



Panel discussion: Lessons learned and future reflections - Austria

Introductory statement: Austria is well known for its high investment in active labour market policy and adult learning for the unemployed in particular. In other areas of support, including the support of CVET for the employed, public investment is overall less developed, with the nine Bundesländer playing a key role for closing the gap.

Question: Taking example of Vienna, could you explain the importance of regional level for financing adult learning in Austria? What are the key challenges and how do you address them? And to what extent a national-level ILAs could help to resolve them? Would you see any limitations to a national-level ILA instrument?

Answer (Monika Nigl, Vienna Employment Promotion Fund

- waff): I would like to speak about some of the challenges we face in Austria - and especially in Vienna - when it comes to labor market policy and adult education. At the same time, I want to highlight how Vienna stands as a strong example of how regional approaches can help address these challenges effectively. Through targeted programs, long-term investment, and inclusive strategies, Vienna shows us that local action can make a real difference - especially when it comes to supporting people in their careers, education, and personal development.



In the beginning let me highlight five key areas of concern:

First: Economic pressure and inflation

Austria has been going through a long period of economic difficulty. In Vienna, the unemployment rate is 11.9%. Major company closures have led to job losses and growing insecurity for many people.

Second: Migration and labor market integration

More than half of Vienna's working-age population has a migration background. Many migrants are working in low-skilled jobs - even when they have good qualifications. Language barriers, discrimination, and the lack of recognition for foreign diplomas make it hard for them to fully participate in the labor market.

Third: Qualification mismatch

Many people with university degrees are working in jobs that don't match their education. This is especially true for migrants from third countries and Central and Eastern Europe. Why? Because they often lack access to professional networks, face language challenges, and experience systemic discrimination.

Fourth: Low-skilled workers at high risk

Almost 50% of unemployed people in Vienna have only completed compulsory schooling. Their risk of unemployment is three times higher than for those with vocational training. This group is often stuck in unstable jobs and faces serious barriers to re-entering the labor market.

Fifth: Adult learning — gaps in access

Participation in adult learning depends heavily on income and social background. Considering these challenges, I would like to introduce you to the work of the **Vienna Employment Promotion Fund - waff**

waff: Supporting people in Vienna for over 30 Years

waff was founded in 1995. Since then, it has helped hundreds of thousands of people in Vienna improve their job opportunities. It works closely with the Public Employment Service and many other partners. In 2025, WAFF has a budget of EUR 157 million and a team of 260 employees. Every year, more than 40,000 people benefit from waff's services.

waff's mission:

- Help people develop their careers
- Support adult education and training
- Provide financial help for courses and qualifications
- Promote equal opportunities — especially for women and migrants
- Assist young people in starting their careers

waff's services for employed people

waff offers strong support for people who are already working but want to improve their skills or change careers. This includes:

- Free career counseling
- Help with recognising foreign qualifications
- Support for women returning to work
- Programs for digital and climate-related jobs
- Financial support for training and education

The *Chancen-Scheck* — Opportunity cheque

One of waff's most successful programs is the Chancen-Scheck. It has been available since 2015 and is co-financed by the European Social Fund and the City of Vienna.

Here's what it offers:

- Up to EUR 5,000 for training or education
- waff pays 90% of course and exam costs
- The money goes directly to the training provider — no upfront payment needed

You can use the *Chancen-Scheck* to:

- Complete an apprenticeship – formal education
- Gain a new qualification – German as a second language
- Get foreign diplomas recognized
- Take part in job-related training

Who can apply?

- People who live in Vienna
- People who are employed — even part-time or on educational leave
- People working below their qualification level or in helper roles

Individual career counseling

waff also offers free personal advice/counselling to help people:

- Find the right training or education
- Plan their career step-by-step
- Understand which funding they can get
- Get support before and after parental leave
- Explore new career paths — especially through programs for women

Appointments can be booked at the WAFF Career and Counselling Center, or by calling or online.

Our funding programs are tailored to the needs of diverse and different groups based on education and income. The more challenging a person's situation, the stronger the support - especially in training and education. Individual learning accounts are embedded in a comprehensive advisory process ensuring that guidance and financial support go hand in hand.

Besides strong programs, waff has a focus on outreach work. Pop-up counselling in housing areas and public events, creative campaigns like *#GemmaLehre* and social media soap operas — and this year, the “Future Fit Festival” with 280 events across Vienna focusing on healthcare, social services and STEM-fields.

Conclusion: Why waff matters?

waff helps people in Vienna learn, grow, and succeed — especially in times of economic change and uncertainty. It promotes fairness, inclusion, and opportunity for many people in Vienna. Thank you.

Monika Nigl, monika.nigl@waff.at, [Vienna Employment Promotion Fund – waff](#)

Unedited