

# The Austrian Initiative for Adult Education

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The Austrian Initiative for Adult Education is a cooperation of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and the nine Austrian provinces. Its objective is to enable adults who lack basic skills or never graduated from a lower secondary school to continue and finish their education. The innovative approach of this project is due to two characteristics. First, the implementation of consistent national quality guidelines for courses of this program and, secondly, the fact that all courses are free of charge for the participants. This has been accomplished by national funding and – since 2015 – an additional co-financing by the European Social Fund (ESF).

## 1. Background

Although the level of qualifications has been rising gradually over the last decades, the amount of low skilled people in Austria is regarded as being too high. The results of PIAAC indicate that more than 17% of the inhabitants (nearly one million people) have poor literacy skills. Further studies show that there are still nearly 250.000 people whose qualifications in regard to reading, writing, calculating and the use of technical facilities are not sufficient for their employment or their participation in everyday life. Every year about 3.700 Austrian teenagers (nearly 4%) finish their compulsory education without qualifications. It is estimated that the target group for second chance education at lower secondary level amounts to 220.000 people. These numbers include people speaking German as their first language as well as those who use German as their second language.

## 2. History and Progress

The Initiative for Adult Education was formed in 2011 after nearly three years of negotiations and concept development. During this process the partners were representatives of the federal ministry of education and the nine Austrian provinces as well as experts of adult education. They achieved a legal agreement regarding the financing as well as a document describing the project's intentions, the quality standards and the main structure and procedures during the realization. The first program period from January 2012 to December 2014 provided a total budget of 50 million euros to fund courses. Over 2.000 courses could be implemented, serving 15.000 participants. Therefore, a second program period from 2015 to 2017 has been established and the third program period has been extended from 2018 to 2023. By the means of co-financing by the ESF the available funds have been increased to about 30 million euros annually. Around 6.000 people participate in about 700 courses per year.



### 3. Program

The Initiative for Adult Education covers two program areas: Training of basic skills and lower secondary education. Basic skills training includes numeracy, literacy, digital skills and essential skills in German or another language. The target group consists of people who didn't have the opportunity to gain such skills, irrespective of language, birth or potential graduations. The main quality guidelines of this program area cover the qualification of trainers and the adaption to the needs of adults. In 2019, a general curriculum has been established, standardizing competence levels and certificates for the participants across all institutions.

The target group of the program area of the lower secondary education consists of people without a graduation at this level. The curriculum focusses especially on compulsory education for adults. In addition to the training of various subjects a clearing-period at the beginning and counselling at the end regarding the transition into work or further education are very important parts of this program.

### 4. Accreditation – Quality Criteria

Austrian institutions that want to take part in the program of the Initiative of Adult Education have to apply for an accreditation and provide evidence on the following three quality criteria: general requirements for an educational establishment, an appropriate concept of their course program and qualification of their trainers and counsellors in accordance with the guidelines of the Initiative for Adult Education. The applications are decided by a group of 6 external experts from the field of adult education and education research. A successful accreditation is required for a funding application. The funding approval depends on the balance of the various courses of the different program areas and the different target groups in the particular region.

### 5. Program management

The Initiative's Viennese office serves as a communication platform and supports the partners. A steering committee, consisting of the region's and the ministry's representatives and social partners, supervises the project's strategy and design. The accreditation group decides the accreditation applications and advises the steering committee.

The Institutions taking part in the Initiative's program commit themselves to continuous monitoring and evaluation. The Initiative's office supervises the process and reports the results. By this procedure the Initiative gains further knowledge about the specific problems and advancements of adult education.