

## **Factsheet:**

### **Voluntary Work and Education in later Life**

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## INTRODUCTION

A wide range of effects are attributed to voluntary engagement. Alongside the enormous value for the national economy which it generates, the value added it provides for the recipients of voluntary services and the proven positive effects on health of voluntary deployments, attention in recent years has increasingly been focused on the educational aspect of volunteering.

Like volunteering, education in old age also has provenly positive effects on the quality of life. In the Federal Senior Citizens' Plan (2013), a great deal of attention is therefore paid to the creation of offers in relation to education, learning and advice. Educational programmes are intended to convey knowledge, abilities and key competences which can enable people to lead a later life which is as independent, meaningful and fulfilled as possible. Education is therefore linked to the goal of strengthening social participation. Education and volunteering share this objective.

In the Second Austrian Report on Voluntary Work of 2015, separate chapters were dedicated to the acquisition of skills and qualifications via volunteering and to initial and further training programmes within this framework. Whereas the significance of skills acquired via voluntary work for the labour market, for young people and with regard to the Austrian National Qualifications Framework are mentioned there, the connections between education in later life and volunteering remain unclear. This fact sheet provides a compact overview of this issue and described current approaches used in practice.

## **1. DEFINITIONS**

### **1.1. Lifelong learning**

According to the definition of the European Union, which is also valid for Austrian educational policy, lifelong learning means “all forms of learning during a person’s entire life which improve knowledge, qualifications and competences and take place within the framework of a personal, civic, social or employment-related perspective” (Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, 2001 p.9). Accordingly, all learning – formal, non-formal and informal – is considered to be lifelong learning.

The five guidelines of the Austrian Lifelong Learning Strategy (LLL:2020) published in 2011 form the basis of this strategy: the orientation towards life phases (enabling educational processes independently of age and adapted to different ages), focusing on learners (linking places of learning, the development of new learning designs and new forms of teaching and learning and the further development of the role of teachers). The strategy also includes lifelong guidance (comprehensive support of learners, the improvement and extension of advice offers, increasing the professionalism of advisers), an orientation towards skills (the transparency and comparability of qualifications, the further development of skills portfolio instruments, and the recognition of informal knowledge and competences) as well as promoting the participation in lifelong learning (the strengthening of people's motivation to learn and the joy they feel when learning, promotional measures and the creation of incentives). Educational offers and learning processes in the actual voluntary work can be linked to this (Kellner, 2015).

### **1.2. Education in later life**

The practice of educational work with people in the second halves of their lives provides education in a context which is highly orientated towards the concept of experience in the meaning of active adaptation to changed living circumstances and coping with one's environment (Kolland, 2016). Bubolz-Lutz (1979) sees education as a kind of processing and the anticipatory change of mental, physical, emotional and social abilities and events.

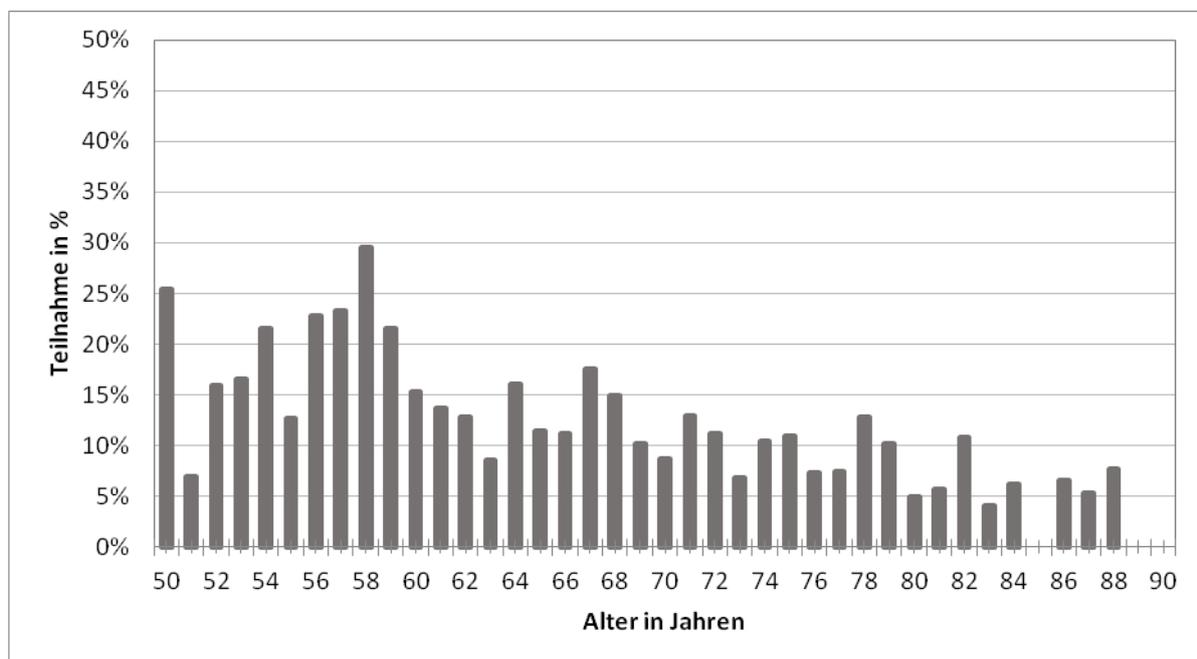
According to Kricheldorff (2010), the determinants of education in later life are the evolvment of identity and addressing age-specific development tasks in a specific-historical culture and society. Kricheldorff’s use of a holistic concept of education is not functionalist, and is valid for the entire phase of later life. The following points of reference apply: competences for coping with everyday life, social skills and the skills needed to take action, as well as creative and biographical competences. Self-reflectiveness is meant here as well as (self-)experience and (self-)expression. Reflecting on biographical experiences as an important orientation aid for the conscious design of the remainder of one's life is accompanied by the decision about which learning and life goals should be realised in later

life. These learning and life goals made an essential contribution towards the development and maintenance of educational motivation.

Programmatically speaking, in Austria education is part of the 9<sup>th</sup> line of action of the Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020. Education in the post-occupational phase of life is viewed as an enrichment of quality of life. An element of these objectives which should be emphasised is that education in later life requires a corresponding infrastructure which facilitates low-threshold participation close to people's homes. This is a point which also influences voluntary work in later life.

Data on participation in further education reveals a reduction which correlates to age. A closer look reveals firstly that there are significant differences between the so-called third and fourth phases of life (50-70; 70+), and secondly that age can only to a limited extent be considered as the cause of the changes.

### Participation in non-formal education in Austria (2013)



Source: SHARE 2013.

Participation in %

Age in years

It is not primarily age, but other factors (such as educational status) which explain the causes of the reduction. Educational barriers for older people are revealed which have less to do with their age than with where they live, their gender and state of health.

If we understand education in later life as a cognitive activity with a strong experience and reflection-related component, and as a social activity which focuses on active citizenship, an intentionality of education comes to the fore. In this context, intentionality not only means goal-orientated, but also meaningful activity. This reveals a connection in terms of content to voluntary engagement.

### **1.3. Competence**

There is currently no authoritative definition or concept of competence or skills. The existing definitions agree that it refers to "a complex and educationally applicable model of personal abilities and the ability to take action; competence thus always means the skills needed to act" (Kellner, 2015, p.36)

A useful minimalist definition according to Kellner (2015, p.36) is: "Competence is a person's ability to take action." A minimalist model of competence developed from this includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, characteristics and values.

Roth (1971, p.180) relates the concept of competence to maturity: "Maturity as we understand it can be interpreted as competence in three different senses: a) as self-competence, i.e. the ability to act responsibly for oneself; b) as competence in a specific field, i.e. as the ability to make judgements and take action and thus to take on responsibility, and c) as social competence, i.e. as the ability to also make judgements, take action and take on responsibility in socially and politically relevant fields."

### **1.4. Formal learning**

According to the National Qualifications Framework Act (NQR Act, 2016 Section 2 para.4), formal qualifications are "Qualifications which are regulated by law or regulations or are the result of initial or further training or continuing education which is regulated by law or regulations".

### **1.5. Non-formal learning:**

The federal law on the National Qualifications Framework (NQR Act, 2016, Section 2 para.5) defines non-formal qualifications as "Qualifications which are the result of initial or further training or continuing education which is not regulated by law or regulations."

### **1.6. Informal learning**

The federal law on the National Qualifications Framework (NQR Act, 2016, Section 2 para.3) defines informal learning as "a learning process which is not regulated and which, for example, takes place in everyday life, in the workplace or in leisure time".

## **1.7. Informal and formal voluntary engagement**

The Austrian Report on Voluntary Work 2015 differentiates between informal and formal volunteering. Informal voluntary work is when a person supports their neighbours, friends or acquaintances without receiving any monetary reward for doing so. This field is usually summarised under the term neighbourly help.

Formal voluntary engagement takes place in non-profit organisations in various sections of society ranging from sports to disaster relief. In the form of the Voluntary Work Act, which was adopted in 2012 amended in 2015, Austria has for the first time a definition of formal voluntary engagement which contains five criteria and also covers the participation in skills training measures as a service carried out by volunteers:

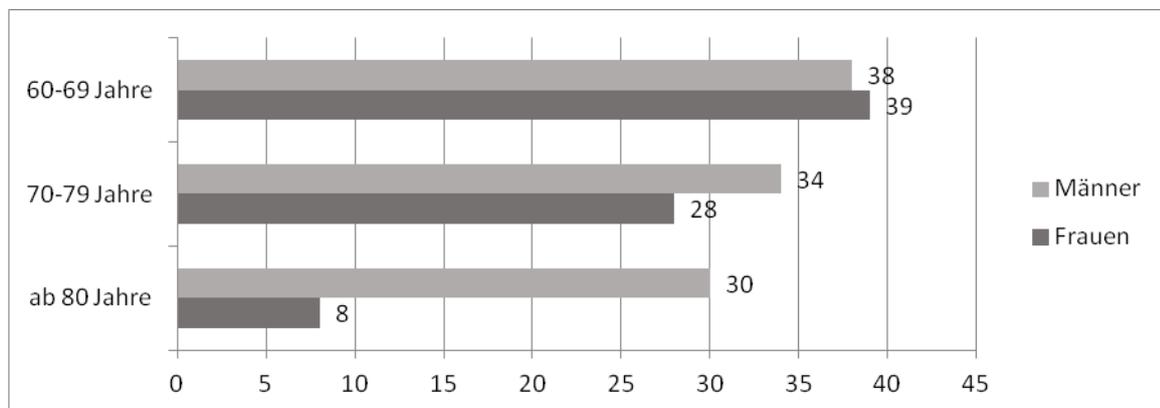
“Section (2) Voluntary engagement is when natural persons carry out:

1. voluntary work for others;
2. within the framework of an organisation;
3. unpaid;
4. with the purpose of supporting the general public or out of predominantly social motives;
5. and without the intention of earning a living, and without it being part of an employment relationship, or taking place within the framework of vocational training.

Voluntary engagement also includes measures for personal and professional initial and further training which are required by an organisation which works with volunteers and for the realisation of the voluntary work. In addition, participation in European Voluntary Service in accordance with the Regulation (EU) no. 1288/2013 for the establishment of Erasmus+, OJ No. L 347 of 20.12.2013 p. 50 is also considered as voluntary work.

Internships, hobbies and work carried out within families are thus not considered to be voluntary work.

**Participation rates in formal voluntary work according to age and gender (in percentages of the age group)**



60-69 years

70-79 years

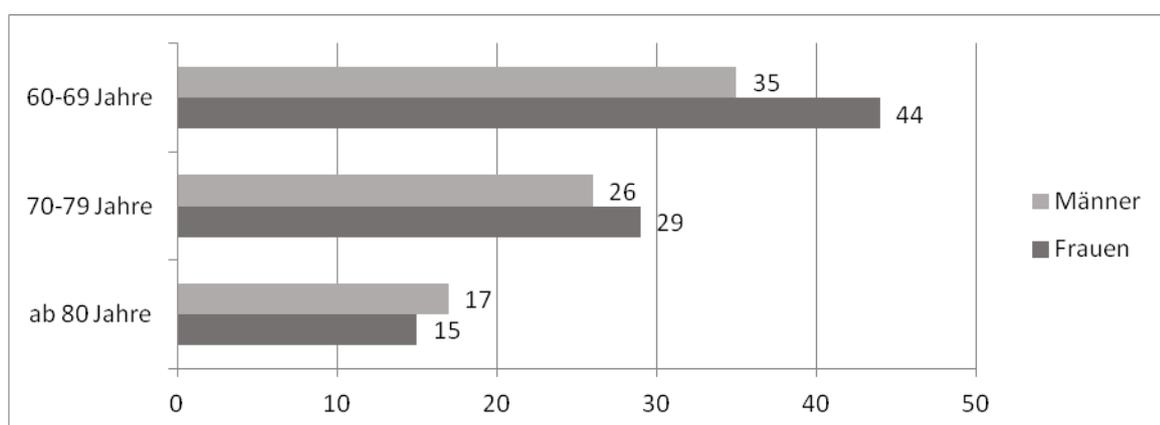
over 80

Men

Women

*Source: Voluntary engagement – survey of the population 2016, study carried out by the Institut für Empirische Sozialforschung (Institute for Empirical Social Research).*

**Participation rates in informal voluntary work according to age and gender (in percentages of the age group)**



*Source: Voluntary engagement – survey of the population 2016, study carried out by the Institut für Empirische Sozialforschung (Institute for Empirical Social Research).*

In comparison: the participation rates for the overall population of Austria over the age of 15 are 31% (formal voluntary work) and 30% (informal voluntary work).

## **2. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LIFELONG LEARNING AND VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENT**

72% of the Austrians over the age of 15 surveyed indicated that they do voluntary work in order to learn something new (Survey on voluntary engagement in Austria 2012). 51.5% of those who do voluntary work in Germany stated that obtaining qualifications was the main motive for their engagement (German Survey of Volunteering 2014).

Persons with a higher level of education tend to find a way into volunteering more easily. When carrying out voluntary work, however, this group does not exhibit a higher participation rate, because as soon as persons with a lower level of education become active in volunteering, the likelihood of their participation in further training does not differ from those who are better educated (German Survey of Volunteering 2014).

If this correlation is viewed with regard to later life, several particularities are revealed. The first of these is the increasing significance with age of a person's close environment. Both voluntary work itself as well as learning processes related to it have a different spatial relationship than in other phases of life. A second particularity is related to experiences, as mentioned above. In later life, educational processes as well as voluntary engagement are both accompanied by experiences and have a reciprocal effect. Volunteers contribute what they have learned in life (Kade 2009). A third particularity can be found in the form of the activity. Both voluntary work itself as well as education in later life are less formal and have a strong element of self-regulation.

Last but not least, volunteering and educational activity have a positive influence on each other: volunteers participate more frequently in further education programmes, and people who take advantage of further education volunteer more frequently (Baumgartner et al. 2013). Older people who take part in further education tend to volunteer more frequently, they have more trust in political institutions, and participate more often in petition campaigns and political discussions. The relationship between these two social sub-systems – education and active citizenship – can be seen as reciprocal; i.e. self-reinforcing feedback effects take place between the two systems (Kolland/Ahmadi 2010).

### **3. THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING PROCESS THROUGH VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENT**

The German Survey of Volunteering 2014 (Simonson et. al., 2017), considers that skills and qualifications have a great significance in voluntary work. Depending on the work carried out, more or less knowledge and abilities are a prerequisite or have to be acquired in advance. In the 65+ age group, 21.2% of volunteers require specific initial and further training in order to carry out their voluntary work. 45.9% of those over 65 have already undergone further training for their voluntary work.

Above and beyond the non-formal offer of induction programmes and further training, most organisations which use volunteers have – independently of their respective fields of deployment of volunteers and the resulting needs and demand on the part of the volunteers – established specific basic conditions which promote learning: regular team meetings help volunteers to share their experiences and to learn from the other volunteers. Peer coaching sessions carried out in this context, or also independently of it, enable volunteers to work on solutions for specific problem situations with their equals. In clinical supervision sessions, an external advisor supports them in developing new approaches and procedures for problems, conflicts or other issues. Written records of deployments can be used by the volunteers themselves or (in an anonymised form) in team meetings to reflect upon their activities.

#### **4. THE EFFECTS OF LEARNING PROCESS INVOLVED IN VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENT**

Voluntary work provides learning fields for the acquisition of various skills. In the age group over 65, only 16.7% of women and 14.6% of men stated that they had not acquired any abilities (German Survey of Volunteers 2014), while 44.3% of women and 62.7% of men mentioned specialist skills they had acquired. A total of 71.2% of women and 68.7% of men mentioned social skills (e.g. being able to listen and the ability to work in a team), and 48.2% of women and 52.6% of men mentioned personal skills (e.g. time management, working techniques and autonomy).

Volunteering strengthens the personal and social resources of those who do it. It can help people to build up their social networks and to counteract the loss of their previous roles, as the latter can be a particular issue in later life. The loss of roles with increasing age can include scenarios such as the children moving out, retirement, the death of a partner, etc.) and may lead to feelings of life having less meaning, which can have negative effects on mental health. Volunteering can counteract such negative effects. Volunteers are better equipped to deal with life's challenges (Lum & Lightfoot, 2005).

Self-efficacy as the belief in one's own ability to master future goals and challenges and to cope well with difficulties and obstacles in everyday life is also a key resource in later life - it leads to people seeking out more difficult challenges, and exerting themselves more to achieve an objective they have set themselves. It also means that they have more perseverance when difficulties block the path, and are therefore probably more successful in what they do. Volunteering can increase people's self-efficacy by providing them with experience of success, the satisfaction of being able to do something, and consciously perceiving and reflecting upon their own successes, by receiving encouragement and recognition from their volunteer coordinator, experiencing a motivating atmosphere, and by observing others overcoming a difficult task (observational learning).

## **5. DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN SKILLS TRAINING AND EDUCATION WITH REGARD TO VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENT**

Lifelong learning is still not sufficiently perceived as an activity which is of benefit and is even a necessity for a person's entire lifespan. Lifelong learning is still excessively orientated towards vocational qualifications. In order for lifelong learning to be increasingly taken advantage in later life, an infrastructure which is sensitive to people's biographies is required.

Voluntary engagement has no direct connection to the world of work, although there are a multitude of bridges and crossovers to it. This applies in the case of unemployment as well as in collective company-led participation in relief operations and the like. And certain correlations can be seen regarding a tendency for some people to give up voluntary positions after retirement because the voluntary work was closely related to their paid work. Voluntary engagement and education in later life should therefore be set apart from processes related to skills training and qualifications, because in later life it is not so much about skills in a narrower sense, but about processes of reflection, self-determination, and orientation towards the life worlds of individuals.

## **6. VALIDATION OF THE ACQUISITION OF SKILLS IN VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENT**

The 10<sup>th</sup> line of action of the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 is aimed towards the recognition and certification of skills and competences, regardless of how they have been acquired. It is about “procedures for the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge and competences in all sectors of education” (Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Austria 2020, p.46).

In the National Qualifications Framework (NQR), Austrian vocational examinations and qualifications will be assigned to one of eight levels in future. After qualifications within the formal education system have been assigned, there are also plans to assign learning outcomes from non-formal learning (e.g. from the volunteering sector). The NQR is primarily orientated towards learning results and includes the entire education system (e.g. also adult education).

In order to validate the acquisition of competences via voluntary engagement, summative (requirements orientated) and formative (development orientated) procedures are available. Since roughly around the turn of the century, processes have been developed specifically for the voluntary work sector in Austria (for an overview see Kellner 2015). Here, the essential thing is – by looking at the activities carried out by a person until now - to find out which knowledge and skills and which attitudes, characteristics and values were important for this.

In the form of the new voluntary work certificate which was revised and reissued in 2017, a tool for recording skills is available which – in a dialogue-like process between the volunteer and a trained interlocutor (usually a volunteer coordinator) – leads to a sound description of skills which is based on biographical explorations. In order to make this into a development-orientated process, the results of the recording of competences provide pointers for the volunteer with regard to possible future directions for their voluntary engagement.

## **7. SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE OCCUPATIONS OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATION AND VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT**

Given that the relevance of volunteering for lifelong learning – and particularly in later life – is increasingly being emphasised by researchers and politicians, and is also being closely observed by the education sector, volunteer coordinators and managers are coming into contact with this issue more and more frequently. Skills orientation and the recording of competences are of increasing importance in the job profile of this occupational group.

A consequence of this is the inclusion of the learning field entitled Skills Orientation and the Acquisition and Recording of Competences as a basic skill of volunteer coordinators in the *Manual for the Curricula of Courses for Managers Involved in Work with Volunteers* (issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2017). “Participants who have completed this learning field know that volunteers contribute their skills to the organisation they work for, that they are interested in their own personal development, and that they can acquire additional competences via non-formal and informal learning processes in the context of their work. They are in a position to summarise these competences in a succinct way and to draw up a conclusive certificate recording them.” (Manual, 2017, p. 25)

On this issue there will also be a structured exchange in future between those involved in the field of senior citizens’ education and the voluntary work sector.

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