competence Framework, is aiming to involve many different actors in developing a wider Austrian strategy on adult education. The pact considers structure implementation, qualifications and validation, certification of grades and competence levels, creating relationships between adult education institutions and private enterprise, and the ongoing updating and evaluating digital competences.

Opening dialogue on adult education in Austria, the first BarCamp for adult education took place at the Federal Institute in December 2018, where such questions as digitalisation and its effects on adult education structures, open educational resources (OER), and the promotion of opportunities for disadvantaged people were discussed.

Several initiatives were launched in the past year in the field of non-formal adult education. In March 2019, the Democracy MOOC, consisting of ten modules, was launched. It aims to increase the accessibility of available civic education for Austrian citizens. The course is run by EAEA member, the Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres, in partnership with the Democracy Centre Vienna, using funds from several governmental bodies. Annual Conference 2019 of the Austrian Conference of Adult Education also considered education for democratic citizenship. In addition to this, a new curriculum was put together, concerning basic education for adults, which intends to create wider access to the labour market and German integration courses.

However, the past year has brought some new challenges to the Austrian adult education sector too. The Labour Market Service has changed its political priorities, greatly reducing the number of available training courses, instead focusing on counselling and coaching. Due to this, a high number of trainers were dismissed.

In terms of financing adult education, the amount of funding allocated by the Ministry of Education has not changed since 2012, which runs the risk of losses in the scale or quality of provision due to rising personnel costs. There needs to be stronger empirical evidence for increasing their funding, based on better reporting systems of the impact of the non-formal education sector.

Links to EU and international policy in Austria

The Sustainable Development Goals are at the core of many Austrian national political strategies concerning inclusive and quality education for all. Sustainability is the main theme within the nation-wide programme for adult education centres. While this seems positive for non-formal, or informal, education in Austria, the Austrian government is primarily focusing on formal education; and this issue is being addressed by EAEA members in the country through advocacy work.

At the moment, the Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres, an EAEA member, is working on the development of teaching and learning methods of the Democracy MOOC (described in the previous section). The online course is designed to enhance democratic citizenship, support people in transition phases, and build their capacity to deal with climate change issues.

The Upskilling Pathways initiative is implemented in some areas, especially regarding basic education for adults, vocational training, and higher education. In addition, the EAEA members support the concept that adult learning should be part of the declaration of human rights.

The Austrian Agenda for Adult Learning emphasizes the importance of high quality of formal and non-formal education and training for adults, however, it does not explicitly mention the necessity of structures in adult education. It is believed that governance should be a focus of the future agenda and adult education organisations must have well-functioning structures.

Challenges and recommendations in Austria

Working on digitalisation and democratic education will continue to be the main challenge, and thus focus, for all stakeholders involved.

Meanwhile, EAEA members in Austria underline the necessity to ensure public support for adult education, and a need to strengthen the existing structures. To achieve all of this, its necessary to continue with the implementation and the validation strategy, in order to provide high-quality and professional services accessible for all. Meanwhile, the policies need to remain committed to education for democratic citizenship, social cohesion, and European consciousness.
