

Partner Countries – Desk Research Exercise (VINFL)

***please note, the aim of this template is to collate information on VINFL in national and prison contexts from **already completed research**, such as policy and academic papers. The purpose of this form is not to collect original research – the teacher survey will begin this process.*

Partner Country:	Austria
Organisation:	die Berater
Representative:	Maren Satke

Provide an outline of the **prison system** in your country (maximum 500 words)

- You should include information such as: global prisoner numbers, estates, and trends.

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Outline arrangements for **prison education** in your country (maximum 500 words)

- You should include some information regarding the accessibility of education, opportunities, class sizes, resources, challenges.

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Recent **study and policy recommendations** in your country (maximum 1500 words)

Is there a national strategy for the validation of informal learning (VINFL)? If so, how well developed is this?

At this moment, there is no provision for VINFL within the national education system. Thus, a recent OECD review of vocational education and training explicitly recommended the institution of a joint advisory body in Austria to improve the recognition of prior formal and informal learning (cf. Musset et al., 2013, p. 36).

The Austrian federal ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs has recently launched a public consultation on the issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning. There is little national / legal activity concerning validation of learning outcomes from informal or non-formal learning, apart from a mention in the Austrian Strategy for lifelong learning (which has officially been published in 2011), the establishment of a coordination point for the NQF and several pilot projects for validation.

In fact, there is no comprehensive and coordinated system for the formative validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences in place so far (cf. BMBF, 2015, p. 9). As opposed to this, there are many options available to acquire certifications and qualifications of formal education in a non-traditional way by passing final exams (ibid., p. 12) such as “außerordentlicher Zugang zur Lehrabschlussprüfung” (exceptional admission to pass the final apprenticeship examination), “ExternistInnenprüfung” (possibility to pass the school



leaving examination through adult learning courses), or “Befähigungsnachweis für Zugang zu reglementierten Gewerben” (certification for regulated professions).

Understanding of formal/non-formal and informal learning in Austria: Austria has a longstanding tradition of formal education with a strong emphasis on its widespread dual vocational training system which still has a very good reputation (similar to Germany) Vocational education remains an important pillar of the Austrian education system: In 2012, 76% of students who were enrolled in upper secondary education participated in pre-vocational or vocational programmes, the second highest percentage in the OECD (cf. OECD, 2014).

Has there been any pre-existing research carried out on the value of informal learning in education?

Over the last couple of years, several approaches for the validation of non-formally/informally acquired skills and competences have been developed with the aim of facilitating vocational re-orientation (c.f. paragraph 1.3). However these instruments are stand alone solutions and not embedded into an integrated political strategy. Overall, there is little systematic coordination in regards to validation of non-formal or informal learning in Austria (cf. BMUKK, 2011, p.46)

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is relatively new and not yet fully embraced concept in Austria.

So far, we are only aware of the profession of adult educator that already offers a well-elaborated validation system for the qualification and recognition of adult educators (wba-Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich/Austrian Academy of Continuing Education). Although several formats for formative competence assessment exist and are being used by various institutions in the spheres of adult learning, lifelong guidance and vocational orientation, there is currently no formal process or system in place for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning experiences (particularly not in higher education).

“Assessment” tools that are currently being used include the following (with very varying dissemination):

Kompetenz+ Beratung (supported by the Ministry of Education): This approach has been offered since 2012 and provides a standardised format which has so far been used by approximately 2000 persons. It combines workshops with a final individual coaching which leads to a competence protocol and an action plan. In contrast to other formats, the focus is on some distinct activities which have led to relevant competences that are needed in the future of the client instead of a whole-life competence assessment. The focus of this approach is furthermore on acknowledging competences (i.e. help clients to become aware of them) rather than validating them.

Kompetenzbilanz (developed by Zukunftszentrum Tirol): actually a coaching process including a start workshop, two individual coaching sessions to make participants aware of important experiences and skills and a final coaching session to develop next steps and goals for the future. The Kompetenzbilanz approach has been copied and adapted by several institutions in Austria.



Kompetenzprofil (www.kompetenzprofil.at): This approach consists of 4 group workshops and 20 hours individual work, provided by the Volkshochschule Linz.

Competence portfolio for teens WIK:I (supported by the Ministry of Family and Youth): The main outcome of the WIK:I workshops is an evidence of competences that can be added to job applications.

Other tools have been developed particularly for competences of volunteers, such as the “testimony of volunteering activities” promoted by the Ministry of Social Affairs, the competence portfolio for volunteers, and the SLIC competence workshop for senior volunteers. And of course, the Youthpass is a tool that is in use in Austria, too.

Does VINFL form part of training for teachers?

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This desk research stresses that the validation of competences that have been acquired in non-formal and informal learning is a relatively new concept in Austria. There is no streamlined strategy or process in place and the relevance of validation of competences and learning outcomes is relatively low in education and employment. Although various institutions offer formative formats for competence assessment, we could only identify one profession that fully embraces the concept of validation of non-formal and informal learning and that is the profession of adult educators (including managerial positions, teaching, counselling and librarianship). Overall, the political discussions as well as the educational system are strongly focused on certificates.

Are you aware of pre-existing research that has been carried out into the need for and potential benefits of VINFL, particularly in prisons? (maximum 1000 words)



Erasmus+

Give examples of **good practice in informal learning activities/projects in prisons and community justice settings** (maximum 1000 words)