

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

AUSTRIA

D2.1 State of the Art Report

Country Factsheet:	Austria
Conceptual approaches and specific national /regional policies promoting transversal competences in validation and guidance processes:	
Lifelong-Learning Strategy LLL:2020 (issued in 2011) ¹	<p>In July 2011, four federal ministries (Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture; Ministry for Science and Research; Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth; Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs) supported by social partners and all key stakeholders, agreed on a joint strategy². Its rationale is based upon five pillars: life phase orientation (all ages), placing learners at the centre (flexibility of learning), lifelong guidance (facilitating the learning process), competence orientation (recognition of informal learning), and promotion of participation in lifelong learning (enhancing the motivation to learn).³ The approach encompasses the eight key competences as a point of reference for all guiding principles of the recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning of the Council and the Commission. Four of those are transversal competences: interpersonal skills and the ability to adopt new competences / active citizenship / entrepreneurship / cultural awareness and expression.⁴ As overarching strategy, LLL:2020 was the context in which the national validation strategy was developed.</p>
Validation Strategy (issued in 2017)	<p>The national validation strategy notes as the first strategic key objective to increase the value of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning, followed by better accessibility of validation arrangements by providing low-threshold, central information and advisory services as well as the strengthening of validation as an integral part of the Austrian education and training system - strategic goals also coincide with the aims of TRANSVAL-EU.⁵</p> <p>The national strategy introduces four thematic working groups, one of which addresses the professionalization of practitioners, "as there is no specific profile of professionals carrying out validation processes in Austria. Depending on the specific measures and the sector it belongs to, the validation practitioners are teachers, career counsellors, experienced professionals and members of the respective authorities, ministries or social partners."⁶ The envisioned focus therefore lies on the standardization of competences in a consolidated practitioner profile and developing respective training offers, a strategic goal in alignment with the goals of TRANSVAL-EU. Training offers are to be aligned with the catalogue of quality criteria for validation (2018)⁷, which encompasses general quality criteria, e.g., making individual competences explicit, and specific quality criteria, e.g., staff and their competences as well as regular further training. The catalogue of quality criteria is developed as a bottom-up approach based on analyses of existing validation initiatives.⁸</p>

¹ Republik Österreich (2011): Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich. LLL:2020. [Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich \(qualifikationsregister.at\)](#). last consulted 15/06/2021

² Luomi Messerer, K. (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Austria. p.3. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Austria.pdf

³ Austria: Strategy for Lifelong Learning LLL:2020 issued in 2011 | UIL (unesco.org). last consulted 15/06/2021

⁴ Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning | Education and Training (europa.eu). last consulted 15/06/2021

⁵ Luomi Messerer, K. (2019), p. 4.

⁶ Luomi Messerer, K. (2019), p. 36.

⁷ [Kriterienkatalog zur Förderung der Qualität von Validierungsverfahren im Bereich der Berufs- und Erwachsenenbildung in Österreich \(qualifikationsregister.at\)](#); last consulted 15/06/2021

⁸ Luomi Messerer, K. (2019), p. 38f.

	<p>Validation in Austria is generally based on a bottom-up approach with specific projects for example in the sphere of apprenticeships and adult education. There is no legal framework to regulate validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, there is also no individual right for individuals to access validation initiatives.⁹ With regard to the validation of transversal competences, there is no specific framework in Austria and the aim is therefore to gain valuable insights for good and innovative practices in the course of the policy experimentation.</p>
<p>NQF-Act (issued in 2016)</p>	<p>One element of the validation strategy is the linking to the NQF, especially regarding the approach on learning outcomes fostering transparency and therefore being a key success factor for building trust in validation. Efforts to develop the NQF in Austria were pushed ahead based on the 2008 EQF Recommendation. The adoption of the federal law on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF-Act) was an important step towards full implementation of the NQF. The act regulates the mapping of Austrian qualifications based on learning outcomes to one of the eight qualification levels of the NQF which correspond to the levels of the EQF. This process culminates in the publication of the results of the mapping process for information purposes in the NQF-Register. The objective of the NQF-Act is to use the NQF as a tool for encouraging the transparency and comparability of qualifications in Austria and Europe and to promote lifelong learning, which comprises formal, non-formal, and informal learning. The NQF therefore is open for qualifications recognized through validation and for transversal competencies included in qualifications.</p> <p>Transversal competences can be found/are considered in two areas of the EQF and in the NQF and therefore</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Can be found in the descriptors and explanations of the levels: The descriptions ('descriptors') of the individual EQF levels are formulated in a rather general manner. The descriptors of the levels are further specified by explanations: To ensure EQF descriptors can be understood and applied more easily, these formulations aim to specify the abstract descriptions in greater detail. b) Are considered in the mapping process of the individual qualifications and their learning outcomes

Framework (figures, diagrams or rubrics): If there are diagrams or rubrics setting out transversal competences, please include them here, and provide the source

<p>Situation in Austria</p>	<p>In Austria, there are no commonly used frameworks for transversal competences in place. The existing framework in place is the EQF, hence NQF, focusing on qualifications and transversal competences within those qualifications (see above).</p>
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⁹ Luomi Messerer, K. (2019), p. 5f.

Users (Providers and beneficiaries) and uses (purposes) of validation of transversal competences	
What type of organizations/initiatives/projects offer VNFIL for transversal competences and at which stages of guidance and validation processes?	<p>Overall, validation of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning encompasses transversal competences, e.g. the dimensions of social and personal competences, but there is no dedicated mentioning of transversal competences. In many cases, the guidance and validation processes reside in the identification and documentation stages. Yet implicitly, transversal competences gain attention and are to be found also in classical validation processes within the phases of assessment and certification.</p> <p>There are various types of organizations, initiatives, and projects that offer VNFIL that might also cover transversal competences. These organizations include, for example, educational institutions – schools, higher education institutions, adult education institutions (the Austrian Academy of continuing education, wba, for example, is supported by all ten major Austrian adult education umbrella organizations), apprenticeship offices of the competent Economic Chambers, the Austrian Public Employment Service as well as organizations operating in the third sector. Educational counselling and career guidance is, for example, also provided by the Chamber of Labor. There are national initiatives and others with a regional focus (an example of the latter is the initiative ‘Du kannst was!’). There are also initiatives specifically designed for certain target groups, e.g. migrants/refugees/asylum seekers (such as ZEP, Competence Kaleidoscope), supporting low-qualified people in obtaining a qualification from outside the formal system (such as KOMKOM) or empowering women who return to the labour market after parental leave (such as Kompetenzbilanz/ProfilPass).</p>
How are practitioners made aware of the focus on validation of transversal competences?	<p>Awareness raising and information provision has a broader scope and is not limited or explicitly used related to transversal competences.</p>
Do practitioners have access to training and guidelines on the use of frameworks and tools setting out transversal competences?	<p>There is no standardized training for practitioners on transversal competences.</p>
How are employers engaged in validation of transversal competences as stakeholders and users (e.g., in helping to define relevant transversal competences).	<p>For relevant qualifications, employers are involved in validation processes in Austria. As social partner, they are generally involved in educational policies, which is also the case for the employee representation. Explicitly, in specific qualifications employer representatives are actively involved in the validation processes: These validation initiatives may include the validation of transversal competences but are usually not explicitly designed to do so. For example, the initiative ‘Du kannst was!’, a project initiated by the Austrian social partners, validates competences acquired in informal and non-formal learning contexts and leads to the award of an apprenticeship diploma. The examinations are taken at the respective Apprenticeship Office of the Economic Chamber, the awarding body for apprenticeship diplomas in Austria.</p>

	<p>Another example is the engineer qualification (Ingenieur): It can be awarded based on a validation and certification process to graduates of VET colleges of engineering and in the agricultural and forestry/environmental sector who have a minimum of three years of professional experience. The certification bodies are accredited by the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs and several of them are located at regional Economic Chambers.</p>
<p>How are educators/trainers engaged in validation of transversal competences as stakeholders e.g. in helping to define relevant transversal competences or in supporting learners to develop these competences).</p>	<p>Validation initiatives in Austria are developed by practitioners and experts with different backgrounds and offered in a variety of settings. In some cases, educators and trainers are involved, in particular in the adult education context: These validation initiatives may include the validation of transversal competences. For example, the validation process of the Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (wba) uses templates for the self-description of candidates for personal social competences and digital skills / media literacy. Another example to be named is the European project ZEP, co-funded by the European Social Fund and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, that vises to identify and document digital basic competences with a self-evaluation questionnaire. Other initiatives use biography-oriented procedures and methods (e.g. Kompetenz+, Competence Kaleidoscope) or holistic portfolio approaches (e.g. competence profile CH-Q); yet, the validation initiatives in the realm of education are usually not explicitly designed to include transversal skills, yet they can be involved in all four stages of the validation process and can also support candidates in developing competences or finding relevant courses to do so.</p>
<p>How are learners engaged in VNFIL processes that include the validation of transversal competences (e.g. self-assessment, peer assessment)?</p>	<p>Depending on the initiative, learners may carry out self-assessment, e.g. by filling in templates/questionnaires or compiling portfolios to show the competences they have already achieved, including transversal competences. This can also be done with support or in group settings (workshops). In some cases, learners can also demonstrate their transversal competences in formal assessment situations.</p>
<p>General awareness: Are there national campaigns to promote VNFIL service? How and where people can find information on this service?</p>	<p>There are no centralized national campaigns to promote VNFIL services, however there are platforms like erwachsenenbildung.at or Euroguidance that disseminate information on activities as well as the National Coordination Point for the NQF in Austria as contact point for validation in Austria.</p>