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Lost in Transition? Not with Guidance!

Austrian Survey on the national Lifelong Guidance System

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## **EPALE - Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe**

### **Blog**

# **Lost in Transition? Not with Guidance!**

## **Austrian Survey on the**

## **National Lifelong Guidance System**

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by Peter Härtel

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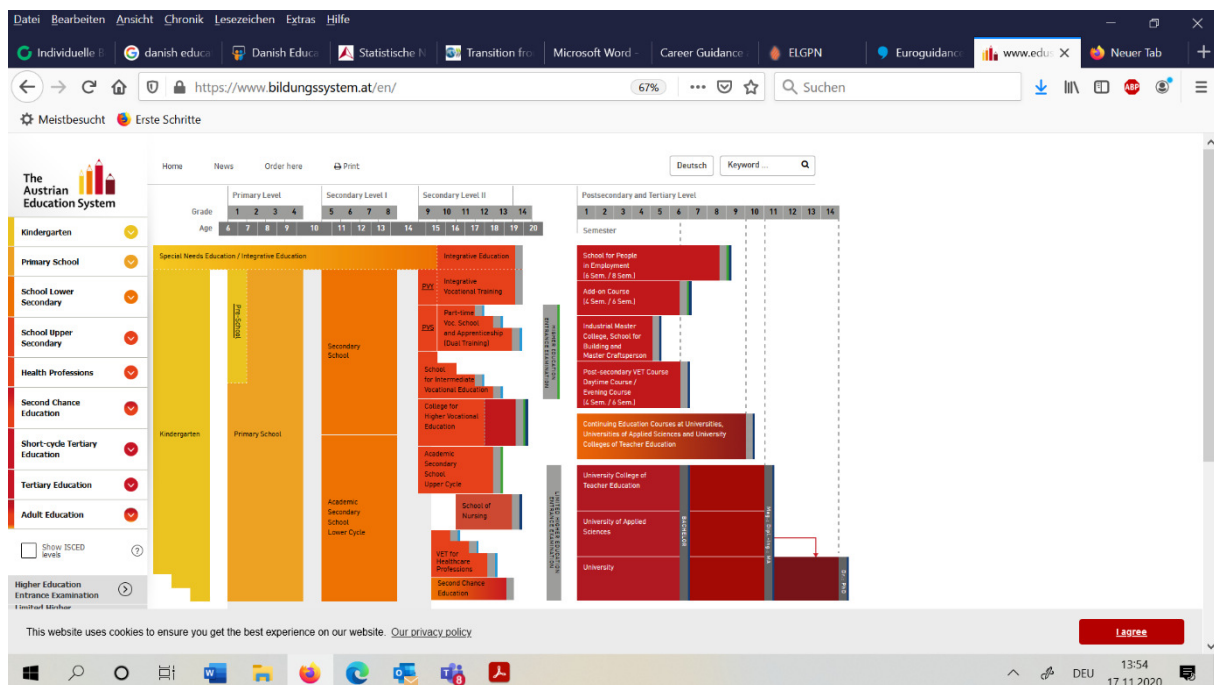
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## General remarks on transition and guidance in Austria

Austria's education system faces a unique situation with regard to transitions and points of interface. In scarcely any other European country do so many consequential decisions regarding various education and training paths have to be made during the education phase beginning with initial entry into extrafamilial institutions such as crèches, nurseries, pre-school and elementary educational institutions and extending to the end of the upper secondary level, as in Austria.

One look at the diagram below immediately underscores the diverse segmentation of the system, both along the timeline as well as across the several age groups.



Screenshot [www.bildungssystem.at](http://www.bildungssystem.at) (link is external); © OeAD / Euroguidance

While education systems in countries such as Denmark, Finland, and Sweden cultivate a high degree of intrinsic pedagogical differentiation while maintaining a common structure from the primary level through the completion of lower secondary education, the Austrian system is marked by a high level of external, institutional differentiation. In Austria, as many as four major decisions have to be taken in the educational process by children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 16, and these decisions can involve a change of educational institutions. In the northern European countries mentioned above, young people in this stage of their education remain in a single educational institution.

The advantages and disadvantages of external systemic and intrinsic pedagogical differentiation can be debated. There can be no doubt, however, that the aspect of “guidance” is profoundly important in Austria even at this early stage, as the trajectory determined at these points of transition and interface can significantly impact an individual’s further education, career, and life path, even if the overall system is fundamentally permeable.



One of the strengths of the Austrian educational landscape is the vocational education and training at the upper secondary level. Some 75% of 15–19-year-olds in Austria choose one of the two vocational training paths, in-company vocational training or full-time school-based vocational training. That figure is among the highest in the European Union as well as in the OECD. More than 200 dual job profiles, over 200 different vocational school curricula, new apprenticeships, as well as options such as apprenticeship with a school leaving certificate (Matura) and apprenticeship after the Matura continue to pose a challenge in terms of guidance and also in the context of transition processes. Today’s educational landscape is considerably more diverse than it was 20 or 30 years ago. There is also a strong demand for information and advice among parents and guardians. This demand is even greater for individuals from diverse intercultural, social, and migratory backgrounds.

Naturally this continues to be the case beyond the upper secondary level. The post-secondary and tertiary sectors of the Austrian education system have experienced dynamic changes in recent years. The establishment and expansion of universities of applied sciences, the formation of teacher training colleges, and the area of private universities have broadened the decision-making spectrum, as has the range of programmes and courses offering master’s degrees and other similar qualifications.

But “transition” are not only a phenomenon of the progression from initial education and training to further education and employment. Transition is a dynamic process that continues over the course of one’s entire life. The Austrian labour market is one of the most dynamic in Europe, with one in three employment relationships undergoing a change every year due to new entrants, retirement transitioning, job changes, unemployment, and seasonality. [1] This tendency is exacerbated by the current impact of COVID-19, which, though seemingly paradoxical, actually serves to foster stability in general in that it encourages flexible adaptation to changes. However, as with the education sector, stability in the face of transition requires effective guidance.

### **Austria’s strategy for lifelong guidance**

Austria has been addressing this issue head-on since at least the end of the 1990s. The large-scale OECD project “Transition from Initial Education to Working Life” [2] from 1997 to 2000 was the first such project in which Austria took an active part. The implementation of obligatory vocational orientation during the period of compulsory schooling also coincides with this period.

OECD’s subsequent project, “Career Guidance and Public Policy” [3], was the springboard for a development that led first to an Austrian lifelong guidance strategy, which has also been incorporated into the Austrian Lifelong Learning Strategy – LLL:2020, as well as to the creation of “Information, Advice, and Guidance for Education and Career”, acronym in German “IBOBB”. Today, IBOBB serves as the “brand” for the comprehensive approach of all of the Ministry of Education’s guidance measures and programmes in Austria. [4]

Since then, Austria has participated in all major European and international activities and networks that deal with the issue of guidance. These include ELGPN – European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network [5], ICCDPP – International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy [6], as well as numerous projects and cooperation initiatives in the European



Erasmus+ programmes. Through regularly held symposia that have helped to establish an Austrian community for guidance, Euroguidance has an important role to play in this context. [7] The cross-border seminars have been contributing to a dynamic exchange on the topic of guidance and related issues for many years.

### **Impact at the national level**

Participation in European and global initiatives is never an end in itself and always entails at least two objectives. The first is to gather input from other parts of the world, to collect information about examples of successful developments, about effective solutions and examples of good practice, while at the same time, as a second objective, to present and discuss situations and approaches to solutions from one's own country on an international level, to learn from feedback given from the perspectives of other countries and other systems, and to draw both encouragement and the necessary course of action from this experience. When it comes to the aspects of transitioning and guidance, Austria has been leveraging the benefits of both of the objectives outlined above intensively for many years now.

### **Impact on the school sector**

Through services offered by schools and supplementary offerings from external providers, major efforts have been initiated in the school sector in recent years to facilitate successful transitions for young people, both as they move between different school types and levels within the school system as well as the transition from initial education to further education and training as well as to career pathways in the world of work. For that the Cross Border Seminar Compendium – Bucharest 2018 provides an in-depth account of developments up to 2018. [8] Of particular importance in this regard are professional services that take into account the long-term process of transition; in other words, services that commence and support transition at an early stage, well in advance of the transitions after the 4th grade and at the 8th and 9th grades, especially in terms of the choice between full-time school-based education and dual apprenticeship training that combines in-company vocational training with vocational school. The transition from general education and vocational schools leading to the school leaving examination and further education at universities, universities of applied sciences, teacher training colleges, colleges and training programmes or direct entry into a profession is also highly relevant.

### **Impact on the area of the labor market**

The Austrian Public Employment Service, with its statutory mandate to implement the federal government's labour market policy, is the main actor in the context of interfaces and transitions on the labour market and the provision of guidance surrounding these issues. A detailed description of the developments up to 2019 is presented in the National Survey Austria for the Euroguidance Cross Border Seminar 2019 in Slovenia. [9] Due to the impact of COVID-19, the demands in this field have increased dramatically since March 2020. It should be noted that consequences of this kind cannot be addressed by guidance and job placement alone; rather, what is required is a bundle of measures that have been initiated in Austria through a combination of direct payments to companies, compensation for lost sales, and regulations for extended forms of short-time work.



If unemployment cannot be avoided, the ensuing disposable time is used to obtain higher qualifications or retraining wherever possible. Such measures are designed to make “transition” possible again; supportive advisory services play a decisive role in this context. [10]

For adults, receiving counselling in the event of job loss or during a job search is not the sole issue of concern. Guidance is also an essential component during ongoing employment, periods of non-employment, or in post-professional phases. These, too, are transition processes during which guidance plays an indispensable role.

In this field since 2011, an effective, provider-neutral educational information and guidance system has been in place nationwide under the initiative of the Ministry of Education, drawing on funding from the European Social Fund and offering cost-free counselling for adults as a first point of contact for individuals with an interest in education. These guidance services are offered by cooperative project networks that have been established in the Austrian federal provinces to ensure the broadest possible range of access to target groups, educational opportunities, and types of counselling and guidance. [11]

An advanced type of guidance that is particularly well suited to the ongoing nature of transition and guidance is “competence counselling”, which combines several formats – group counselling, individual work, and one-on-one counselling – to facilitate a deeper exploration of one’s own skills and how they can be fostered and applied personally and professionally. [12]

The fact that an online consulting service that is being used virtually nationwide was established in 2014 is particularly beneficial for clients and providers in the era of COVID-19. [13]

### **Austrian national lifelong guidance forum**

In early December 2020, the annual meeting of the steering group of the Austrian national lifelong guidance forum will convene for the 19th time. This forum is a prime example of how European and international involvement and cooperation can achieve sustainable impact.

For the first time, the recommendation to establish national forums for lifelong guidance was formulated in the 2004 Resolution of the European Council and the European Commission. [14] Austria coordinated one of the two joint action projects that dealt with this issue and laid the groundwork for establishing the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network – ELGPN – which has produced policy documents and practical guidelines for lifelong guidance over many years, and also provided support for the development of systems, structures, and policies for lifelong guidance in the European member states.

Austria has focused on the cooperative integration of all major national actors since preparing the National Report as part of the OECD project “Career Guidance Policies” [15] in 2000. This group, which worked initially at an operational level, subsequently developed into the Austrian national lifelong guidance forum, in which representatives from all federal ministries, authorities, social partner organisations, practitioners’ associations, research institutions, and other parties that play a key role in guidance are involved. Over the past 20 years, the structured dialogue that takes place in this forum – which has always been held in person at least once a



year – has made a decisive contribution towards creating a common information base and achieving multifaceted approaches to cross-sectoral developments and a shared understanding of the role of guidance, including matters relating to transition.

However, it has also heightened awareness of the specific roles that different actors and stakeholders play in guidance in view of their particular responsibilities as well as ways to leverage the benefits collectively.

At the 18th meeting of the steering group of the national forum for lifelong guidance in late November 2019, reports were submitted by

- the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research
  - on national developments such as how IBOBB – information, advice and guidance for education and career are anchored within school governance
- Euroguidance
  - about news from Erasmus+ and Euroguidance at the European level

Furthermore, the following institutions have exchanged knowledge and experience

- The Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research, School Psychology Service – health promotion and psychosocial support, educational guidance
- University College of Teacher Education Styria
- Lower Austrian Board of Education and the University College of Teacher Education in Lower Austria
- The Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research – special education/inclusive education
- Public Employment Service
- Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection
- Austrian Federal Chancellery – youth policy
- Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research – psychological counselling for students and information about study programmes
- Austrian Federal Economic Chamber WKO – Department for Education Policy
- ibw Austria – Research & Development in VET
- Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training – öibf
- Federal Institute for Adult Education – bifef
- Euroguidance – network for educational and career guidance in Europe

as well as on special topics from

- CareersNet/Cedefop
- ICCDPP – International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy – symposium, Tromsø

Details of the knowledge sharing and exchange have been documented extensively for the participating institutions. [16]



The lasting achievements of the Austrian national lifelong guidance forum prompted the chairperson for the international ICCDPP symposium in Tromsø to make this public statement underscoring the country's efforts as an example of good practice:

“Austria’s national forum has been in existence for 17 years and has strong connections with social partners and the entire guidance community . . . cooperation is an essential element of the social fabric and culture of Austria . . . Many countries might wish for this to be bottled and sold!” (Lynn Bezancon, Chairperson for the ICCDPP symposium in Tromsø, 2019).

### **Current developments and challenges**

Major new developments have unfolded since the steering committee of the national lifelong guidance forum met last.

The new Austrian government programme [17] includes numerous approaches to transition and guidance, among them the following explicitly worded examples illustrating the active role of guidance in the process of transition:

“Creation of an interface survey that maps the interfaces between kindergarten and university as well as a plan of action based on the survey and aimed at reducing interface problems”

and

“Improve vocational and educational guidance for young people and implement Austria-wide talent checks as part of the curriculum for all 14-year-olds in various school types, supported by counselling for parents. . .”

*(from the 2020–2024 government programme).*

Inevitably, some of the developments are now being impacted by COVID-19-related lockdowns. Many projects, however, are being resolutely pursued, such as the redesign of the curricula for educational, vocational, and personal orientation that is being implemented in the compulsory schooling period in all school types, as well as efforts to raise the profile of the “overarching themes”, which are to be firmly integrated into all subjects, in all school types, and at all school levels.

This also includes the aspect of guidance, which will strengthen the transition process considerably.

Additionally, the ongoing dialogue within the national lifelong guidance forum will be instrumental in achieving the objectives. The same applies to the exchange of ideas and information in the Euroguidance Cross Border Seminars!



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## Links

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<https://bildung.erasmusplus.at/fileadmin/Dokumente/bildung.erasmusplus.a...> (link is external)

<https://bildung.erasmusplus.at/de/policy-support/euroguidance/> (link is external)

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<https://www.bildungsberatung-online.at/startseite.html> (link is external)





<https://www.bildungssystem.at/> (link is external)

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<http://www.elgpn.eu/> (link is external)

<https://erwachsenenbildung.at/themen/bildungsberatung/angebot/initiative...> (link is external)

<https://erwachsenenbildung.at/themen/bildungsberatung/governance/strategieentwicklung.php>  
(link is external)

<https://www.iccdpp.org/> (link is external)

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## Footnotes

[1] Knittler K. (2018): Dynamik des österreichischen Arbeitsmarktes. In: Statistik Austria, Statistische Nachrichten 10/2018 Wien.

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[5] <http://www.elgpn.eu/> (link is external)

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[10] <https://www.ams.at/unternehmen/personal--und-organisationsentwicklung/sc...> (link is external)

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[12] Brandstetter G. / Kellner W. (2014): Die Kompetenz+Beratung. Ein Leitfaden. Projektpublikation des Rings Österreichischer Bildungswerke und des Österreichischen Instituts für Berufsbildungsforschung im Rahmen des Projektnetzwerks "Bildungsberatung Österreich - Querschnittsthemen". Wien.

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[17] <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/bundeskanzleramt/die-bundesregierung/...> (link is external)

