



Co-funded by
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Country Report Austria

Habitus Sensitive Guidance for Working Persons in Under- privileged Milieus

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Date: December 2022

ReachOut to the 'Left-Behind' – Improving guidance for working
persons from the underprivileged milieu
Project 2021-2-AT01-KA220-ADU-000048968
Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Vienna, December 2022

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1. Introduction

1.1. What is at stake?

Recent changes in the labour market pose a lot of challenges with different causes. Common changes are the so-called 'megatrends' that fundamentally affect entire economies and, secondarily, labour markets. These megatrends are mainly globalisation, digitalisation, climate change, and demographic and societal changes. Some of these trends result in incremental changes, while others are more disruptive or 'game-changing'. For instance, they affect the structure of the economy and the labour market, the design of industrial relations, and the proportions of forms of work, besides increasing the precarity of the balance between flexibility and security in the labour market.

All these changes in the labour market have an impact on the workforce. Workers need to respond adequately to remain competitive in the labour market. As widely cited in literature (Bremer, 2017a; Bremer, 2017b; Erler, 2014), education is increasingly becoming an important and strong determinant of employment and career.

With the aforementioned changes in the labour market, including its rising knowledge requirements, the approach to (adult) education and the willingness to be educated are becoming more essential. Through lifelong learning, an employee can be rewarded with a higher status and with more interesting and usually better-rated and better-paying work. However, this learning situation is affected by labour market situations and the status of specific working groups or the specific individual situations of employees and their access to information. Also, while lifelong education as such is becoming more and more a prerequisite for career success, other factors might carry more weight with regard to worker selection and allocation.

To address these concerns, access to continued information and education as well as to educational guidance can be perceived as comparative advantages of workers. Noticeably disadvantaged in this respect, however, are working people who could be described as belonging to underprivileged milieus or lower underprivileged (Bremer, 2017b), where major barriers to lifelong education and training still exist. People from underprivileged groups mostly have lower education and skills levels but also demonstrate lower participation in further education and educational guidance.

1.2. The Erasmus+ Project "ReachOut to the 'left-behind' – improving guidance for working persons from the underprivileged milieu"

Responding to the challenges outlined in the previous section, the Erasmus+-funded project *ReachOut* (2022–2024) aims at the improvement of the adult education sector by enhancing the competences of adult educators and other adult education staff in offering and providing guidance to workers in underprivileged milieus for their special needs for orientation and empowerment, as well as creating upskilling pathways for such workers and increasing their adult education access and take-up.

Within the project framework, working persons from the underprivileged milieu are persons in the prime working age who have a less stable form of gainful work (e.g., a fragmented, precarious, low-paid, marginal or partly declared work). They have limited access to formal education and guidance, are low-skilled, may have a very low level of education and are functionally illiterate. They are often unconvinced, based on experience, that formal education and guidance can help improve their employment status, and they assume that the promise of advancement through further education does

not apply to them. Some of these employees may be migrants or refugees, so they may have little knowledge of the national language or the applied systems in their host country.

The Erasmus+ ReachOut project is working under the assumption that education in general and adult education in particular are efficient ways of improving and extending access to adult training and upskilling. At the same time, the project is based on the fact that educational guidance professionals have to tackle the challenge of dealing with people in a changing society with changing needs for guidance and empowerment. Their challenges are not the same; on the contrary, large differences in their backgrounds, milieus and habitus can be assumed.



The general idea of the project is to display adequate guidance to individuals in accessing appropriate education and training opportunities in adult education and to give them a clear picture of the individual skills that they need.

The end-goal of the project is to extend the accessibility of, and increase participation in, adult education. The project intends to achieve it through focused guidance in, and well-designed support for, accession to appropriate education and training opportunities in adult education. Very important is the use of motivation strategies by adapting guidance offers to the target group of working persons from underprivileged milieus. What is essential in this process is that these working persons attain knowledge of the individual skills that they need.

The project works with three main direct and indirect target groups to improve the situation in educational guidance for working persons in underprivileged milieus. Those target groups are as follows:

A. **Guidance practitioners** and their organisations who are confronted with the challenges of working with persons from underprivileged milieus, whose habitus differs greatly from that of general guidance practitioners themselves (e.g., due to their different educational backgrounds).

B. **Working persons from underprivileged milieus** who are of the prime working age and who have a less stable form of gainful work (e.g., a fragmented, precarious, low-paid, marginal or partly declared work). They are low-skilled, may have a very basic level of education, are functionally illiterate and have limited access to formal education and guidance. Some of these working persons may be migrants or refugees and thus may have, little knowledge of the national language or systems applied in their host country.

C. **Governing actors** at the regional, national and European levels, such as stakeholders responsible for educational guidance and training as well as policy makers in the field of strategic programme development and funding.

The project is implemented by a European consortium composed of the following institutions with long-standing expertise in the fields of educational guidance, labour, and labour market and education policy, policy analysis, consulting and scientific research:

- ÖSB Social Innovation Gemeinnützige GmbH (AT) – leader of the project;
- bbb Büro für berufliche Bildungsplanung (DE);
- Andragoski Center Republike Slovenije (SI); and
- Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (CZ).

1.3. About this report

This report mainly describes and critically analyses the systems by which professional educational guidance is delivered to working persons from underprivileged milieus in all countries involved in the project. It also maps the state of the art related to the policy and practice of such guidance and provides best-practice examples aside from addressing weak points. The analyses will be interpreted in the light of the latest social and political developments and will specifically respond to current events connected to changes in the labour market and additional requirements in the labour market and guidance systems.

After outlining the general situation concerning guidance systems and the situation in each of the participating countries, this report will focus on describing the specific target group hidden behind the term *underprivileged milieus* specific to each partner country. Both the qualifications of the group and its quantification will be described.

Methodologically, this report is based on a comprehensive literature and data analysis, interviews with selected experts from science and practice and selected good-practice examples.

Expert interviews are a valuable research method in the field of social sciences. These interviews involve engaging with individuals who possess extensive knowledge and expertise in a particular subject or field of study. By tapping into the insights and experiences of these experts, we are able to gain deeper understanding, unique perspectives, and nuanced interpretations of complex social phenomena. The interviews were conducted with persons from science and practice who were relevant for the topic of the project. The first interview was with a scientist who has been studying habitus intensively. In the course of the discussion, the relevance of our project was emphasized and some interesting thoughts for the project process were shared. Literature was also recommended, which was used in the following subchapters. One interview took place with a member of the project WUK Bildungsberatung. Another interview was given by a member of the project "Plaudertischer!". The given information was included in subchapter 4 (Good Practice Examples). Furthermore, the interviews helped to better understand the specific challenges of the target group and to conduct in-depth research on certain topics.

This report will help to create a solid base for the identification of the status quo, key actors, potentials, and possible bottlenecks and challenges relevant for each country. On the basis of the outcomes of the particular national contribution, a Self-Study Manual ('Experience and Cases from Working with Working People in Underprivileged Milieus') and a Policy Paper ('Habitus Sensitive Guidance – Recommendations for Policy Makers') are compiled.

2. Situation of working people from underprivileged milieu

2.1. Defining the object of investigation

One of the main ideas in the field of inequality originates from Pierre Bourdieu, whose work "Distinction" (2018 [1987]) focuses, among other things, on cultural, social, and economic capital and the associated practices of distinction and therefore unequal habitus. It is argued that the conditions for gaining and shaping them can vary according to social class background and the educational path associated with it. Competences can be determined by the consumption of cultural goods, whereby this differs between social groups. Along with this, there is also a milieu-specific habitus. Despite all

efforts, this can never be completely discarded, which is why the types of capital learned during socialization (social, cultural, and economic capital) can be described as very deterministic for the life course of individuals (Bourdieu 2018 [1987]). In a more theoretical framing, cultural capital is seen as a reciprocal resource in the academic milieu and as a basis for social selectivity (Lamont and Lareau 1988). Using theoretical approaches of their work on symbolic boundaries, especially class- and milieu-specific inequalities can be considered.

By symbolic boundaries, Lamont et al. (2015) define those boundaries that lead to the inclusion or exclusion of people, groups, or things. Boundary processes, distinctions, and categorizations are created, among other things, by normative imperatives, cultural attitudes, and practices, and hence dislikes or preferences (Lamont et al. 2015). With the use of interviews with upper-middle class professionals and managers in France and the United States, Lamont (1992) shows that cultural as well as symbolic boundaries vary, and ascriptions of meaning can be defined differently in the national context as well as by class and milieu (Lamont 1992). Boundaries are drawn along three criteria: moral concepts, socioeconomic success, and cultural capital. Moral boundaries are based on ideas about honesty, one's attitude toward gainful employment, and integrity. Socioeconomic boundaries are drawn along internalized assumptions about the social positioning of individuals along the lines of property, power, or wealth. Likewise, success in one's profession or gainful employment is considered a decisive criterion for the higher ascribed value in that area. Finally, cultural boundaries are defined that focus on education, intelligence, cultural preferences, and taste (Lamont 1992).

Bourdieu (2018 [1987]) argues that one cannot dismiss the habitus. Even after completing formal education, the habitus from one's milieu or origin always remains. Because of that, habitus is a very structurally deterministic concept.

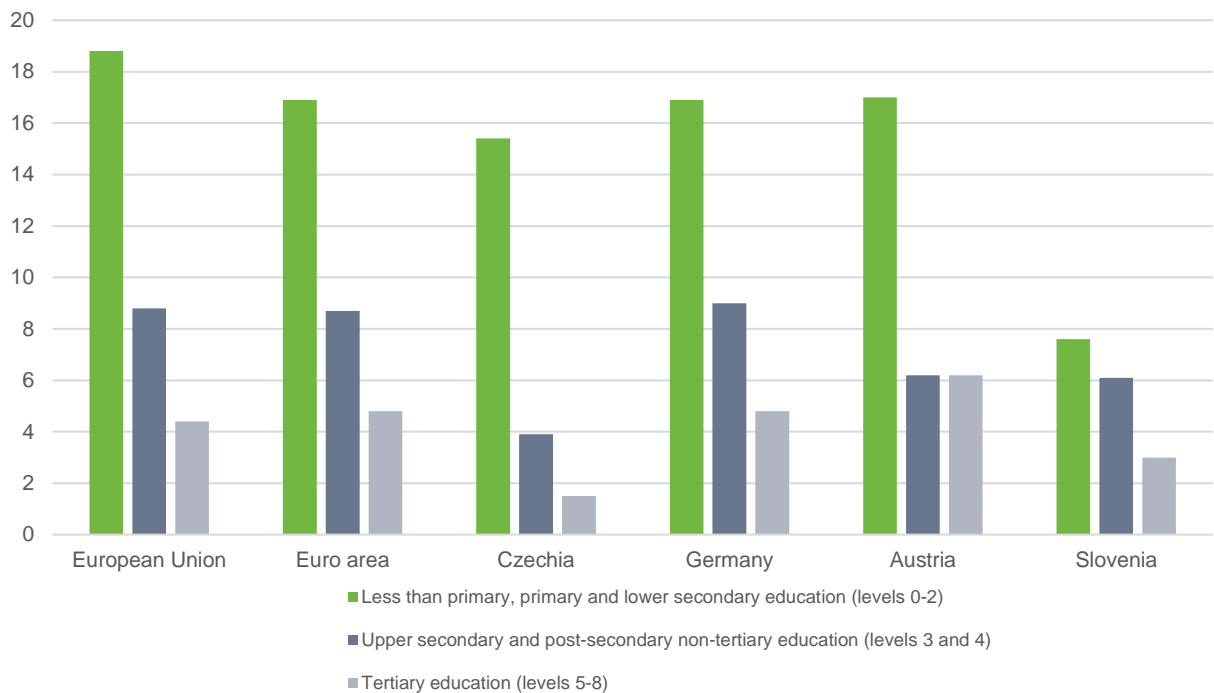
During socialization, the primary habitus is formed in the family. Because of this, the social position of the family is crucial: the way of thinking, speaking, and behaving is inherited. A secondary habitus is formed through socialization at school. Thereby the primary habitus can be reinforced. Habitus does not simply bring different ways of thinking and behaving, but different classification schemes. In conclusion, one's habitus is strongly shaped of the milieu of origin (Bourdieu 2018 [1987]).

Persons from this underprivileged milieu are characterized by a certain habitus (Bourdieu 1993), which differs greatly from that of the guidance practitioners themselves. Guidance practitioners have diverse educational backgrounds and belong typically to the post-material milieu (about 12 % of population in Germany and 10 % in Austria) or the adaptive, pragmatic middle-class milieu (about 12 % of population in DE and AT) (SINUS-Institut 2021). Persons from the underprivileged group belong to the precarious milieu (about 9 % in DE) and consumer-oriented basis (about 9 % in AT). They are characterized by lower educational and skill level and lower participation in educational guidance (Bremer 2017). And a high percentage has migration background. People in a certain social milieu are among other things similar in their preferences and attitudes to work and education (Vester et al. 2001).

2.2. Working people from the underprivileged milieu in European Union

To illustrate the situation in the EU and selected countries, we can use data from the EU-SILC. These data allow us to picture the portion of in-work at-risk-of-poverty depending on an educational level.

Figure 1: In-work at-risk-of-poverty by education level (2020)



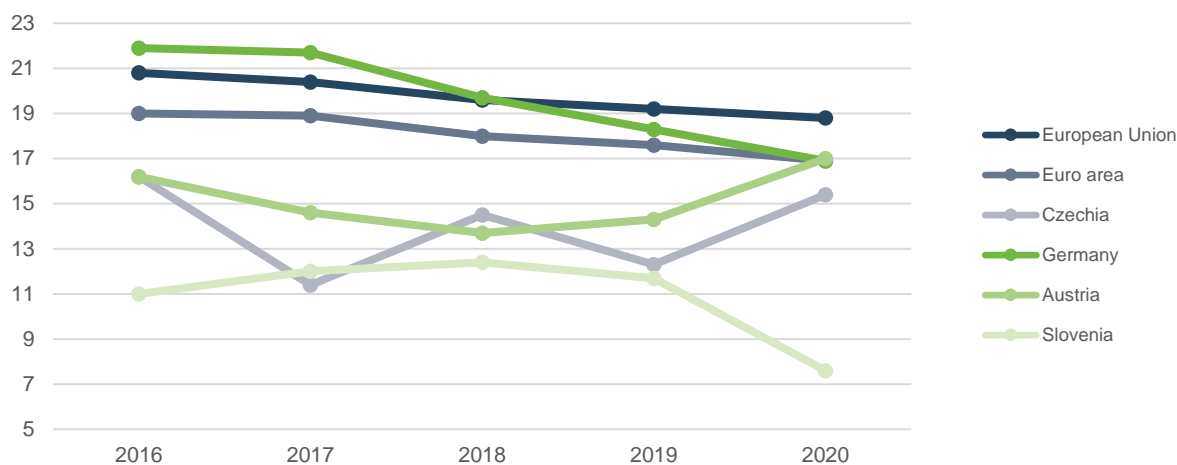
Source: Eurostat, 2022

In Figure 1 we may recognize the distinct effect of low education. Persons with less than primary, primary, and lower secondary education are most often at risk of in-work poverty. In 2020 the lowest rate of 7,6% was in Slovenia. Other selected countries were close to the union average. In Czechia it was 15,4 %, in Germany 16,9 % and in Austria 17 %.

As could be expected, with higher levels of attained education the portion of persons at risk of poverty declines. On the other hand, it does not decline linearly. We may observe a gap between the category of lowest education and the two other categories for higher education levels (in 2020, only Slovenia represented an exemption from the pattern). This observation highlights the importance of qualification and competencies for people from underprivileged milieu.

If preceding years were considered, we could notice that the relevant ratios for persons with upper secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education (two higher categories) are quite stable. Within the category for lowest attained education (most relevant in this project), more volatility can be observed. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: In-work poverty of lowest educational category (2016-2020)



Source: Eurostat, 2022

In the period from 2016 to 2020 there was a slow decline recorded in Germany, similarly as on the level of the EU and Eurozone. In contrast, Czechia, Austria, and Slovenia experienced more dynamics, mostly in 2020, which was the first year of the pandemic of COVID-19. Recorded changes were undoubtedly affected by applied social and anti-pandemic (compensation) policies.

Participation rate in education and training has been more or less stable between 2015 to 2019, however a sudden increase has been detected in 2020 (from 11,7 % to 14,6 %). In 2021 the rate in education and training as been increased again. However, the number is expected to be higher because of many online courses that have been offered. Whether the participation of working people from underprivileged milieu is influenced by this is not clarified. It is assumed that since Covid 19 the (educational) inequalities have been increased.

Table 1: Participation rate in education and training (between 25 and 64 years) in LLL from 2015 to 2021

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
EU (27 countries)	10,1	10,3	10,4	10,6	10,8	9,1	10,8
Austria	14,4	14,9	15,8	15,1	14,7	11,7	14,6

Source: Eurostat, 2021

While comparing and interpreting these data we should keep a sceptical view and consider the national specifics in all selected countries. To allow deeper analysis, we investigate the situation in Austria in detail in the next subchapter.

2.3. National situation of working people from underprivileged milieu

While income inequality in Austria is quite low compared to many other OECD countries, social mobility lags behind. Socioeconomic outcomes are highly passable across generations: fathers' incomes are a strong predictor of their children's earnings in prime years, compared to elsewhere.

This reflects strong consistency across generations in professional and educational outcomes, especially for women and immigrants. Relative income status also tends to persist in people's lives (Förster, Königs 2020). Being involved in the national labour market educates and reinforces (core/key) competencies that can be relevant far beyond the labour market. In Austria, the career choice is strongly based on the social milieu. Above all, the employment activities of parents influence the possible paths of children.

Job-related reasons lead to the acceptance of further vocational courses in the form of non-formal learning opportunities. These include courses in "education and teacher training", "IT and information technology", "health, medicine, pharmacy", "transport services" and "health and safety at work". Hence, it is likely that specific professions and fields of work can increase the value of continuing vocational programs. The data shows that the level of income is crucial in whether further vocational programs are attended: People with the highest incomes achieve a participation rate of 60%, while only about a quarter of employees from the lowest fifth of income have taken up continuing vocational training (Erler 2014).

The Austrian labour market presents a clearly defined pattern of people who are experiencing precarious employment.

Persons with a maximum of a mandatory school leaving certificate are more often affected by precariousness than persons with an apprenticeship or intermediate school leaving certificate. This is particularly evident in the fact that people in this group (max. mandatory school leaving certificate) are more often employed in low-wage jobs. People who are unemployed or are only employed as unskilled workers have lower satisfaction values on average than people who have highly skilled jobs or are self-employed.

Precarious employment in the low-wage segment first affects unskilled workers, most of whom have few formal educational qualifications. These people usually belong to disadvantaged milieus and sometimes have language barriers, health restrictions or very low education and vocational training certificates (Statistik Austria/EU-SILC 2020).

In Austria, compulsory schooling is regulated in terms of a nine-year period beginning in September following the age of six/the sixth birthday. However, positive graduation from the last year of school is not necessarily required for the ending of compulsory schooling – there is no explicit formal educational qualification "compulsory schooling" in Austrian national school law.

People who do not continue their (formal) education after completing compulsory schooling have a particularly hard time on the Austrian labour market. The first job is taken up late, and the employment career is very unstable. Also, the unemployment risk increases. On average, persons in the second year after completing their compulsory schooling are employed for only 15% of the time that has passed (two months) (Statistik Austria 2021).

A closer look at the labour market status after dropping out of compulsory schooling reveals that more than every second person who dropped out is entirely outside the education and employment system. The vast majority are only registered at a main residence in Austria, but they do not have any (health/social) insurance periods of their own. Another 15% of those who have dropped out of compulsory school are registered with the Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS) as unemployed, in training or looking for an apprenticeship. Only about 10% of dropouts are in gainful employment. After dropping out of compulsory school, some persons (21%) start another formal education. Whether further attempts at education are undertaken often depends on entering the labour market/dements on the first steps taken into the labour market (Statistik Austria 2015).

Young people's opportunities and situations on the labour market depend to a significant part on the formal qualifications they have acquired. The risk of unemployment increases when certain types of education are discontinued. People who do not pursue further education after compulsory schooling have a particularly hard time. They face an increased risk of unemployment, lower earning potential and unstable employment careers.

Another characteristic of the national/Austrian labour market is the so called dequalification of specific milieus and/or population groups. In the last few years, due to increasing digitalization and changes in the world of work, the number of people affected by de-skilling has been rising. Nevertheless, mostly affected are migrants whose educational certificates acquired abroad are not recognized, whose nostrification/validation would be very expensive or too time-consuming (exams that must be repeated in German). In some cases, the knowledge and skills cannot be (immediately) used in the labour market due to the limited proficiency of German. In some cases, people are working outside their profession in form of temporary solutions, i.e., the people affected are pursuing other paid jobs. For example, doctors or translators are employed as assistants in cleaning or nursing. The longer the period of employment in a non-specialized sector, the less likely it is that the employee will return to his or her original occupation. Thus, employment activities that were initially intended as transitional solutions can lead to permanent de-skilling (Herzog-Punzenberger 2017). In some cases, migrants also work informally for/in private households, like cleaning or construction work. That often leads to negative effects for social security and is a problem because of (health) insurance reasons.

Particularly since the publishing of the results of the “Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) 2013”, which compared the basic skills of adults in the areas of reading, general mathematics, and technology-based problem-solving skills in different countries, it has become clear that many people in highly developed industrial societies – including Austria – do not have sufficient basic skills to cope with everyday tasks. Often, there are differences in skills proficiency related to socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, level of education and social background. Immigrants, whose mother tongue is a foreign language, have low levels of literacy proficiency in the German language (OECD 2012). The results of the PIAAC data suggest that it is mainly the unequal distribution of socioeconomic wealth that leads to deficits in knowledge/skills among underprivileged milieus.

Functional illiteracy has a considerable impact on the lives of those affected. They often find themselves in precarious living conditions such as unemployment or welfare state dependency. The ability to read and write is a necessity for participation in the Austrian labour market. However, this was not always the case: until the 1970s, there were hardly any difficulties for illiterate people to find a job, as there were enough jobs available that did not require any specific knowledge. However, due to increasing technological development, the work environment changed. Due to the rising level of education, there was also an increase in qualifications in reading and writing.

Thus, from today's perspective, the successful completion of a basic education (be it an education after compulsory schooling or an apprenticeship) is of relevance to permanently increase one's chances on the labour market.

3. Resulting challenges for the Guidance System

3.1. Structure of the Guidance System

In Austria, educational and vocational guidance is provided by many different actors in the following sectors:

3.1.1. Guidance in initial education and training

The following support system has been established in the Austrian secondary school system to enable students to make well-informed and thoughtful decisions on their educational and vocational careers:

- Vocational orientation (Berufsorientierung) in school curricula: As part of the mandatory curriculum in different school types of Vocational Orientation is about sharing of information, experiences, as well as about providing support for individual vocational and educational choices.
- Student and education counselling by school teachers: Specially qualified teachers provide information and counselling activities for individual students on a voluntary basis. Students are supported in their decision-making process, especially in gathering and interpreting information.
- Educational counselling by school psychologists: This guidance service is a public offer run by the Ministry of Education. Psychologists are supervising and supporting the school teachers who specialise in student counselling (see above) and give practical support in demanding cases. They also use scientific and empirical methods (psychological tests) to assess students' personal interests and talents, as well as to assess achievement levels and personality traits.

3.1.2. Guidance in Tertiary Education

Universities and universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) mostly provide guidance offers in transition phases, like the enrolment phase (choice of subjects), or at the end of the study programmes when students are entering the labour market (career counselling).

- Study counselling of the Austrian Students' Union (ÖH): Currently, the ÖH (Austrian Students Representatives) is providing the main share of university study counselling. These offers mostly aim at the first phase of enrolment (before taking up studies) or at the initial phase of a semester. Counselling is done by other senior students, who act as "peers" for the juniors. In this context, some distance counselling tools like phone, email or Skype are used as well.
- Psychological student counselling: Psychological student counselling is provided by the Ministry of Science, which is responsible for universities in Austria, and is available in all six Austrian cities with universities. Apart from psychological support in crisis situations, there are also guidance offers for choosing the right study subject.
- Career Services: Some of the Austrian universities have already established so-called career centres where students who are currently finishing their studies can get guidance services for their successful entry into the labour market.

3.1.3. Guidance in the employment sector

The most important provider and financier of guidance services in the labour market policy context is the Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS). Guidance offers are carried out nationwide by the

AMS via its network of regional offices (RGS) and Vocational Information Centres (BIZ). Additionally, AMS is funding a large number of labour market policy measures which also have guidance elements.

- Vocational Information Centres (BIZ): The main task of BIZ is providing information about trends and changes in the labour market. The services from BIZ all over Austria range from support in information research, public information events and workshops (e.g., for professional self-assessment and job search training), group work with school classes to visualise their potential career choices, guidance counselling and answering inquiries by email or telephone. BIZ focuses its work on the transition from school to work. Students are supported in making informed choices about their educational and professional careers. This should also help to reduce unemployment (Putz 2013).
- Vocational information provided by AMS: AMS provides information on vocations, education programmes and the labour market in printed form (brochures, folders etc.), as well as on the internet (downloads, online tools, databases). The AMS Research Network operated by the AMS department for labour market research and professional information is an important platform in this context. It provides information and several services which are based on AMS research in the area. Among these information sources are the AMS Practice Handbooks, which can be used by labour market policy measure trainers or other educational and vocational guidance practitioners as a tool, learning aid and reference text for their daily work.
- Labour Market Policy Measures for Unemployed – Active Labour Market Policies and Qualification: Training measures by AMS can be separated into orientation (vocational orientation and training), qualification (further training and education), active job search, training measures and workplace training (BMASK 2015).

3.1.4. Guidance in adult education

The Austrian adult education (AE) system deals with education efforts which take place after an individual has finished school education, thus with clients reaching from young adults to senior citizens. In this, AE utilises a concept of education that goes beyond instrumental learning and mere acquisition of specific skills. This concept of education also encompasses values and personal orientation (Schlögl 2006).

In the context of adult education, the following types of guidance providers can be found:

- Provider-independent guidance institutions: This type of guidance provider is not part of adult educational organizations, and does not provide educational services (courses, classes etc.) itself.
- Adult education organizations: Many adult education organizations provide guidance and counselling activities as part of their services. These activities are partially aimed at getting the clients into the correct courses and educational offers, which are offered by the institution itself (course counselling). Other services see themselves as “neutral”, meaning that the clients get counselling independent of the own offered courses, focusing on the needs/interests of the clients. In this context, guidance counselling can give support and orientation for the clients to make informed choices about vocations, education, and employment. Adult education providers with guidance counselling services include – inter alia – community colleges (Volkshochschulen), education institutes run by the social partners (WIFI, bfi etc.), several church-affiliated adult education organizations and others.

- Self-employed guidance counsellors in vocations, education, and employment: Due to the rising trend of coaching and supervision services offered, there is also a growing number of self-employed guidance counsellors, who offer their services.
- Provision of guidance by interest groups:
 - Chamber of Commerce (WK/WIFI): Different institutions belonging to the WK or the WIFI offer educational and vocational guidance in many different forms, including information services, guidance counselling, psychological tests, skill checks or workshops dealing with educational and vocational topics. As an additional service, they also provide an online portal called “BerufsInformationsComputer” (BIC.at).
 - Chamber of Labour (AK): The Chamber of Labour is engaged in educational guidance counselling, although with different intensity in different Austrian provinces. In some provinces, the AK is an active partner and guidance provider within the “Initiative Educational Guidance Austria”.
- Many public projects and programmes (Active labour market policies, education policies) have educational and vocational guidance as (larger or smaller) part of their offered services. In the transition area between school and work, for example, there are support structures like youth coaching and other youth programmes (outside schools), which are active in the field and use methods and tools of guidance counselling in their work. Many non-profit organizations targeting specific groups like women, migrants or handicapped persons also offer educational guidance counselling as part of their repertoire.

3.2. Description of the situation, challenges, and trends of the Guidance System

3.2.1. Target group related challenges and ways of addressing them

The participation in further education/adult education is very unevenly distributed along the social stratum/along the social milieu (see chapter 2.2 for the situation in Austria). There exists a special technical term for this widespread phenomenon. Experts in the field of adult education use to coin it the “Matthew-Effect” referring to the Gospel of Matthew: “For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (Matthew 25:29, RSV)”. Persons with higher levels of initial education participate much more in learning activities (formal and non-formal) than persons with lower levels of initial education, resulting in an ever-widening gap of educational attainment over the life course. One of the core tasks of educational guidance is to address this social challenge by supporting especially persons from precarious social milieu with low educational attainment levels in participating in further education.

This core task and pivotal target group of educational guidance coincides strongly with the target group of the project at hand: **Working persons from the underprivileged milieu**, who have a less stable form of gainful work (e.g., fragmented, precarious, low paid, marginal, partly declared). On average, this social group has a certain distance to formal education and guidance: They are often low-qualified people with very basic levels of education as well as functional analphabets. Some of those working persons can have migration or refugee background so that just little knowledge of the national language or systems is available.

Growing inequality, growing labour market polarization with the increase of unstable precarious work at the fringe of legal labour markets and the large influx of persons from poor countries are driving the growth of the sphere of underprivileged milieus in western societies.

In Austria, substantial efforts are undertaken to reach out to this target group. Recent data from the federal initiative “Educational Guidance Austria in the Adult Education Sector” demonstrates quite a success story in offering guidance to this target group¹:

- 9,6 % of all counselling contacts addressed persons with no official educational achievement
- 22,5 % of all counselling contacts addressed persons with a maximum of statutory education levels (low educational attainment level)
- 50,6 % of all counselling contacts addressed persons with a migration background
- 7,5 % of all counselling contacts addressed persons with minor command of German language
- 18,3 % of all counselling contacts addressed persons featuring other characteristics of social discrimination

In reaching out to this target group, a variety of different mobilizing and counselling approaches are offered. For example:

- Working with peers (e.g., peers, who could improve the accessibility and/or limits in educational guidance; providing low-threshold educational guidance services such as outreach guidance and “educational gossip” in neighbourhoods or anything similar; the formats address people in their immediate living environment)
- Workplace oriented approaches (e.g., workshops for work councillors (dt. Betriebsräte)
- District work (community-oriented approaches)
- Outreach as a method for young people/outreaching youth work (in public spaces, parks, libraries, baths...)
- Multiplication/Multiplier approaches (especially for migrant communities).

3.2.2. Guaranteeing structural framework conditions

In Austria, like in most countries, educational and careers guidance is a classic case of a multi-level governance challenge. On the horizontal level, the relevant services are offered in a wide array of sectors: school, adult education, tertiary education, labour market institutions, advocacy groups, the voluntary sector, the private sector, and beyond. On the vertical axis, it involves all levels of government from EU governance to national ministries, to regional governments and bodies. Under these circumstances, coordinated, coherent political management of the field presents a significant challenge.

This challenge demands good communication between the various levels, sectors and actors involved. Moreover, there is a need to find a good balance when deciding on what level activities should be implemented and decisions made on. Should quality assurance and qualifications for counsellors be centrally managed and standardised across sectors and regions?

Two structural weaknesses of the Austrian guidance system should be emphasised here.

¹ Annual evaluation of the reported counseling contacts in 2021 within the initiative „Educational Counseling Austria“/Gesamtjahresauswertung der gemeldeten Beratungskontakte 2021 im Rahmen der Initiative „Bildungsberatung Österreich“ (oeibf.at, öibf Wien, 2022, BIB-2021-Gesamtjahresauswertung-inkl-Tab.pdf) (15.09.2022)

The first is the historically weak cooperation between actors working in education and the labour market respectively. The second is the strong connection between guidance services and education providers, and the inadequate proportion of guidance providers which are independent of education providers.

Reaching out to guidance groups at the fringe of society, to persons from the underprivileged milieu, entails many challenges and needs a lot of special resources:

- finding ways of getting access to these groups,
- having and keeping up to date knowledge of the special guidance needs of these groups, changing their composition over time
- and last but not least, having the means, competences and methods to guide/counsel these groups (e. g.: habitus sensitive approaches)

Modern, successful multi-level governance systems are required to allow guidance to respond to these challenges. This requires that an 'educational and careers guidance' profession be established, characterised by the following traits (see also Schiersmann 213, 48ff):

- *institutionalisation*, in the sense of guidance offerings being available everywhere, with a consolidated provider structure,
- *juridification*, in the sense of legal safeguarding and codification of our societal mandate,
- academisation, of education and training,
- *scientification*, through secure and differentiated scientific knowledge,
- *professionalisation*, among other things through increasing prevalence of guidance as a main career.

In all of these dimensions substantial progress has been made in the last decades in Austria. Still there is ample room for improvement left. As sketched above, the well available offer of educational guidance is scattered across various policy sectors/silos, lacking common agreed definitions, quality standards and approaches. There is hardly any scientific discourse on guidance issues in Austria. The lack of a guidance professorship and a scientific guidance journal does not help in this respect. While academisation of guidance practitioners is increasing, guidance is still fighting for being perceived and legally defined as a proper profession.

3.2.3. Supporting those on the frontline

In our opinion, it is central to effectively support those operating on the frontline of guidance. We wish to emphasise two areas in this context: firstly, the area of competence in professional action, and secondly the area of work environment as a prerequisite for professional action.

Professionally supporting persons from the underprivileged milieu

Professionalism refers to competent professional action, *i.e.*, *professionalism consists in being able to competently execute actions based on secure knowledge and skills shared within the profession*, and therefore relates above all to the individual abilities of counsellors (see Schiersmann 2013, 53ff).

The objective of educational guidance is to support customers in making informed career and education decisions. Supporting informed decisions requires a deep knowledge of current developments in work, careers, and education, as well as mastery of guidance methods appropriate to the relevant

target group. In relation to providing guidance to persons from the underprivileged milieus, this means the following:

- Educational guidance counsellors must be supported in having substantial knowledge on the living circumstances as well as the aspirations and challenges regarding education, work and career of “persons from the underprivileged milieus”
- Educational guidance counsellors must be supported in developing appropriate guidance approaches and tools which will allow them to reach and advise the target groups “persons from the underprivileged milieus”, and to deploy them in their work.

A stable foundation for work

Working in a field which demands permanent adaptation to challenges in content and methodology requires a high degree of intrinsic motivation. The personal commitment to social welfare of people working in ‘social careers’ is gleefully exploited; just look at their pay in comparison to other areas of activity.

To get ‘the best’ for the complex and demanding task of up-to-date inclusive educational and careers guidance, we recommend using ‘good work’ concepts (such as that submitted by the German unions) to orient their discipline. In the context of adult education in Austria, turning away from volatile project financing is an urgent first step.

Beyond this, we wish to emphasise that development requires resources. Guidance counsellors must get the resources to engage with developments in content and methods alongside their regular guidance role. This is the only way that inclusive up-to-date guidance can be reliably offered to social groups at the fringe of society.

4. Good Practice Examples

#we_do

Country	Austria
Main goals and objectives	#we_do is a one-stop service to improve the employment situation of women at risk of working poor through accessible and free coaching and counseling services.
Size of the programme (local/regional/federal) + number of users if data available	258 women were able to participate in the #we_do project as of the cut-off date of 30th of November 2021. The project is financed by the province of Styria and the European Social Fund and is open to employed women with low incomes from the regions of Graz, Upper Styria West, Eastern Styria, and Southeastern Styria. All women who reside in one of the project regions and are working poor according to one of the two indicators (individual or household income) are entitled to participate. Self-employed persons, transit workers and persons who are not employed (e.g., unemployed or on parental leave) are excluded from participation.
Duration of implementation (start – end of the intervention)	Juni 2020 to May 2022
Short description of the example, containing: (Service offered) (Instruments involved, case management methodology, up-skilling, ...)	The support provided by #we_do counselors is divided into five phases: Outreach: Women in working poverty must be reached through outreach. This has happened with the help of regional partners and various collaborations:

<p>(Implementation actions – what measure have been taken to ensure implementation of the initiative)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outreach online (website, social media, online media...). - Outreach on site (information booths, office hours...) - Collaboration with partner organizations - Outreach activities (folders, billboards and posters, radio ads, newspaper reports, advertisements, etc.) <p>Arrival: Consultation hours are flexible to meet individual needs. There are no guidelines for success or pressure, but an open concept.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consulting and Coaching <p>Build up: Counselors not only assist with labour market qualifications, but also work with participants on personal development and empowerment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consulting and Coaching - Case Management - Peer Cafés - workshops - Collaboration with partner organizations <p>Training: Education and training are important to be able to make a difference in one's position in the labour market.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carrier-neutral educational counseling - Promotion of further education <p>Apply: Participants are given tools to overcome further professional and private hurdles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counseling and coaching - workshops - Open clothes rack and open bookshelf
<p>Challenges encountered and how they were addressed</p>	<p>Women experiencing working poor often have limited time resources, as family, work, and living in poverty leave limited time for other efforts. The main focus of their daily lives is usually managing financial challenges. The accessibility of women working poor was provided through a regional network.</p>
<p>Effect and impact <i>(what has been the actual impact, what are the effects)</i></p>	<p>The positive results are also reflected in the participants' status at the end of the program. In total, 75% of the participants have experienced an improvement in at least one of the different areas of life (education, jobs, personal) or are better informed about the possibilities. Of 108 participants, 20% already have a new job or have expanded their weekly working hours, and 7% are planning to do so. An additional 3% had achieved their goal of a job. 22% were in vocational training, and 11% were planning to start vocational training. 8% of the participants took away information about their (professional) possibilities as a result. Personal development was the focus for 4%.</p>
<p>Lessons learnt <i>(What lessons have been learnt from the practice – could other countries learn anything from this case? (Has the practice been changed since it was initiated?))</i></p>	<p>Potential for further development exist in the following aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand target group (no restrictions on regions, employment status (e.g., self-employed/self-employed, parent carers, transit workers, state employees). Finance driver's license (mobility is very important, especially in rural areas) Optimize offers (online formats with many participants have found little acceptance, peercafés and joint walks, on the other hand, have been used well and a lot, possibly organize daycare)

	Hybrid counseling (provide additional services to on-site counseling via telephone, video telephony or chat)
Links	https://www.we-do.at/

WUK Bildungsberatung

Country	Austria, focusing on Vienna
Main goals and objectives	"Educational Guidance" is a network project in which locations throughout Austria are involved and participating. The "WUK Bildungsberatung" is part of this project and is mainly active in Vienna. The aim of the project "Educational Guidance" is to support people in their individual situation regarding their career paths and professions as well as further education/guidance. The target group consists not only of low-skilled people, but in general of people who want to change or develop regarding their education and/or further education or profession/job. The task is to offer consulting services (in various formats).
Size of the programme (local/regional/federal) + number of users if data available	Educational guidance is a large network and operates throughout Austria, but "WUK Bildungsberatung" only exists in Vienna. On average, 2500 counseling contacts can be achieved in a period of five months. It should be noted that contacts (i.e. counseling services in various forms) are counted, not persons.
Duration of implementation (start – end of the intervention)	The program has been in existence since 2008, and since then there have been many changes at the content and organizational level.
Short description of the example, containing: (Service offered) (Instruments involved, case management methodology, up-skilling, ...) (Implementation actions – what measure have been taken to ensure implementation of the initiative)	<p>Educational guidance is intended to reach very different target groups. However, there is a focus on the following priority target groups: older people (older than 50 years old), low-skilled people (no/only compulsory school, no/only apprenticeship diploma, secondary school without a-levels), people with disadvantages (migration background, care obligations), inactive people (household), de-skilled people (higher education, but de-skilled due to employment), people with disabilities.</p> <p>The counseling takes place in different formats. A distinction is made between counseling services and information services, which can take place either alone or in a group setting. Appointments are made and booked via an online appointment calendar. Telephone or videotelephonic consultations are also possible. In all aspects, it is tried to respond to the needs and wishes of the target groups, which is why the educational counseling is flexible and adaptable in methods and form.</p> <p>The focus of the counseling is always on working with individual resources that are available to a person. Information is passed on or further offers are sought. Advice is also given on financing options or similar topics. However, it is important to distinguish this from social work or therapeutic work. The mission is always "to help" - but there is no coaching/no therapy etc.. The format differs depending on the target group.</p> <p>There is no limit, the persons can take up a consultation as often as desired and necessary. On average, however, one to three consultations per person take place.</p>

Challenges encountered and how they were addressed	In the sector of the formally more highly educated, educational counseling is fully booked. Reaching the target group of the low-skilled is challenging. Attempts have been made to reach them via information booths, information leaflets, multipliers or places where people like to go anyway (neighborhood festivals, etc.). Another challenge is that many people do not have sufficient knowledge of German and for this reason initial consultations have to take place in many first languages. It is quite difficult to recruit counselors who have these broad competencies.
Effect and impact <i>(what has been the actual impact, what are the effects)</i>	The proportion of people undergoing education and training is sustainably increased. However, these steps often take place over a period of more than six months, which is why even supposedly small steps such as talking to acquaintances/relatives about private changes can be counted as a success.
Lessons learnt <i>(What lessons have been learnt from the practice – could other countries learn anything from this case? (Has the practice been changed since it was initiated?))</i>	The acquisition of people through outreach/mobile work has shown little success. Contacting and networking with multipliers was (more) helpful. People of the target group are best reached in settings that they already visit or use for education and training. Target groups should also be reached via social media, as well as by visiting neighborhood festivals. The Covid 19 pandemic has changed the types of canvassing, outreach, and networking that can be done - with ongoing learnings that in turn necessitate adaptation and adjustment of informational brochures. In addition, the content on website and social media channels needs to be continuously changed in order to (re)target individuals. Counseling sessions or courses that last longer are hardly compatible with the rest of life for the target group of the low-skilled and/or disadvantaged, as there are often childcare obligations. For this reason, it has proven effective to design smaller course units over a few days. Video telephony formats must also take into account the fact that attention and concentration spans can decrease if there are distractions due to the presence of third parties (usually children).
Links	https://www.wuk.at/angebot/bildung-und-beratung/bildungsberatung/

“Plaudertischer!”

Country	Austria, focusing Vienna and Lower Austria
Main goals and objectives	The aim of the project is to approach the topic of loneliness in a low-threshold way and to make it visible.
Size of the programme (local/regional/federal) + number of users if data available	March/April 2021 to July 2022: Number of virtual PT: 421 Number of participants in virtual PT: 1,138 Number of volunteer facilitators: 28 Number of two-way conversations ("Zoom in two"): 18 Number of participating partners (gastro, NZ): 38 Number of participants in "presence" PT: 249
Duration of implementation (start – end of the intervention)	The project started in March 2020, a point in time when long and extensive restrictions on contact were introduced in Austria due to Covid 19. For this reason, the project was held almost exclusively digi-

	<p>tally/virtually in the first year. However, the implementation via videotelephony has proven to be successful, as also sick and less mobile persons can be reached.</p>
<p>Short description of the example, containing: (Service offered) (Instruments involved, case management methodology, up-skilling, ...) (Implementation actions – what measure have been taken to ensure implementation of the initiative)</p>	<p>The "Plaudertischl" is part of "Diakonie Eine Welt Sozialdienst gem. GmbH" (subsidiary of Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst). The aim is to reach out to people affected by poverty and loneliness.</p> <p>Since the project was launched in March 2020 almost simultaneously with the first lockdown in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic, the first year was almost exclusively virtual chat.</p> <p>The project works with volunteers who moderate virtual chat tables: Social counselors in training, students, etc. – in principle, people from civil society can get involved.</p> <p>On the one hand, there are "Plaudertischl" directly in restaurants, on the other hand, there are also group offerings in neighborhood centers, for example. There is also the virtual "Tischerl", both for groups and individuals.</p> <p>The goal is to bring people together, but also to make the issue of loneliness visible. Ongoing networking takes place, e.g. with social networking partners or with the help of scientific studies according to different information.</p> <p>Very different people come to the project. The topic of loneliness affects almost everyone in some way. The extent and complexity of the topic only became apparent through a closer examination of the subject. The target groups are very different: young people who have started studying and are new to the city. In some cases, initiatives such as "Students for Students" develop from this. Virtual offers reach people who are not so mobile for various reasons (illness). People outside of Vienna are also reached, since virtual participation is possible. Among other things, people who are alone and lonely due to strokes of fate, including some caring relatives, also participate. Reached are older persons, freshly in the pension partly. Partly also group-specific offers are set e.g. chat table for women.</p>
<p>Challenges encountered and how they were addressed</p>	<p>The greatest challenge is reaching the target group. People who are affected by loneliness often live very isolated lives, which is why they are often reluctant to join a group where they don't know anyone. The idea of "Plaudertischl" is nevertheless very well received, and restaurant owners are also very happy to be part of the project. At the beginning, concrete offers are needed until groups can organize themselves at some point. In some places this is already working very well, in others little has happened so far.</p> <p>The cooperation with volunteers works very well because the visitors can be sure that there is really someone there they can talk to. Accessibility is almost never completely free of barriers. Via social media, digital competence is also required, as well as the appropriate equipment. It is more low-threshold if more channels are used at the same time. Older people are reached via district newspapers or notices, while younger people are naturally more likely to be reached via social media. We also try to ensure that social partners who work with the target group are always as well informed as possible. Of course, different formats are tried out for the offers in the coffee houses (varying topics, organizing walks, meeting online). It varies with which efforts which people can be reached. Currently, the project management is still looking for further low-threshold offers.</p>

Effect and impact <i>(what has been the actual impact, what are the effects)</i>	People who participate are now friends and exchange information on an ongoing basis (via What's App or meetings outside the chat table). But it takes time. At first, moderation is important, but then friendships gradually develop when there is this regularity.
Lessons learnt <i>(What lessons have been learnt from the practice – could other countries learn anything from this case? (Has the practice been changed since it was initiated?))</i>	It is also important that the people themselves bring in topics. The target group's participation is really important. It should be about the needs of the users. Self-responsibility/empowerment works really well. The participants of the Plaudertischer! also see themselves as part of the project and gradually feel responsible for making it work. Cooperation with civil society is really important and absolutely necessary. There is also exchange with other institutions that are active in the community. It simply takes a lot of time – but especially in the course of project funding, there is often no time. It is therefore essential that projects can be planned for the long term in order to establish themselves sustainably and make successes visible.
Links	https://plaudertischerl.at/

5. Conclusions and Main Recommendations

As mentioned in the introduction, there are countless changes in the labour market that affect the workforce. Growing inequality, increasing labour market polarization with the rise of unstable precarious work on the margins of legal labour markets, and the strong immigration of people from poor countries are pushing the growth of underprivileged milieus in Western societies.

Education is turning more and more to an important and decisive factor for employment and career. The changes in the labour market mean that education and qualification are becoming crucial in order to help employees find better-paid jobs through to higher status. However, the willingness and readiness for education and training depends on individual situations and access to information. Individuals from this underprivileged milieu are characterized by a certain habitus (Bourdieu 1993), which is very different from that of the counsellors themselves. Further education/adult education participation is very unevenly distributed along social class or along social milieus.

In order to reach this target group, different mobilization and counselling approaches are offered. For example:

- Working with peers
- Workplace-oriented approaches
- District work (community-oriented approaches)
- Outreach as a method
- Multiplication/Multiplicator approaches

It is important to offer professional support to people from underprivileged milieus and to those who work with these people in the context of counselling. It is important to start directly with those affected in order to be able to establish long-term changes. Currently, there is still a considerable need for organizational support.

Educational advisors must be supported in obtaining a profound knowledge of the living conditions as well as the wishes and challenges regarding to education, work and careers of people from underprivileged milieus.

Counsellors should be supported in developing appropriate counselling approaches and tools that enable them to reach the target groups of people from underprivileged milieus to mentor them and to use the tools in their daily work.

In order to " get the best" for the complex and challenging task of contemporary inclusive educational and vocational guidance, we recommend being guided by concepts of "Good Work" (as presented by the German trade unions). In the context of adult education in Austria, moving away from volatile project funding is an urgent first step.

Furthermore, we would like to emphasize that development needs resources. Counsellors must be given the resources to deal with developments in content and methodology in addition to their regular counselling activities. This is the only way to reliably offer inclusive, contemporary counselling for socially marginalized groups. This could happen within the framework of ongoing reflections and articulations of daily work with persons from underprivileged milieus. Supervision is needed to address particular challenges in dealing with habitus and to sustainably increase the effectiveness of counselling.

6. Literature

Figure 1: In-work at-risk-of-poverty by education level (2020)	7
Figure 2: In-work poverty of lowest educational category (2016-2020).....	8

Table 1: Participation rate in education and training (between 25 and 64 years) in LLL from 2015 to 2021	9
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