



# LITERACY IN AUSTRIA

COUNTRY REPORT  
SHORT VERSION

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# 1 Introduction

This report on the state of literacy in Austria is one of a series produced in 2015 and 2016 by ELINET, the European Literacy Policy Network. ELINET was founded in February 2014 and has 78 partner organisations in 28 European countries<sup>1</sup>. ELINET aims to improve literacy policies in its member countries in order to reduce the number of children, young people and adults with low literacy skills. One major tool to achieve this aim is to produce a set of reliable, up-to-date and comprehensive reports on the state of literacy in each country where ELINET has one or more partners, and to provide guidance towards improving literacy policies in those countries. The reports are based (wherever possible) on available, internationally comparable performance data, as well as reliable national data provided (and translated) by our partners.

ELINET continues the work of the European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (HLG) which was established by the European Commission in January 2011 and reported in September 2012<sup>2</sup>. All country reports produced by ELINET use a common theoretical framework which is described here: "ELINET Country Reports – Frame of Reference"<sup>3</sup>.

The Country Reports are organised around the three recommendations of the HLG's literacy report:

- Creating a literate environment
- Improving the quality of teaching
- Increasing participation, inclusion (and equity<sup>4</sup>).

Within its two-year funding period ELINET has completed Literacy Country Reports for all 30 ELINET member countries. In most cases we published separate **Long Reports** for specific age groups (Children / Adolescents and Adults), in some cases comprehensive reports covering all age groups. Additionally, for all 30 countries, we published **Short Reports** covering all age groups, containing the summary of performance data and policy messages of the Long Reports. These reports are accompanied by a collection of good practice examples which cover all age groups and policy areas as well. These examples refer to the **European Framework of Good Practice in Raising Literacy Levels**; both are to be found in the section "Good Practice"<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the network and its activities see: [www.eli-net.eu](http://www.eli-net.eu).

<sup>2</sup> In the following, the final report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy is referenced as "HLG report". This report can be downloaded under the following link: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report_en.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.eli-net.eu/research/country-reports/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Equity" was added by ELINET.

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.eli-net.eu/good-practice/>.

## 2 General Information on Austria's Education System

Austria is a federal parliamentary republic consisting of nine provinces (Bundesländer), each of which has its own provincial government. Responsibility for legislation and its implementation is divided between the federation (Bund) and the provinces. Austria has 8.58 Mio. inhabitants (2015), out of which 238,685 children are of pre-primary age (3-5 years) and around 326,571 of primary age (6-10 years)(c.f. Statistik Austria 2014). Compulsory education lasts for nine years.

The Austrian education system is hierarchically organised, highly centralised, and selective at a very early stage. The provinces have legislative responsibility for kindergarten and for providing public-sector compulsory education in cooperation with the municipalities.

### Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education encompasses formal childcare from the age of three until entering primary education as well as early childhood education up to the age of three. It corresponds to the ISCED level 0. The elementary level (ISCED 0) in Austria refers to the following childcare institutions: crèches, kindergartens, after-school care facilities and children's groups. Playgroups and nannies also offer their services. Pre-school education for children of school age who are not yet ready for school belongs to the elementary level as well.

Austria has 8,988 early childhood education care centres (including kindergartens), 342,261 children were enrolled in those childcare institution in 2014/2015 (c.f. Statistik Austria 2015).

### Primary Education

Primary education encompasses Primary School and begins at the age of compulsory education. It corresponds to the ISCED level 1. Compulsory education in Austria starts at the age of 6; the primary level lasts four years. Schools of this level are primary/elementary schools as well as special-needs schools and integrative/inclusive education in regular schools.

### Lower and Upper Secondary Level

Lower secondary education encompasses the first 4 years after primary education. It corresponds to the ISCED level 2. Pupils can choose between the following types of schools (different admission requirements): General Secondary School (Hauptschule), New Secondary School (Neue Mittelschule), Academic Secondary School Lower Level (AHS Unterstufe) as well as special needs schools and inclusive education.

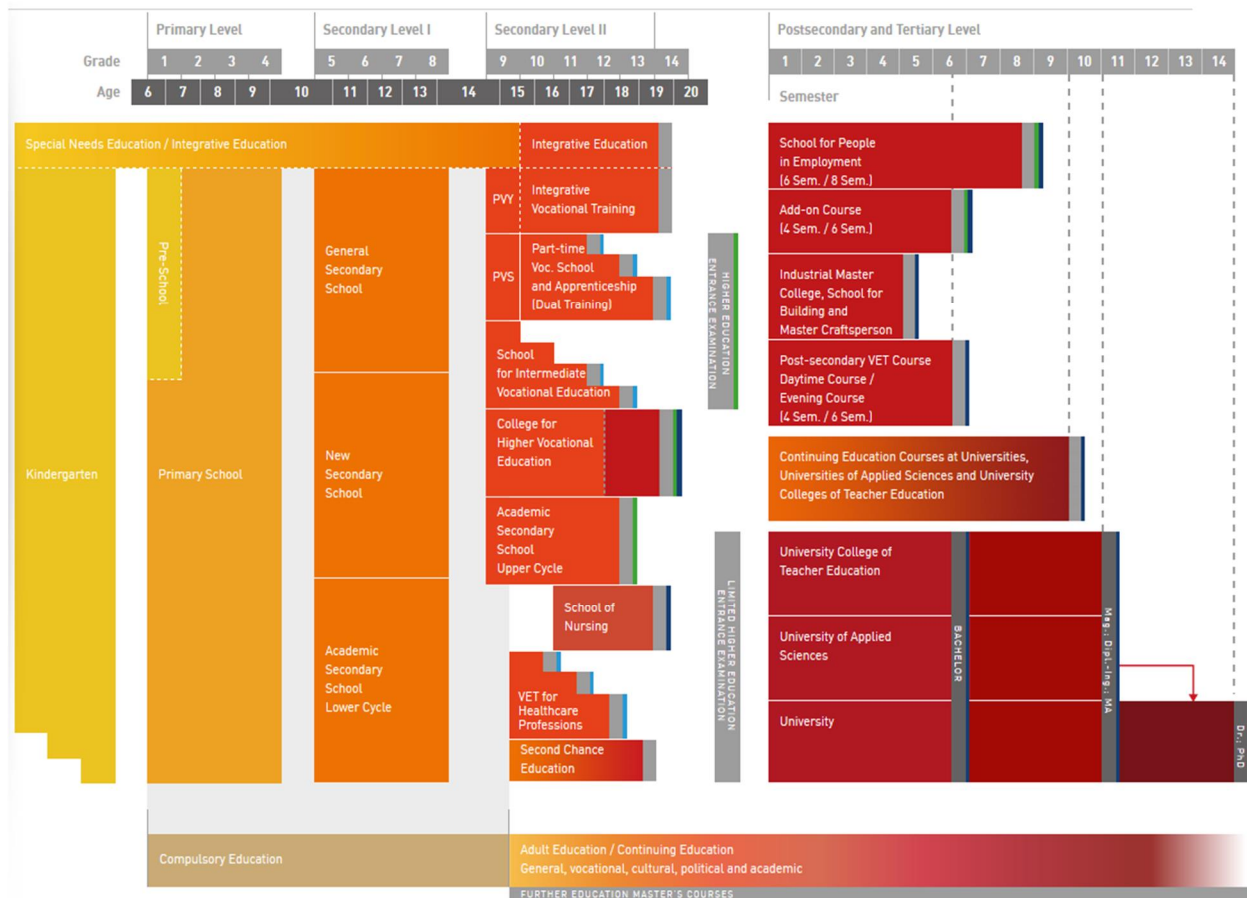
At secondary level II, they then attend the Upper Level of the Academic Secondary School or the Medium or Upper Level Secondary Technical and Vocational School. Once students have completed 9 years of compulsory education they can also take up an apprenticeship within the dual system of practical training combined with part-time vocational school, or follow a programme of training leading to a healthcare profession.

Upon completion of secondary level II the Austrian education system offers additional educational opportunities, ranging from short-cycle tertiary education in the field of Vocational Education and

Training (VET) to degree-level programmes at university colleges of teacher education, universities of applied sciences and universities (c.f. OeAD 2016).

The following figure represents the structure of the Austrian Education System:

Figure 1: Austrian Education System<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> See: [www.edusystem.at](http://www.edusystem.at), accessed March 21, 2016.

### 3 Literacy Performance Data

Austria participated in IEA's PIRLS (4<sup>th</sup> graders reading comprehension) in 2006 and 2011, in OECD's PISA (15 year-olds' reading literacy) since 2000, and in OECD's PIAAC (adults' reading literacy) in 2012. This means it is possible to describe the changes over time in average reading proficiency, according to different characteristics of the readers, and to compare relative reading levels of proficiencies for different age groups.

Austria performed below the EU average in PIRLS 2011 (529 vs 535 EU-average) and very close to EU average in PISA 2012 (490 vs 489). Its score even fell well below the average in 2009 (470 vs 486 in EU). The performance decreased in PIRLS between 2006 and 2011 (by 9 score points), and decreased much more (by 18 score points) in PISA between 2000 and 2012, namely by the equivalent of about a half-year of schooling.

The proportion of pupils who can be considered as low-performing readers in both studies is close to the EU countries on average (20 % in PIRLS and PISA). These students can read simple texts, retrieve explicit information, or make straightforward inferences, but they are not able to deal with longer or more complex texts, and are unable to interpret beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. The proportion of low-performing readers has increased in PISA between 2000 and 2011 (from 14.6 % to 19.5 %). The proportion of top-performing readers was 5% in PIRLS (vs 9% EU-average) and 5.5% in PISA (vs 7% EU-average).

The gap according to the pupils' socioeconomic background was higher than the EU average in PIRLS (87 vs 76 on average). In PISA, it was close to the EU average (91 vs 89 on average). However, the indices of socioeconomic background are not the same in PIRLS and PISA, so the comparison should be taken with caution.

In PISA 2009, the gap between native students and students with a migrant background was much higher than in EU countries on average (67 vs 38). Similarly, in PIRLS the mean score difference between those who always spoke the test language at home, and those who sometimes or never did so was slightly higher than in EU countries (36 vs 26).

In Austria, the gender gap (in favour of girls) was lower than the corresponding EU average differences in PIRLS (8 vs 12) and in PISA (41 vs 44). In PIRLS, the decrease was rather similar among girls and boys. In PISA, the decrease in reading performance observed between 2000 and 2012 was two times stronger among boys (-0.24) than among girls (-0.12).

In conclusion, the performance in reading in Austria has decreased overtime, more significantly among 15 year-olds than at grade 4. Austria now performs below the average in PIRLS and close to average in PISA. The proportion of low-performing readers is close to the EU countries on average, and the proportion of top-performing readers is below EU average. The spread of achievement (gap between low and top performing readers) is smaller in Austria than in EU on average at both levels. The gap according to socioeconomic status, migration or language spoken at home tends to be higher in Austria than in EU on average. Austria is then a little less effective, and also tends to be less equitable than EU countries on average. However, the major concern is the decrease in reading performance, and the increase of the proportion of low-performing readers, especially among teenage boys.

**Technical note:**

In 2009, a dispute between teachers' unions and the education minister of Austria led to a boycott of PISA, which was only lifted after the first week of testing. The boycott required the OECD to remove identifiable cases from the dataset. Although the Austrian dataset met the PISA 2009 technical standards after these cases were removed, the negative reaction to assessments has affected the conditions under which the PISA survey was conducted and could have adversely affected student motivation to respond to the PISA tasks. Therefore, the comparability of 2009 data with data from earlier PISA assessments cannot be ensured, and data from Austria have been excluded from trend comparisons.

The "**National Education Report**" (Nationaler Bildungsbericht) 2012 stated: "As a whole, Austrian pupils' reading levels are unsatisfactory. In comparison with reading levels measured at the end of primary school (PIRLS 2006), Austrian pupils only ranked in the mid-range of the participating countries. By the end of year four, approximately 11,000 pupils only have basic reading skills and approximately 1,500 fail to achieve even this. (...) This low rank is strongly influenced by the large percentage of particularly weak readers (27%) in the Austrian system. If PIRLS and PISA are taken as one integrated longitudinal study, it becomes clear that the weakest readers fall behind by at least one year of typical learning progress between the end of primary school and the end of lower secondary school" (Herzog-Punzenberger/Bruneforth/Lasnigg 2013, p. 15).

The results could not be ignored: Accompanied by a heated educational debate, efforts in a more efficient reading education have increased. Similar to other German-speaking countries "Nationale Bildungsstandards" (national standards of education) had been formulated and now build the basis for higher commitment and reviewability of learning processes. The government recognised the seriousness of the situation. The standards of education and the implemented monitoring processes will help to get more specific data about strengths and weaknesses in the field of reading education and will help to develop concrete measures.

Concerning the literate environment outside school it has to be stated that Austria is a Federal Republic and preschool education, adult education and public libraries are in shared responsibility of the Federal Government and the nine States. That sometimes leads to huge differences in the promotion programmes and financial support for e.g. public libraries. There is a lack of detailed studies, but the evidence-base of the few (regional) surveys shows strong regional differences even within the Federal States (c.f. OÖ. Kinder-Medien-Studie 2014, OÖ. Jugend-Medien-Studie 2015<sup>7</sup>).

An important step towards a better interchange between all the different players in creating a vivid literacy culture for all and across all age- and social groups was the establishment of a big working-group by the Austrian Ministry of Education for the preparation of an **Austrian Literacy Framework in 2014**<sup>8</sup>. Similar to the structure of the working-groups in ELINET, experts and institutions of all fields of reading promotion and education described the actual situation and developed a catalogue of objectives, challenges and possible ways. Qualitative improvement in teacher training, the development of better diagnostic instruments, targeted remedial teaching or binding regulations for Austrian libraries are only some of the demands that should lead to a structured implementation plan. The work for the Austrian Literacy Framework has been finished in March 2016.

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<sup>7</sup> See: [www.edugroup.at/innovation/forschung/](http://www.edugroup.at/innovation/forschung/).

<sup>8</sup> See: [www.leseplan.at](http://www.leseplan.at).



# 4 Key Literacy Policy Areas for Development (age-specific and across age-groups)

## 4.1 Creating a Literate Environment

### 4.1.1 Pre-Primary Years

**Creating a literate environment at home:** Compared to the European average, Austria has medium or high scores in important factors which constitute a **supportive home environment** for the fostering of children's literacy performance:

- The majority of pupils in Austria have parents with positive attitudes towards reading.
- The availability of children's books in the home is close to the European average.
- Almost all parents engage often or sometimes in early literacy activities with their children regarding the nine activities. To nearly 70% of the children the parents read books to them often in pre-primary years (European average 58.4 %).

**Challenges:** There is a need for broad national family literacy programmes **to raise awareness of all parents** that literacy is a key to learning and life chances. Programmes like "Bookstart: growing with books"<sup>9</sup> should be carried out nationwide, not only offered by regional or local initiatives.

### 4.1.2 Primary Children and Adolescents

**Creating a literate environment in school:** As stated in PIRLS, more children in Austria than the EU-average have access to school and/or class **libraries**. There is also the so-called "Grundsatzlerlass Leserziehung" (**Basic Decree on Reading Education**) published by the Ministry of Education that promotes literate environments and diverse methods of teaching reading at school (BMUKK 2013). Also there are many local **reading partnerships** and projects in schools, meaning that volunteers are reading to or with children in need or that students get free time every day to read whatever they want ("reading schools"). Needed are more school libraries including guidelines as well as more stable cooperations of schools and public libraries.

**Supporting reading motivation, especially among boys and adolescents:** Teachers would need more gender-sensitive reading material, more children or youth-connected reading material, digital texts and reading situations should be provided to teachers. School libraries and external reading institutions and programmes should be implemented in long-term strategies in a more structured way.

**Offering digital literacy learning opportunities in schools (and other public spaces, e.g. libraries):** Austrian students are relatively well digitally equipped in comparison to the EU average; concerning access to computers, connectivity to fast broadband and connection (i.e. their school has for example a website). Broadband speed is considerably higher than in other EU countries. Approximately 79% of students in Austria have a computer available for reading lessons, but only 3% of the adolescents in Austria are ranging at the highest level of digital reading competence.

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<sup>9</sup> See: [www.buchstart.at](http://www.buchstart.at).

**Challenges:** There is need for a national strategy about the implementation of ICT in reading promotion. Experiences and studies from other countries must be brought in discussion. Various pilot projects have to be evaluated and discussed in public. Also schools have to be equipped with access to eLibraries.

**Strengthening the role of public libraries:** Austria has around 1,500 libraries in 1,062 municipalities, out of which around 1,200 are run by volunteers. This high grade of volunteers is specific for Austria's library system. As legally binding national **regulations for public libraries are still missing** in Austria, there is a strong and urgent need for them. It was possible to fix public libraries to the working programme of the Austrian government 2014-2018 as a key-agenda and the call for a national library plan and law was also formulated in the Austrian Literacy Framework. Public libraries are an important agent in reading promotion, there are for example library festivals each year ("Austria reads. Meeting point library", [www.oesterreichliest.at](http://www.oesterreichliest.at)).

**Improving literate environments for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples:** There are various initiatives in the field of literacy promotion, like the "Austrian Book Club for Young People"<sup>10</sup>, active in primary schools, or "LESERstimmen – Der Preis der jungen LeserInnen" (Readers' Voices<sup>11</sup>), bringing authors and children into close exchange. There are also children's book fairs and festivals like Bookolino<sup>12</sup> or "Buch Wien", the annual Austrian Book Fair.). Also platform like [www.literacy.at](http://www.literacy.at) (run by the Ministry of Education) and [www.wirlesen.org](http://www.wirlesen.org) (for libraries) give impulses for promoting literacy. Of course the family literacy programme "Buchstart"<sup>13</sup>, Bookstart, serves as a support for libraries and families (see above).

#### 4.1.3 Adults

**Fostering literacy provision for adults:** For adults there is a comprehensive range of institutions, single events or festivals. About ten "**Literaturhäuser**" (houses of literature) provide readings by authors and other literature programme.

Famous international **reading festivals** like the Ingeborg-Bachmann-contest in Klagenfurt<sup>14</sup>, "Rauriser Literaturtage"<sup>15</sup> or "Literatur im Nebel" (literature in the fog)<sup>16</sup> are important for readers as well as for authors and help to bring literature into media. Since 2008 every autumn the book fair "**Buch Wien**" brings together authors, books and readers.

Beneath that activities for passionate readers in recent years more and more projects and initiatives started to invite and involve the group of reserved or distanced readers. The big festival "**Österreich liest. Treffpunkt Bibliothek**" (Austria reads – meeting point public library)<sup>17</sup> offers thousands of activities all over the country not just for excites readers but also for broad levels of the population.

There is a long history of adult basic education programmes in Austria: since the 1990s this provision has diversified to include not only reading and writing, but courses in ICT, mathematics and

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<sup>10</sup> See: [www.buchkub.at](http://www.buchkub.at).

<sup>11</sup> See: [www.leserstimmen.at/](http://www.leserstimmen.at/).

<sup>12</sup> See: [www.bookolino.at](http://www.bookolino.at).

<sup>13</sup> See: [www.buchstart.at](http://www.buchstart.at).

<sup>14</sup> See: [bachmannpreis.orf.at/](http://bachmannpreis.orf.at/).

<sup>15</sup> See: [www.rauriser-literaturtage.at/](http://www.rauriser-literaturtage.at/).

<sup>16</sup> See: [www.literaturimnebel.at](http://www.literaturimnebel.at).

<sup>17</sup> See: [www.oesterreichliest.at](http://www.oesterreichliest.at).

autonomous learning. Basic skills provision in Austria is offered in two streams: provision for people for speakers of other languages and provision for people with German as their first language. Courses for second language speakers aim to combine German-language content with training in literacy and numeracy, whereas the basic skills offer for German native speakers contains no content on language acquisition.

The **problem of functional illiteracy** was ignored in the Austrian society for a long time. Of very high importance was the legal agreement in 2012 between the Federal Government and all nine Federal States to provide **offers of basis education** for successful completion of compulsory education. Costs are met by the State, through funding bodies including the Federal Ministry of Education and Women, the states and the municipalities. The Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection delivers basic skills courses via the labour market service. Since 2012, basic skills offers have been provided through the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education. Target groups consist of those people who never had the opportunity to gain such skills, irrespective of language, birth or completed compulsory education. The target group of the lower secondary education programme area consists of people without a graduation in this level. The costs are covered equally by the nine Austrian provinces and the Federal government. A nationwide network "Basisbildung und Alphabetisierung" (basis education and literacy) offers free courses in reading, writing, numeracy and digital literacy and a hotline<sup>18</sup>.

## 4.2 Improving the Quality of Teaching

### 4.2.1 Pre-Primary Years

**Improving the quality of preschool education:** Concerning **ECEC**, in some of our indicators Austria is behind the European average.

- Austria is at the lower end of the distribution among European countries for the total public expenditure per child on pre-primary education (with 0.6%). Also there are 9 different standards for ECEC (Länder level).
- Preschool teachers' qualification levels are rather low. The minimum required level to become a qualified teacher is level 4B (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101) while in most European countries a tertiary education degree at bachelor level is required. Only in Austria and Germany is the minimum entry a qualification at post-secondary non-tertiary. (BAKIP, Bundesbildungsanstalt für Kindergartenpädagogik).
- The percentage of males among preschool teachers is rather low.

Austria, however, is one of the few countries with a comprehensive literacy curriculum in pre-primary schools. It contains all the aspects outlined in our ELINET framework for a good emergent literacy curriculum.

**Challenges:** It should and is already discussed whether pre-primary and primary teachers should be educated together at tertiary level. Language ability tests are compulsory in kindergarten and serve as basis for individual support, but kindergarten teachers often lack sufficient diagnostic competence to reliably identify literacy difficulties at an early stage. There is also a need for even more cooperation between pre-school and school as well as the cooperation with external early literacy programmes like

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<sup>18</sup> See: [www.basisbildung-alphabetisierung.at](http://www.basisbildung-alphabetisierung.at).

bookstart. A lot is already happening on local basis, but it should be launched at a regional or even national level. An idea would be to offer a training for early-childhood literacy experts.

#### 4.2.2 Primary Children and Adolescents

##### Improving literacy curricula and reading instruction in schools:

- According to PIRLS 2011 in the *scale of reading for pleasure* Austrian students performed a little bit above average.
- Relatively little lesson time is spent on learning to read.
- There are remarkable gaps in reading achievement and reading strategies as well as reading engagement.
- According to their teachers, students in Austria engage less frequently on a daily basis in activities such as locating information in a text, comparing what they have read with experiences they have had, making predictions about what will happen next in a text, and describing the style and structure of a text, than do teachers on average across the EU-24.
- The Eurydice (2011) analysis of official curriculum documents indicates an absence in Austria of reading comprehension skills such as using background knowledge, constructing visual representations, and reflecting on own reading processes (p. 160, Figure 1.4).

**Challenges:** The time spent for teaching and training reading must be increased; the low percentage of instructional practices to engage reading in "most lessons" must be improved. There is a need to mainstream literacy across the curriculum and to offer content area literacy instruction in all school subjects also throughout secondary education, whether academic or vocational. It would be worthwhile to sharpen the literacy focus to help teachers of all subjects to become real literacy teachers.

There must be more acknowledgement in the secondary schools that reading is not only a business of the language classes but that every teacher has to promote and support reading within their lessons - whole-staff support ("Lesen in allen Fächern"). New media and its usage should be taken up more actively in school. Therefore, training courses for teachers must be clearly intensified in the field of interdisciplinary reading promotion and the value of literacy.

**Digital literacy as part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools:** Media education is explicitly mentioned in curricula. A decree exists, named "Unterrichtsprinzip Medienerziehung – Grundsatzlerlass 2014". The Austrian Ministry of Education developed a new strategy for ICT in 2012 that adheres to the objectives of "Europe 2020". At secondary level, media education is a cross-curricular subject and also a separate, optional subject.

**Early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners:** There is a shortfall of 4.6% between students in need of remedial support and those who really receive it. Just 9% of students are in classrooms where there is always access to specialised professionals to work with children with difficulties, compared with an EU-24 average of 25%. There are Educational Standards (Bildungsstandards), tested at grade four and at grade 8. These standards are tested obligatory and periodically and provide a focus for planning and delivering lessons, and grading students. Teacher-generated assessment is based on classroom participation as well as on the results of oral, written, practical, and graphical work. There is also the possibility to use the tool "IKM" – Informelle

Kompetenzmessung, which means “informal screening of competencies”<sup>19</sup>. There is also an obligatory screening at the third and fifth grade, the “Salzburger Lesescreening”. It tests the basic literacy skills. To measure the process in reading skills in Austria like in most EU countries the assessment of the teacher is weighted higher than independent testing, tests are of lower importance than in other countries.

**Challenges:** To gain a more complete picture of literacy levels in the classroom, regular literacy assessments should be implemented at each grade level. An ongoing assessment is needed in order to diagnose as early as possible learning difficulties and to respond with focused instruction tailored to the individual needs. Teachers have to be equipped better with easy-to-use tools for diagnostics and receive respective trainings.

**Improving the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training:** The aim of having high quality teachers requires selective teacher recruitment policies, which already happens in Austria in some cases. Regarding the literacy skills of the students (future teachers) more effort should be made to foster these during the study courses.

Regarding **teacher education for literacy,**

- PIRLS indicates that fewer teachers in Austria have participated in initial training courses in which topics such as studying the language of the PIRLS test, studying teaching pedagogy and studying reading theory are strong areas of emphasis, compared with their respective EU-24 averages.
- According to the Eurydice (2011) report, generic skills or methodology for teaching reading is not a topic in initial teacher education in Austria.
- Just 7% of students in Austria were taught by teachers who had not availed themselves of professional development in reading in the two years prior to 2011, compared with an EU-24 average of 29%.

**Challenges:** Initial teacher education needs a compulsory focus on developing literacy expertise among future primary and secondary teachers. There is a need to foster this focus in Austria by mandatory training and CPD. CPD is mandatory for teachers under province-leadership, but not for the ones under the federal leadership. This has to be changed.

**Improving the quality of literacy instruction: Programmes, initiatives and examples:** There is a coordination centre for reading, created to support primary school teachers and schools and offer nationwide programs. Another thing is IMST (Innovationen Machen Schulen Top! = innovations leads schools to the top) which is a programme that supports school in improving teaching in German language (including reading) and other subjects. The whole-staff approach forms the basis for in-school CPD training (Schulinterne Lehrerfortbildung, acronym: SCHILF) or for cross-school CPD training in Austria. These trainings often encompass all members of the staff and must focus more on literacy.

Also the Austrian National Literacy Framework (Österreichischer Rahmenleseplan) should become an instrument for improving the quality of teaching<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> See: [www.bifie.at/ikm](http://www.bifie.at/ikm).

<sup>20</sup> See: [www.leseplan.at](http://www.leseplan.at).

### 4.2.3 Adults

**Monitoring the quality of adult literacy providers:** Most basic skills offers are promoted and handled by the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education. An accreditation group, consisting of six adult education experts, surveys the quality of applications for basic skills provision with reference to the initiative's quality guidelines. Where a provider is successful in achieving accreditation, it can then apply for funding from the relevant provincial department. Departmental approval is dependent on the balance of courses in different programme areas and the different target groups in the particular region. Institutions accredited by the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education commit themselves to continuous monitoring and evaluation.

An online monitoring database also exists for all successfully accredited providers which contains information about the measures, administrative data on participants and exit data. Training providers deliver quarterly participant and measurement data which is evaluated by the Monitoring Group. The federal data centre, the IT department of the Federal Ministry of Education and Women and an external database company are involved in the monitoring process.

In.Motion-Network basic skills and literacy in Austria is an Austrian-wide project funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs that has developed quality standards on three levels: (1) quality standards for the training of trainers, (2) quality standards for the offers, and (3) standards for the provider of basic skills measures. These quality standards were incorporated into the curriculum ("programme planning document") of the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education. Providers of basic skills courses must meet these quality standards in order to receive funding. Where standards are not achieved in some subsections, providers can try to achieve these standards over a predetermined period of time.

**Developing curricula for adult literacy:** There is no national basic skills curricula in Austria; instead, all training plans are developed by adult literacy teachers jointly with learners and together they set individual learning goals.

In basic skills offers funded by the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education there are not more than six participants per trainer, learning materials are tailored to the needs of individual participants, and learning plans are tailored to the individual resources of the participants. This individualisation in basic skills offers allow lessons to focus the needs of the participants.

**Improving the qualification and status of teachers of adult literacy:** There are no legal requirements for formal qualifications. However, trainers working in the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education, are required to:

- Have specialised training or successful completion of the portfolio process for the recognition of professional skills regarding basic skills;
- Have a level of experience as a basic skills trainer
- Participate in training, at least once per year.

Two recognised basic skills trainer courses are available. One six-weekend course is specific to those working on programmes funded by the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education; the other, longer course, takes three semesters to complete and is offered by the Federal Institute for Adult Education (bifeb Strobl). Participants rarely pay for training; instead, funding comes from the employing organisation or local and national funding bodies.

Many trainers have many years of practical experience in the field of basic education. A prerequisite for work as basic education trainer is a subject-specific vocational training, such as a pedagogical qualification, training as a social worker or a specialist training as an adult educator. The federal adult education centre offers a diploma course: "basic skills and literacy trainer" aimed at social workers, people with a pedagogical qualification and education and career counsellors, as well as newcomers who want to become basic skills trainers.

There is therefore a considerable degree of professionalization in the field of adult education in Austria and opportunities for adult educators to gain accreditation, although there is as yet no continuing profession development for adult literacy trainers focused on literacy development. Research suggests that those working in this field derive a high degree of job satisfaction, in large measure derived from meaningful contact with learners and good collegial relations. However, many trainers are self-employed with no standard levels of earnings, and those who are employed and have their salaries set by collective agreements, earn only around the national average despite their higher than average qualification levels.

### 4.3 Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

The gap according to the pupils' **socioeconomic background** and the influence of parents' educational achievement in Austria was higher than the EU average in PIRLS (87 vs 76 on average). In PISA, it was close to the EU average (91 vs 89 on average). However, the indices of socioeconomic background are not the same in PIRLS and PISA, so the comparison should be taken with caution. Nevertheless, these results go hand in hand with a quite socially selective choice already at the age of 10 between General Secondary, New Secondary and Academic Secondary school; in particular in urban spheres where you find these various offers. There are also remarkable gaps with regards to **gender** (in favour of girls) and **migration/language** (in favour of native students) in PIRLS/PISA.

Figure 2: Performance gaps in Austria compared to the EU-24 average, indicating the level of the parents' education, the language spoken at home and gender in primary school (PIRLS 2011)

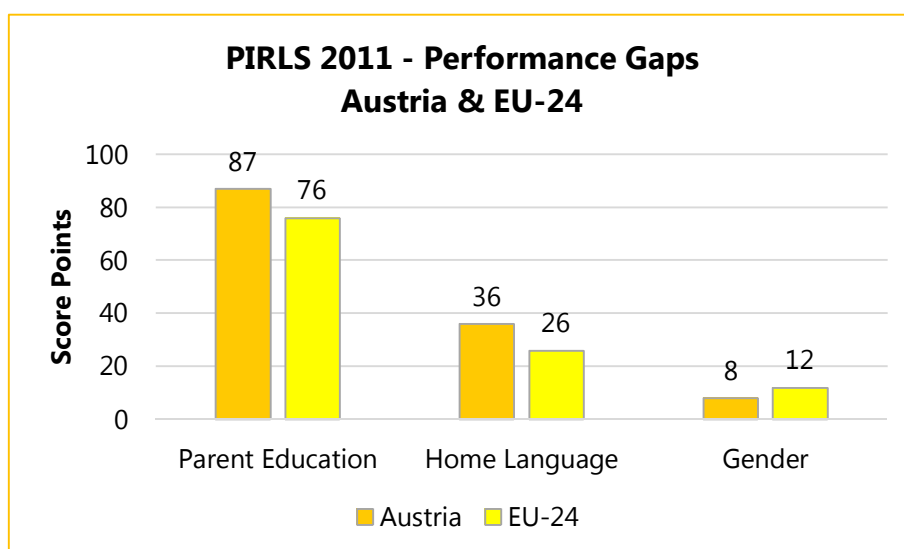
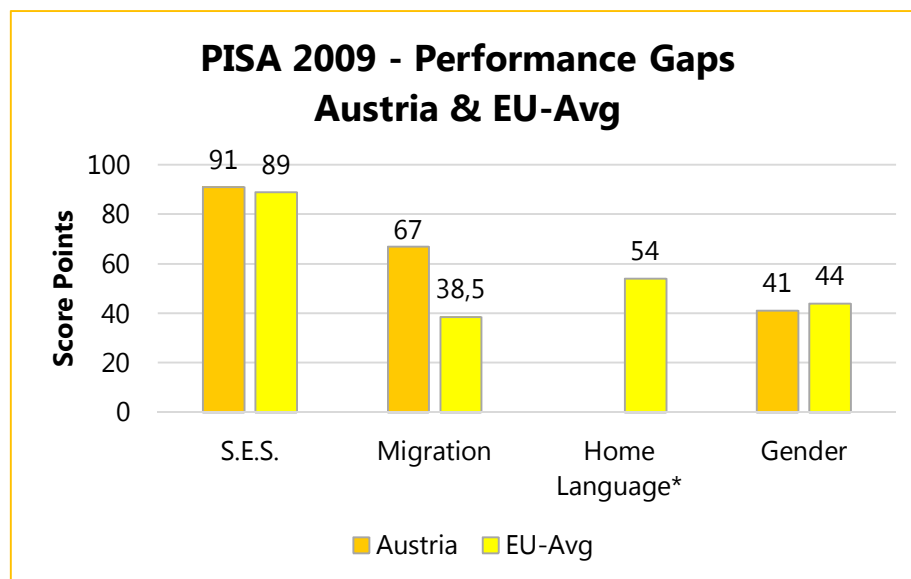


Figure 3: Performance gaps in Austria compared to the EU average, indicating the socio-economic background, the migration status, the language spoken at home and gender in secondary school (PISA 2009)



\*no data

#### 4.3.1 Pre-Primary Years

**Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors:** Austria is near the European average or has slightly more favourable scores in most of the indicators:

- With 27.6 % in the Gini index, a measure of inequality, Austria is close to the European average.
- The child poverty rate in Austria (7.3%) is among the lowest in Europe.
- Only a very low proportion of mothers have a low level of education.
- The proportion of teenage mothers and single parents is also below the European average.
- More than 20 % of all students in Austria have another first language than German.
- There is quite a significant performance gap in reading competence at grade 4 between children who spoke the language of the test before starting school (mean reading score 533) and those who did not speak the language (mean reading score 490).

**Challenges:** There is a strong need for more multi-lingual books or digital material in kindergartens and libraries (due to lack of financial resources) as well as literature and work books in the respective foreign languages. Teachers (school and kindergarten) and librarians have to be trained more in giving the necessary support to people with another first language than German. There are already mobile support teams financed in some Länder to help the educational professionals.

**Encouraging preschool attendance, especially for disadvantaged children:** The participation rate in preschool is high (99.1 % for 5-year-olds, 89.9 % for 4-year-olds, and 56.7 % for 3-year-olds) and free of charge for one year prior to the beginning of primary school. In September 2010 mandatory kindergarten attendance for 16 to 20 hours (half day) over a minimum of at least 4 days per week was introduced for the 5 year olds. This mandatory year was an important step towards inclusion of disadvantaged children. A second mandatory year (also offered free of charge for the parents) is currently being prepared and discussed at political level.



**Identification of and support for preschool children with language difficulties:** In 2009, Austria introduced a framework for supporting the language development of children aged 3-6. The Nationwide Framework Curriculum for Austrian ECEC Services (c.f. Charlotte Bühler Institut 2009) is defined as a play-based curriculum for ECEC institutions and one major part outlines the principles for “Fostering language and speech development”. Apart from that, all Länder are legally bound to collect data on each child’s language skills no later than 15 months before school entry (“Sprachstandsfeststellung”- language level testing), followed by respective support measures if necessary.

#### **4.3.2 Primary Children and Adolescents**

Austria has several programmes to identify and **support children at risk:**

- In 2009, Austria introduced a framework for supporting the language development of children aged 3-6 (see above).
- Mainly in cities with higher immigration rates, there is specialist support for children whose home language is not the language of school. All provinces have established programmes for children and parents with migrant backgrounds. Measures comprise additional staff in settings with higher numbers of non-German speaking children, staff with migrant language skills or specially trained staff to promote German language skills.
- There are trained specialists for children with special needs available in ECEC, special kindergarten teachers, special after-school care centre teachers, psychologists, remedial language teachers and physiotherapists as well as mother-tongue teachers.

**Support for children with special needs:** Regarding the school system, it is currently being discussed (2016) to abolish Special Schools and teach all children together in so-called inclusive classes. This would need more internal differentiation, more professional staff, more different methods (e.g. back to reform-pedagogics) and more autonomy for schools.

**Support for migrant children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school:** More than 20 % of all students in Austria have another first language than German. There is a principle in school education called “intercultural education” in Austria’s secondary school system. There is also “DaZ” – Deutsch als Zweit-/Fremdsprache / German as a second/foreign language, established as special didactic approaches in the curricula for German lessons. Children are supported to take part in the “Muttersprachlicher Unterricht”, which means that they have classes also in own mother tongue.

**Challenges:** The system of early differentiation must be seriously discussed. Full-time day schools but also comprehensive schools until the age of 14 would support equity for those with fewer resources from home, as Austria has a very selective school system. Within the various programmes of family literacy (bookstart), in parent-child-groups and kindergartens there are many local or regional projects and important approaches of multilingualism and intercultural exchange. This trend must be encouraged. Public libraries play an important role in these activities.

**Preventing early school leaving** Austria has a relatively low rate of ESL: 7% in 2014. In 2012, the Ministry of Education adopted a national strategy against ESL. It aims to inter-connect measures at the structural level (reforms and improvements within the school education system); measures at the level of the specific school (initiatives on school quality and improvements of teaching and learning environments); and measures to support students at risk (youth coaching as a new nationwide

measure to support students at risk). Students with a migrant background are at a higher risk for ESL in Austria than native students; efforts have been made within the last years.

**Increasing participation, inclusion and equity for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples:** There are a lot of initiatives in and outside schools and preschool for intercultural and multilingual activities such as "Miteinander lesen" (reading together) in Salzburg or "Grenzenlos lesen" (Reading without borders) by the Austrian Library Association<sup>21</sup>. Also HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) - an internationally accepted and proven programme for Early-Childhood-Intervention - is active in Austria<sup>22</sup> and of course "Bookstart: growing with books" offers material and impulses for parents in various languages<sup>23</sup> and contributes to more social inclusion, engaging the libraries to care for groups at risk. There is also a close net of parent-child-groups, where intercultural aspects are reflected and specific support is given. As Austria has a high-level social welfare system, families at risk get financial support and other benefits in order to fight poverty and disadvantages.

**Challenges:** All professionals in education, be it day-care-mothers, preschool, school or similar institutions dealing with literacy, need more support when it comes to multi-lingual work and material. This comprises books, literature but also more competence, knowledge and resources to build on. The Austrian school system has to make sure that no child is left behind in his/her educational biography.

#### 4.3.3 Adults

**Increasing offers for second-language learners:** Courses in German for speakers of other languages (GSOL), taught by qualified trainers, run all over Austria. Providers set their own learning based on their long experience in this education field, and the offer includes courses with a literacy component (alongside other basic skills). Textbooks are available in GSOL programmes that move participants forward to their desired or required language goals. In 2006, the Department of German as a foreign language at the University of Vienna, the Association of Viennese Adult Education and the Literacy Centre for Migrants of the Adult Education centre Ottakring created a framework curriculum for GSOL and literacy for migrants.

Under the 2011 Integration Agreement, third country nationals seeking to settle in Austria agree to acquire a level of German language skills (Module 1) within two years, with those who successfully complete a certified German course at level A2 in eighteen months refunded their costs. Those applying for long-term residency or citizenship are required to complete Module 2, which is intended to provide German language skills for in-depth autonomous language use.

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<sup>21</sup> See: [https://www.bvoe.at/themen/grenzenlos\\_lesen](https://www.bvoe.at/themen/grenzenlos_lesen).

<sup>22</sup> See: [www.hippy.at/](http://www.hippy.at/).

<sup>23</sup> See: <http://www.lebensspuren.net/buchstart/interkulturell.html>

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