

Adult Education Initiative

The Adult Education Initiative is a binding agreement concluded between the provincial governments and the federal government in 2012. This initiative aims to enable young people (who have completed their compulsory schooling period) and adults to acquire basic competences and the compulsory schooling qualification free of charge and guarantee a high quality standard for related educational programmes across Austria. According to the evaluation report which was published recently, about 9,000 people took part in basic education courses in the first programme period (2012 until 2014), of which about 4,700 attended programmes for adults to acquire the compulsory schooling qualification. The target values which were set when the initiative was launched were thus clearly exceeded in the field of basic education, but were not reached in the area of compulsory schooling qualifications.

The evaluation gives a good assessment of the programme and its implementation: Most of the specifications and quality standards are considered major stimuli for the development of the providers, the three-year funding period increases the planning certainty and contributes to professionalisation, the programme landscape has seen further differentiation, additional services such as childcare and open learning are frequently offered as well, etc. Participant satisfaction is very high, the participants' capacity to act has been strengthened. Criticism has been expressed, however, that linking funding with the acquisition of compulsory schooling qualifications encourages creaming of participants in the admission process (the selection of the most promising applicants).

The evaluators recommend that the budget be topped up, not only to be able to better meet current needs but also to enable programmes to be held in remote regions. The initiative should also more intensely address employed target groups that have to date been reached less, older individuals or also those who are furthest from the labour market. In the field of compulsory school-leaving qualifications, activities should focus more on developing appropriate teaching methods for the target groups and teaching materials that are relevant for their living environment. In-service training programmes for trainers should be made available for the internal differentiation of their lessons. Towards the end of the course, cooperation with VET or labour market policy institutions should be intensified to support transition to a VET programme.

According to the latest projections, the target group size for basic education programmes in Austria is about 243,000 people, which corresponds to almost five times the originally estimated demand for basic education and equals almost 2.9% of the total population. For the compulsory schooling qualification, the target group size is now assumed to be around 220,000 people.

The agreement between the federal government and the provincial governments has now been extended by another three years. By using funds of the European Social Fund, it will be possible to almost double resources for the programme area "basic education".

Sources:

Website of the Adult Education Initiative: <https://www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at/>
Stoppacher, Peter und Edler, Marina (2014): Evaluation der ersten Periode der Initiative
Erwachsenenbildung. Download: https://www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at/fileadmin/docs/Evaluation_Abschlussbericht.pdf (retrieved on 22.06.15)