



2023 Annual Report

WIFI Austria
Economic Promotion & Development Institute
of the Austrian Federal Economic Chambers

WIFI. Wissen Ist Für Immer.

ZUKUNFT BILDEN
#schaffenwir



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Rethinking and thinking anew is what our job is about



Domestic companies are facing major upheavals. Digitalisation not only creates growth and new sales opportunities for Austria's companies, but also creates attractive new jobs. Since their boom at the beginning of the pandemic, the manifold advantages of digital technologies have become an indispensable part of the economy. Correspondingly, Austrian entrepreneurs' desire to invest in the expansion of their digital infrastructure is high. According to the 2023 Infrastructure Report, digitization is lagging behind a potential productivity growth of over 60 billion euros, yet this circumstance cannot be exploited, which is primarily due to a glaring shortage of IT specialists.

Considering current developments in the financial, energy and labour markets, employees are the resources on which entrepreneurs are most dependent. Let's take the growth field of AI as an example. AI technologies will be incorporated into many areas of business in the coming years. Payroll accounting, automated e-mail and entire processes will be triggered and executed by artificial intelligence. Only through inspired and appropriately skilled and empowered employees can companies leverage this potential. The same applies to the topics of sustainability and digitalization.

Rethinking and new kinds of thinking have always been part of any entrepreneur's job description. Now is the time to push professional education and training so as to develop, reorient and aptly deploy employees in the best way possible. The WIFI Institutes for Economic Promotion & Development create the content, learning formats and learning spaces for this. We empower employees in their professions and show them perspectives beyond traditional professional scopes.

To achieve this, we need a sustained high level of willingness to engage in further training – especially in times of a record shortage of skilled workers. Anything else would be a further escalation of the staffing situation. Further education has, after all, become the key to being perceived as an attractive employer. Anyone willing to face economic upheaval with qualified employees needs to offer opportunities for further development.

Markus Raml

Mag. Markus Raml
Kurator WIFI Österreich

#lerndichweiter

Further education on the rise: “European Year of Skills 2023”

People should acquire the right skills for high-quality jobs and thus support small and medium-sized enterprises. In short, this is a core task of the WIFIs. Last year, this also constituted the goal of the ‘European Year of Competencies’ or, more widely used, the ‘European Year of Skills 2023’. The good news is: people do want to learn.



The shortage of skilled labour is immanent not only in Austria, but throughout the entire European Union. Addressing this challenge and driving forward the EU competency strategy can only succeed if six million people across Europe retrain and focus on digital and green technology skills. In this context, the results of the 2022/23 adult education survey by Statistics Austria are a positive signal: the participation rate by young people in particular, sees an upturn.

Adult education survey: three in five respondents participate in further education

According to the 2022/23 adult education survey conducted by Statistics Austria, 58% of 25 to 64-year-olds in Austria stated that they had taken part in education and training activities in the twelve months prior to the survey. Compared to the 2011/12 survey, this is an increase of 9.8 percentage points. There has been a particularly strong increase in participation in education and further education among 18 to 24-year-olds. This cohort was surveyed again for the first time since 2011/12. Their participation rate increased markedly from 32.4% to 54.5%, particularly in the scope of formal educational activities (school, apprenticeship, college, etc.).



Flexible learning on the rise

Informal learning activities are not institutionalized, nor are they very structured. They can be held anywhere, oftentimes online, and yet learning takes place quite as consciously. Compared to 2011/12 three times as many people acquired knowledge this way – a total of 86.2 percent. In an ever-changing environment, lifelong learning can take on many forms. The important thing is that it takes place at all, as it enables people of all ages to adapt to changes in society, maintain social relationships, and improve their mental and physical health.

It depends on what we make out of AI



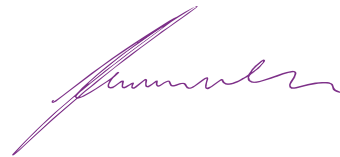
Artificial intelligence has long been considered a discipline for science fiction nerds and IT tinkerers. With ChatGPT, however, AI has become a topic with broad popular appeal. The international development and innovation dynamic around AI has picked up rapidly. Developers in start-ups and corporations are competing fiercely for the best and most impressive AI solutions. Quite a few people are wondering where exactly this will lead to.

The fear that AI and its consequences cannot be controlled is widespread. We need the right answers to the various fears and anxieties, but also to real existing problems. Fact is that technologies are never an end in themselves. It always depends on what we make out of the opportunities they offer and under what conditions we do so.

Especially important in this context are transparency and information.

The more people know about technologies and their possibilities – including those for misuse – the more intensively they will use technology potential. Digital and technological education are therefore more important than ever for shaping the future actively.

The WIFI institutes are in particular demand to ensure that the economy has the skilled workers it needs now and in the future. As the largest non-governmental education provider, we are obligated to enable skilled workers to use new technologies for themselves and for Austria's companies. Human intelligence and AI differ in one key respect: AI can only ever work with data from the past and its patterns. We humans, on the other hand, have the ability to think creatively about the future and also to shape it on this basis. We should do just that.



Dr. Harald Mahrer
President of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber

We create attractive career paths through practical vocational training



The largest education policy milestone of the last 30 years has been reached: the Higher Vocational Education Act is effective with May 1, 2024. This heralds a new era of further and higher vocational education and training. 1.6 million people who have acquired their qualifications in practice will now have an alternative to higher education-academic training and can climb new rungs on the career ladder. This is a double-win for the Austrian location: employees benefit from educational qualifications as building blocks for their own career paths, and companies, in turn, benefit because this further training is closely aligned with the needs of the labour market. Precisely because the requirements in the professional world are changing rapidly due to the mastery of new skills and the usage of new digital technologies, education and further training are

the best way for securing the future of our labour market. As Chamber of Commerce, we therefore invest in training measures that enable upskilling and reskilling from apprentices to established skilled workers: from in-person courses and blended learning to purely online programmes. The aim is to optimally exploit the possibilities digitalisation offers in all areas of in-company and vocational education as well as further training and carry them into member companies.

The WIFI institutes as an essential piece of the puzzle in the education and further training of skilled workers, contribute significantly. As practice-oriented partners of the various professional organisations, the institutes create offerings at the levels 5 to 7 of the 'National Qualifications Framework', resulting in well-qualified specialists who are indispensable for our location. This way, new career opportunities and professional excellence can emerge. Together, we must therefore continue driving the concerns of further vocational training and also incorporate them in the new federal government's priorities.



Mag.ª Mariana Kühnel, MA
Deputy General Secretary of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber

For us, every year is a 'Year of Competencies'



The European Commission designated 2023 as the 'Year of Skills', an even more special year for the WIFI network. It goes without saying that every year is a 'Year of Skills' for us. But the initiative shows one thing: vocational education and further training are more important than ever before. Last year's high inflation, the pandemic and wars around the world have made resources in companies scarce. Entrepreneurs and their employees need to think carefully about how to use their resources in the most meaningful way possible. Further training has therefore become a luxury good in many places, which has its consequences. In times of multiple crises, there is a particular shortage of one resource: that of well-trained professionals.

Further education is highly valued in Austria. The latest further education barometer speaks clearly: 89 percent of the working population consider training and further education to be somewhat or even very important. One fifth of entrepreneurs wants to invest more in training programmes in the future. This is a socio-political mandate that we as the WIFI institutes for economic promotion and development must now fulfil. It is up to us to educate and train skilled workers for Austrian companies at home and abroad.

To achieve this, it is necessary to continue working on our wide range of courses, regardless of whether they're offered in-person, online or as blended learning, and make them accessible to the general public. Flexible learning formats are the key to success.

The good news is that we – with more than 80 district offices throughout Austria – are well equipped to fulfil this task. With WIFI International, we also offer training and further education for Austrian companies abroad. Through the WIFI Certification Centre, we are able to make proficiency visible through recognised certificates.

Together, we have shown what a 'Year of Skills' looks like – in 2023 and for the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Tatjana Baborek'.

Mag.^a Tatjana Baborek
Director of WIFI Austria

WIFI network: growing stronger together

The strength of the WIFIs lies in their network. Joint positions are honed, goals formulated, and measures implemented in the Austria-wide committees. We have also taken steps forward in 2023 – at all levels.

Strategy board of trustees meetings

The WIFI Board of Trustees is the most important advisory body for WIFI. Last year, two board of trustees meetings were held for this purpose. For the first board of trustees meeting in spring, all participants gathered at the Maria-Loretto Castle in Klagenfurt. A discussion with the owner and CEO of UNiQUARE, Michael Schwarzenbacher, focused on essential questions: What educational products are currently in demand? How can employees be retained in a company through training and further education? In November 2023, the board of trustees met for the second time – on the agenda this time: the MAC (Master Alumni Club), which opens new opportunities to master craftsmen, through cooperation with the WIFIs for example. The board of trustees also exchanged views on future topics that affect all WIFIs: quality management, the WIFI digital strategy and cooperation in the field of education at national (WKÖ, BMBWF) and international level (ERASMUS+, EuroSkills).

WIFI network strategy retreat

How can WIFI strengthen and expand its position as market leader? What are the trends and future topics in vocational education and training? The institute directors asked themselves these questions as part of the strategic ILK on the topic of innovation. The results are impressive. Existing project groups within the framework of the digital strategy were completed. In addition, the participants set the strategic focus for the coming years on the following topics: artificial intelligence for employees, trainers and customers, adaptive learning, the further development of myWIFI, the learning platform and user experience, and on strengthening sustainability within the WIFI network.

KEBÖ: Successful negotiations

WIFI Austria is a strong voice in Austria's Conference of Adult Education (KEBÖ), which annually makes adult vocational education visible as part of the state education system. The renegotiations with the BMBWF were successful. The funding contribution for 2022 and 2023 was increased by five percent compared to previous years. An additional five percent increase (on top) in funding was obtained for 2023.

New institute directors in Salzburg and Burgenland

Tatjana Baborek welcomed two new faces to the group of institute directors in 2023. Annemarie Schaur succeeded Renate Woerle in Salzburg, who has entered her well-deserved retirement. Thomas Jestl took over Harald Schermann's agendas in Burgenland and dedicated himself to his new duties as Director of the Burgenland Chamber of Commerce. We are looking forward to a good working relationship and many exciting joint projects!



MMag.^a Annemarie Schaur



Mag. Thomas Jestl

We've arrived in the digital learning future

When we adopted our digital business strategy in 2020, we had one fixed goal: We equally wanted to focus on our customers and their needs in the digital world of education in order to consistently take advantage of all growth opportunities that presented themselves to us. The WIFIs have now spent four years working towards this goal. What was once a vision has turned into concrete projects.

We develop content for the digital market

Four years ago, there was hardly any digital WIFI content. During this time, we developed concepts, ideas and qualitative guidelines for content and products – e.g., via the WIFI Content Contest (WCC). On this basis, vast new content and products have meanwhile been created and show how practical WIFI know-how can be transferred to the digital learning future – in line with our blended learning approach. The result: 150 teaching units that have been fully developed and can be booked in the eShops. These activities will be continued and expanded to include the development of services and training videos.

User-friendly – at first click

The first contact with the WIFIs is almost always online. That is why user experience was at the heart of the digital business strategy. We wanted to make it easier and more enjoyable to enter the WIFI ecosystem. To achieve this, we improved the user-friendliness of WIFI.at and on all regional websites. The result: optimization on more than 2,000 category pages and 9,000 course pages. In order to provide faster orientation online, our home pages will undergo a redesign in the future and resources will be invested in search engine optimization (SEO).



Common login for all WIFI services

With myWIFI, many participants now have access to a digital customer area in which course confirmations, certificates, exam results and invoices can be accessed from home. We want to expand these services and add personalized courses and new self-services. The single sign-on login for all customers is a major step forward. WKIS now allows us to share customer data and define data settings. In February 2024, our customers had already logged in more than 200,000 times. We are currently working on a standardized authentication method that will enable the myWIFI and myWKO services to be linked.

Trainers in the new learning era

The use of new learning formats demands continuous development, which is especially true for trainers. Trainers support knowledge acquisition at the front and meet learners in a variety of learning spaces and content contexts. Last year, they once again demonstrated their innovative strength and flexibility. At WIFI Austria, the set course was realigned for this new era.

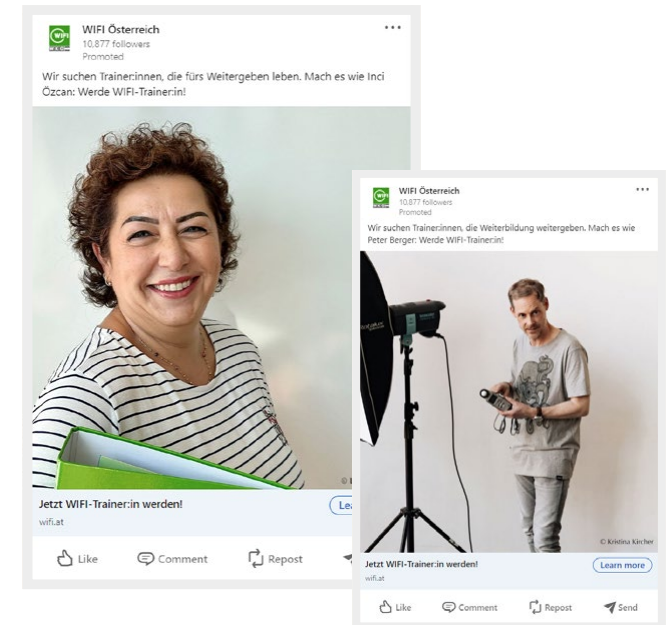
A learning model for tomorrow

The focus was on the further development of the WIFI learning model LENA. The German acronym stands for “LEbendig” (lively) and “NACHhaltig” (sustainable) learners. They are activated and supported by the trainers and concurrently use various resources independently to acquire learning material. LENA was originally co-developed with professor Dr Rolf Arnold, the founder of empowerment didactics, and has been continuously developed ever since. In our learning model, we combine didactics and human-centering with technological and digital competence. But does this still meet current requirements? An Austria-wide LENA core team addressed this issue and formulated seven topics and questions, which were revised in cooperation with the German team of the Didactic Innovations GmbH:

- How relevant is LENA today? Where and how is the scientific basis for learning developing?
- How do people learn in ten years' time?
- How do participants' self-learning skills develop and what impact will this have on the WIFI institutes?
- How do we measure the success of LENA (education controlling)?
- What concrete conclusions from studies on the effectiveness of in-person vs. digital learning method(s) can you provide us with?
- How will the trainers of the future work?
- How will learning success assessments and examination settings be designed in the future?

A trainer congress under the sign of future learning

“Learn4future – developing skills sustainably” was the motto of the 11th WIFI Congress for Training and Further Education, the third online congress in a row. And although everyone was only connected with each other virtually, the great atmosphere among the 180 congress participants was palpable. They were keen to tackle current issues in the training sector with questions such as, “How can learning settings be designed in such a way that they are sustainable and thus, firmly anchored in people’s minds in the long term?” What can trainers do to take sustainability into account when designing training courses, including an ecological perspective? In addition to numerous workshops, Dr Henning Beck’s keynote speech was particularly memorable: “Those who are able to learn new things quickly have a decisive advantage when it comes to adapting to a changing world. No wonder we strive to optimize our learning processes and to design them efficiently.



Wanted: WIFI-Trainers!

The “WIFI-Trainer:in” campaign was continued: it was designed to motivate people to pass on their specialist knowledge to others. The target group consisted of all people who perform well professionally but have never considered becoming a trainer. In the campaign, we therefore showcased existing WIFI trainers, who are also successful outside of their WIFI trainer role – true to the motto “from practice to practice”.

Learning management & services: only further education creates skilled workers

In 2023, vocational education and training was more important than ever before. Above all, however, it was social challenges such as the shortage of skilled workers and rapid digitalisation that impacted most – for companies and employees alike. Further, professional careers are becoming increasingly dynamic and specialised. The only sustainable answer to all these phenomena is education. Only those who train and gain further qualifications can face these developments confidently and competently – and even understand them as an opportunity.

Companies plan investments in education

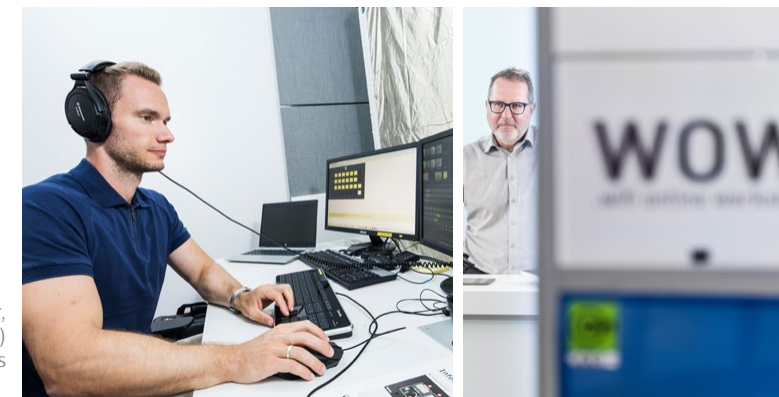
This is why the WIFIs continued to develop their wide range of programmes in 2023, whether in person, online or in the form of blended learning. They are aimed at a broad range of employees – not least to counter the acute shortage of skilled labour. Austrian companies are our partners in this endeavour. According to the latest WIFI Further Education Barometer, four out of five companies consider further education to be “important” or “very important”. Consequently, 20 percent of entrepreneurs are planning major investments in education in the coming year. To this end, we implemented numerous measures in the WIFI network in 2023 – with maximum impact. The result: a very favourable increase of over 10,000 course participations compared to 2022.

Educational content under the banner of change

The training contents are made to match megatrends. In 2023, the topics of IT and digitalisation, technology, quality management, sustainability and green skills, as well as innovation and digital transformation dominated. Once a goal has been determined in terms of content, the means to get there can be defined, i.e. the learning and/or teaching methodology. With their LENA learning model, the WIFIs further develop their own practical and application-orientated set of methods together with their most valuable resource: the trainers. Any learner can work with the model, any content can be learnt. However, it is not only the methods that are flexible, but also the learning location or format. The future trend of blended learning is here to stay. It was already common practice within the WIFI network in 2023. Digitally acquired content was tested in practice under expert guidance, and topics learnt in person were consolidated digitally.

Lived innovation – together with trainers

Expectations of further education institutions are growing. Learning should be increasingly modular, flexible and online. As part of the WIFI Content Contest in 2022, a jury selected eleven products from all submitted ideas that were recommended for implementation based on their quality, degree of innovation and, last but not least, their marketability. Based on initial implementations in 2022, these eleven products were finalised and made available in 2023. Together with the award-winning trainers, ideas for more products have already been devised and encouraged.



Carola Steurer, Dr. Christian G. Majer,
Mag. Roland Pichler, Dr. Clemens Janisch (f. l. t. r.)
as part of project management nuggets

New products to meet societal challenges

New technologies are spurring change in the professional world. In 2023, companies were increasingly looking for employees who are able to understand and successfully implement AI-based solutions. In response to the growing demand, we launched the AI Academy. Since then we also introduced the comprehensive 'AI in Business' course. Participants immerse into the fascinating world of artificial intelligence in a practical way, which prepares them for new requirements and enables them to operate successfully in the increasingly digitalised world of work. After all, AI skills will become even more important in the coming years. We are determined to continuously expand our AI training programmes in order to offer Austrian companies the state-of-the-art. Employees of the tourism, hotel and catering industry are also facing more diverse tasks because digital skills are increasingly in demand in hotels, restaurants and tourism firms. The digital learning programmes 'Calculation in tourism', 'LAP ePreparation HGA' and 'Social media strategy for tourism businesses' take these developments into account. Learning videos, forms and sheets as well as questions for self-assessment also make online learning possible in tourism.

Digital self-services

Customers want to organise their further education and training conveniently online. The myWIFI platform supports learners and companies throughout their entire learner journey: from course selection and preparation to course attendance, course completion and professional education history. The platform grew continuously in 2023. Now it not only provides links to the learning content on the learning platform but also offers links to follow-up courses, course series, articles, blogs, news and funding opportunities. Course participants receive personalised information such as

course confirmations, exam results, PDFs and eBooks to support them in their learning process. The platform also provides access to various learning formats such as live online sessions, blended learning, in-person classes, self-study and learning paths with quizzes or video content.

Higher vocational education

Specialist careers often lead to management careers. On the labour market, this creates a concrete need for extra occupational higher qualifications for employees. Since 2024, the Higher Vocational Education and Training Act (HBB) has made it possible to develop new practice-oriented vocational qualifications in Austria that are equivalent to higher and academic education. Together with the sectors and professional organisations, the WIFIs can now promote procedures and qualifications on a national level – and thus raise the reputation of vocational education and training.

FIT for digital growth

'Off-the-peg' training is insufficient for many companies. In times of increasing professional specialisation, they rely on customised in-house training. The WIFI in-company divisions are the first point of contact for the target group of HR and personnel managers. This message was successfully launched in 2023 with the 'Success Symbols' campaign centred around the wifi.at/fit landing page.

LENA magazine anniversary issue: learning the future

The LENA magazine celebrates ten years. The anniversary issue was published in October under the title 'ZUKUNFT LERNEN' (learning the future). Once again, the LENA magazine inspires and motivates with a variety of content. Trainers, companies and anyone interested in further education can, as always, find lots of new information – case studies from the federal states, talks with education experts and applied training methods – in a compact format on 48 content-rich pages. You can browse them at any time, be it online or on environmentally friendly (PEFC-certified) paper. All infos: wifi.at/lenamagazin



WIFI International: domestic know-how for the world

The global economy is changing. Not only raw materials and products are called for. Modern skills are equally in high demand internationally. Last year, WIFI International carried Austrian expertise into the world. The projects show one thing in particular: dual education and training is a show-case model.



Final exam ALPLA Mexiko

Indonesia

Already back in 2022, WIFI International carried out a major project in Indonesia. The consortium of Austrian companies KIP and M-U-T set up training centres in cooperation with the Indonesian government. Train-the-trainer workshops were held in Austria. The training courses ranged from metal technology, carpentry in Makassar, welding supervision in Serang, Indonesia, to electrical engineering and diesel engine training at WIFI Upper Austria. This cooperation was successfully continued in 2023. Welding training for KIP in Makassar has already been commissioned for 2024. Negotiations are also underway with M-U-T to continue the cooperation in a further Indonesian region.

China and Mexiko

The dual training projects in Shanghai, China, and Toluca, Mexico, were also continued. In China, for example, 25 apprentices in metal/machining technology, plastics moulding, and mechatronics apprenticeships successfully took the final apprenticeship examination (LAP) based on the Austrian model. In Mexico, 16 apprentices completed the LAP in the same way as in Austria again in the craftsmen professions of machining technology, plastics moulding and mechatronics. This training alliance for Austrian companies in China and Mexico is to be continued in 2024, as this year's examinations achieved a high degree of customer satisfaction. In addition, Blum will join the training alliance.

Southeastern Europe

The Fit4Austria projects were successful initiatives in the B2B sector in 2022. As in previous years, online and in-person or face-to-face training courses were also held in 2023. The training courses were organised and conducted locally – in close cooperation with chambers and companies in Albania (December 2022



Welding M-U-T Serang

to November 2023), Moldova (January 2023 to May 2023, two groups), Bosnia (April 2023 to October 2023, two groups) and Kosovo (September 2023 to November 2023). Benchmarking events with Austrian companies took place after the training and were organised with the support of Advantage Austria.

International trainings

It's 'go-international' again since 2023. The initiative for Austrian subsidiaries abroad has been revived. Last year, companies were supported with 50 percent funding of up to EUR 7,500 for vocational education and training abroad. Companies are happy to accept this opportunity and are increasingly booking training courses at WIFI International. These include training projects for EVN in Macedonia, for XXXLutz/Möbelix in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, for Magna in Serbia and for VNT in Hungary with various soft skills topics ranging from leadership to trainer training. These projects will continue in 2024.

EU-projects

Two new EU projects were acquired in 2023. This means that six projects are currently being implemented. Further EU projects on trending topics in education will be submitted in the future.

- **Erasmus+-project ‘EntreComp4Transition’**
Topics: entrepreneurship, green skills;
duration: three years
- **Erasmus+-project ‘Cyanotypes’**
Topics: creative industries and entrepreneurship;
duration: four years
- **Erasmus+-project ‘The Urban Shift’**
Topics: strengthening green and digital skills,
linking university theory and professional practice;
duration: three years
- **CoVE-Erasmus+-Excellence Project
Eurochambres ‘EULEP’**
Topics: digitalisation, AI, VR, social innovation;
duration: four years
- **Erasmus+ project ‘S.E. VET’**
Topic: social entrepreneurship;
duration: three years



‘Urban Shift’ training



Selection of ‘Urban Shift’ projects, UrbanShift.eu

- **Erasmus+-project ‘Skills4Retail’**
Topics: development of training courses for current
and future professions in the retail sector with the
elements green/digital/ resilience;
duration: four years
- **Erasmus+-project ‘BusinessCraft’**
Topics: integration of refugees and immigrants into
the labour market through vocational adult
education in the cultural and creative industries,
entrepreneurship, intercultural skills;
duration: three years (declined)
- **CoVE-Erasmus+-Excellence project
‘Hospitality4Excellence’**
Topics: digitalisation and green jobs in tourism;
preparation of proposal;
duration: four years (declined)



“In 2023, WIFI International continued to focus on trends in education – as first partner at international level. Because learning is like rowing against the current. If you stop, you drift backwards, as the Chinese philosopher Laozi once said.”

Mag.^a (FH) Claudia Neumann,
Teamleader WIFI International

EU-wide best practices

Lively and sustainable learning is highly popular. This is also what the LENA learning method stands for. In the new LENA magazine, WIFI International focussed on the topic of international trainer training. The example of Möbelix showed how WIFI International can pass on local know-how to local employees. The EU project ‘Urban Shift’ was also presented – an international initiative for sustainable curricula in vocational further training

Certification: internationally verifiable competence & quality

The crises of our time call for new solutions and standards, which is why the WIFI/WKÖ certification body constantly develops certification programmes. In 2023, the offer was expanded to include certification programmes on crisis management and sustainability.

8,800 personal certificates and new certification programmes

Certified qualifications in various subject areas were more in demand in 2023 than ever before. The recognised proof of qualification according to the EN/ISO 17024 standard opens up a wide range of career paths for certificate holders. After all, companies need qualified personnel to ensure their competitiveness on national and international markets.

With around 8,800 personal certificates issued in the 2022/23 course year, the WIFI/WKÖ certification body achieved the second-highest number of certificates awarded in its 27-year history. It is thus still the number one in Austria.

The certification body, which is certified through audits and regularly monitored by the supervisory authority at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy and is the third pillar of individuals' competence assessment within the Economic Chamber organisation alongside the master craftsman examination board and the apprenticeship office. Certificates can be obtained in areas as diverse as welding technology, quality management, process, project and risk management, energy technology and services.



Certification as an assessment procedure in context



Apprenticeship
Office



Master Craftsman
Examination Board



Certification
Body

After challenging previous years, the high number of certificates awarded in preceding years was once again achieved in the field of welding technology. In some areas, even more certificates were awarded. As a 'notified body', the WIFI/WKÖ certification body is furthermore authorised to carry out corresponding certifications for steel construction member companies in accordance with EN 1090 and EN ISO 3834 (harmonised standard for the Construction Products Regulation, qualification of specialist welding companies). Certifications were therefore also offered in these business fields.

New series of publications & certifications

To support our member companies in the metal technology sectors, we have published the 'Metal Technology' series. The content of the individual issues is based on our experience from audits and procedure qualification tests. The aim of this series of publications is to familiarise small and medium-sized member companies in particular with those topics where we repeatedly see problems in an easy-to-read format. The brochure 'Qualification of welding procedures' was finalised in the course of the reporting period.

Furthermore, the range of certification programmes in the personal certificates business field was expanded to include the 'Certified Sustainability Expert' in the area of sustainability and the 'Certified Crisis Expert' in the area of crisis management.

The certification body in current figures (course year 2022/23)



8,829
Total personal certificates

39
Procedure tests

24
Product certifications

Efficient co-operations

The knowledge of profilers is of value in other professions too. For this reason, a certification exam was held last year in cooperation with specialist lecturer, Patricia Staniek, in the 'Profilier' certification programme.

Participants from the HR and the public sectors met at the Haus der Wirtschaft. Here, the WIFI/WKÖ certification body was once again able to showcase its range of topics in the best light – both inside and outside the organisation.

Whether it's training or certification, the topic of energy was in great demand in 2023 – especially photovoltaics. Participants not only learn general basics, but also gain the ability to plan systems. To this end, we collaborated with the Educational Training Center Vienna – Berufspädagogisches Institut der ÖJAB. The result: certification in the field of photovoltaics.

Outlook

The topic of resilience is in the air. Some training providers have already approached the WIFI/WKÖ certification centre to explore possible cooperation or a joint training offer on the topic. The participating organisations intend to develop a corresponding training course together with experts in the near future. The result will be a 'Certified Resilience Expert' or 'Certified Resilience Manager' certificate.

The new Federal Act on the Establishment of Higher Vocational Education and Training (HBB Act) could also be an incentive for a certification project.



“The certification body is accredited and monitored by the Federal Ministry of Labour & Economy. Certificates awarded by us in accordance with the EN ISO/IEC 17024 standard therefore enjoy special recognition both in Austria and abroad. In this way, they become ‘qualification shares’, which are highly valued by both companies and certificate applicants.”

Mag. Dietmar Schönfuss,
Director WIFI/WKÖ Certification Body

Focus on further education: companies plan to invest more

The shortage of skilled workers continues to be a pressing issue on the labour market. More than eight out of ten entrepreneurs (83 percent) consider further training to be important or even very important. This was confirmed by the results of the further education barometer, which IMAS carries out every year on behalf of the WIFIs by surveying both employees and entrepreneurs. Despite the cost pressure, almost a fifth of companies (18 percent) are planning to invest more in employee training this year than in previous years, thus aiming to meet entrepreneurial challenges.

IT, digitalisation and technology

Topics which are currently most important to employees are reflected in the range of subjects. Most employees would like a training update in the areas of IT & digitalisation (65 percent), while technical training (62 percent) and quality management (61 percent) are almost equally in strong demand. Additional top-ranked further training topics include sustainability/green skills (56 percent), innovation/digital transformation (55 percent), accounting (52 percent) and health (50 percent).

Employees learn throughout their lives

More than half (55 percent) of employees also rate life-long learning as very important. However, practical implementation frequently fails. Only a third (31 percent) were actually able to put their further education plans into practice. The most common challenges cited by those in employment are the costs (13 percent), constantly staying up to date (11 percent) and time compatibility (10 percent). This makes it clear that the desire for more further education and training is hardly compatible with demands for a reduction of working hours.

Employees and companies prefer in-person presence

Half of both entrepreneurs and employees consider in-person seminars to be the most suitable form of further education. At 12 percent, employees are much more open to online courses than companies

(6 percent). However, the latter (39 percent) tend to use hybrid blended learning much more strongly than the employees (21 percent). At the same time, 70 percent consider their digital skills to be sufficient for online courses.

Unleashing the potential of vocational education and training

Overall, vocational training could become an innovation lever for the economy. According to a survey, as many as 81 percent of employees and 77 percent of entrepreneurs would welcome an increase in state subsidies for further education, while 74 percent of employees and 79 percent of entrepreneurs would make use of a state-funded education account.



Mag. Markus Raml, Mag.^a Mariana Kühnel, Mag.^a Tatjana Baborek (f. l. t. r.) at the Further Education Barometer

Event highlights from the WIFI world

Whoever wishes to learn, needs to exchange ideas. This was particularly true for the 'European Year of Skills', in which the future of adult education was explored across Europe. Entrepreneurs, skilled workers and education experts discussed current challenges at the further education year events. As WIFI institutes, we not only participated, but also helped organise and shape many events

Female entrepreneurs secure the future

'Sustainable management, securing the future': The 7th Women Entrepreneurs' Congress in April was held on site for the first time in three years – this time in Baden. Over 500 participants from all over Austria grabbed this opportunity. The networking event was packed with high-calibre guests – also at the WIFI Austria booth. In addition to a quick sketch artist who immortalised the visitors, the event provided a comprehensive range of information on sustainable education and training.

KEBÖ annual conference under the sign of sustainability

Sustainability has many aspects: ecological, economic and social. But what do these dimensions mean for the work and life skills of learners? This was the question posed by the Austrian Adult Education Conference at its annual conference in the 51st year of its existence. In his opening speech Federal Minister Martin Polaschek emphasised that societies need learning spaces to share knowledge and facilitate discussion. Bernd Overwien from the Humboldt University of Berlin gave an insight into the historical development of the term sustainability in a much-noticed keynote speech and emphasized the importance of taking all its dimensions into account – and not least its role for adult education. KEBÖ also presented its latest statistics: in 2022, around two million people took part in around 160,000 educational events organised by KEBÖ member institutions. The conference therefore renewed its long-standing call for an increase in the adult education budget to at least one per cent of the public education budget in order to ensure quality and access to education for all.



Quick-sketch artist Xi Ding delighted the female entrepreneurs with his artwork on site at the WIFI information stand



Federal Minister Martin Polaschek with representatives of the Austrian Conference on Adult Education at the KEBÖ Annual Conference 2023 at the Europahaus Vienna

Roundtable with government representatives from China

Austrian expertise in skilled workers education and further training is of great international interest. This was demonstrated not least by Chinese government representatives' visit last June. At a roundtable at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy with top domestic companies and WIFI customers such as ALPLA, ENGEL and STIWA, Labour Minister Wang Xioping also gained an impression of the WIFI Institutes' offer and services. WIFI International's wide range of programmes and transnational projects are also strategically relevant during the current challenging times, as the Chinese representatives confirmed in the joint discussion.



Tatjana Baborek greets the Chinese Minister of Labour, Wang Xioping

Excellent Austrian Skills

1,500 participants of 60 professions: When Austria's skilled workers show what they can do, it can take a while. In the process, they not only prove that they have impressive skills, but also how passionate and committed they are to their professions. Styria, Upper Austria and Carinthia in particular came out on top. Increasingly, young female professionals are also asserting themselves in professions that have long been considered male domains. Many of the participants have also trained and developed their skills at WIFI. We have honoured this: Those who won a gold medal were also awarded a WIFI voucher worth 150 euros.



65 graduates received their academic honours at the University of Klagenfurt

Academic celebration at the University of Klagenfurt

Master's degrees need to be celebrated! 65 graduates were awarded the academic title of 'MSc Business Manager' in the frame of an academic ceremony at the University of Klagenfurt. This master's programme has been successfully conducted for more than 20 years by the WIFIs in cooperation with the M/O/T® School of Management, Organisational Development and Technology at the University of Klagenfurt. Students have benefited from the best lecturers and a first-class academic education with maximum practical relevance. Thanks to the new Federal Act on Higher Vocational Education and Training, the programme will be offered in a new form from 2024 onwards: as an Executive MBA (EMBA).



Tatjana Baborek hands over a €500 WIFI education voucher in the frame of a competition at the JW Young Entrepreneurs Summit

Media awards for adult education

Anyone who wants to sharpen their arguments and form their own opinion is dependent on a diverse media landscape. Voices from radio and television that challenge us in this regard are therefore honoured annually by KEBÖ. The Adult Education Radio and Television Awards were presented on one evening each. Representatives of all the award-winning associations were present and congratulated the winners in person – including Tatjana Baborek for WIFI Austria.

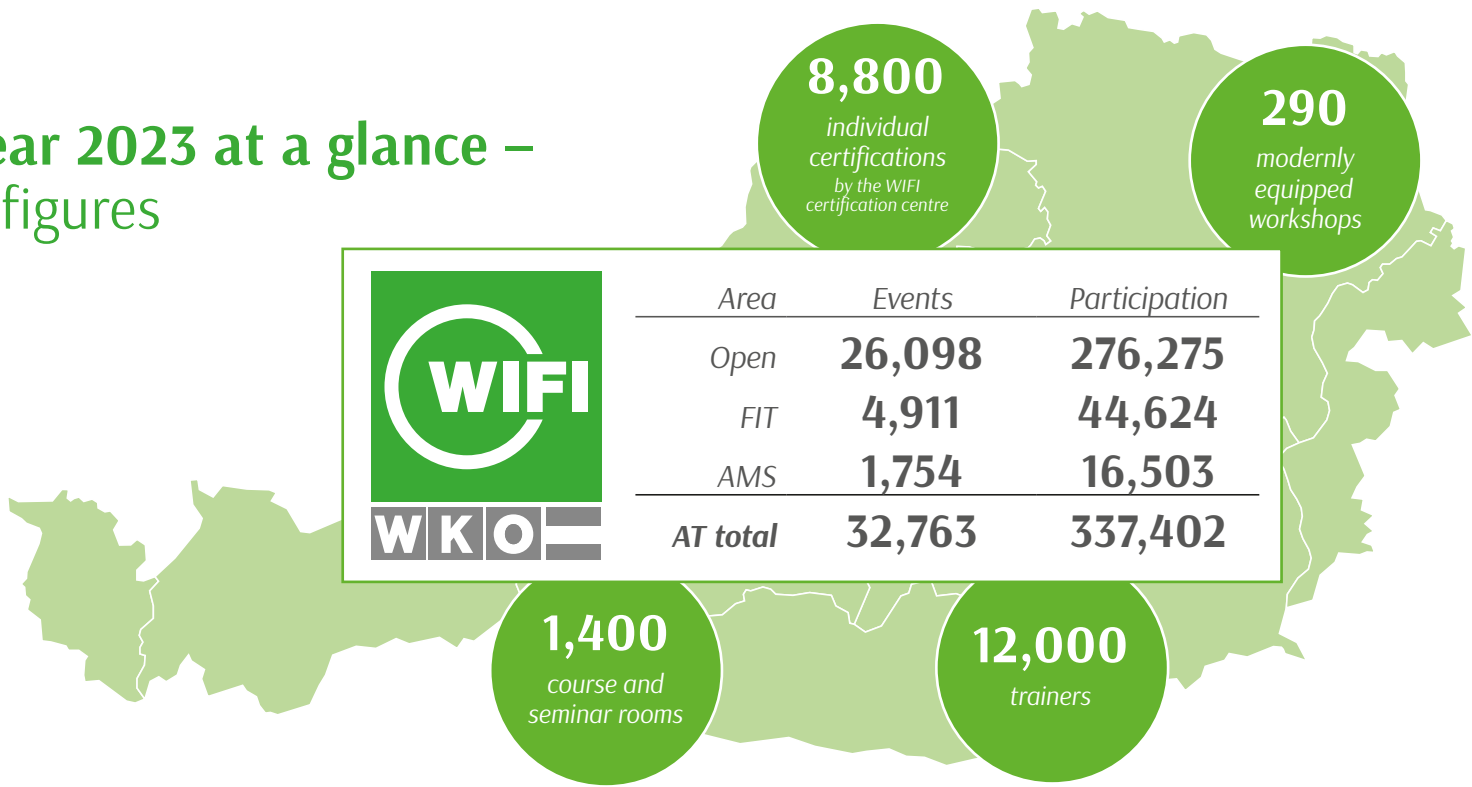


The Media Awards for Adult Education honour outstanding journalistic achievements

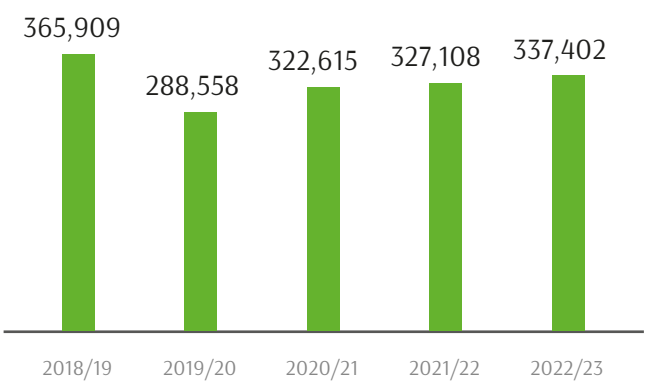
Young business meets WIFI

Innovations, networks, trends: the young economy met at the JW Summit 2023 to acquire knowledge and exchange ideas. Naturally, WIFI Austria was also present. We familiarised young entrepreneurs from all over Austria with our wide range of WIFI services. Successfully so, as several hundred participants in the WIFI competition showed. Institute Director Tatjana Baborek presented a euro 500 voucher to the happy winner. Also present: our WIFI robot, which amazed the visitors with its knowledge.

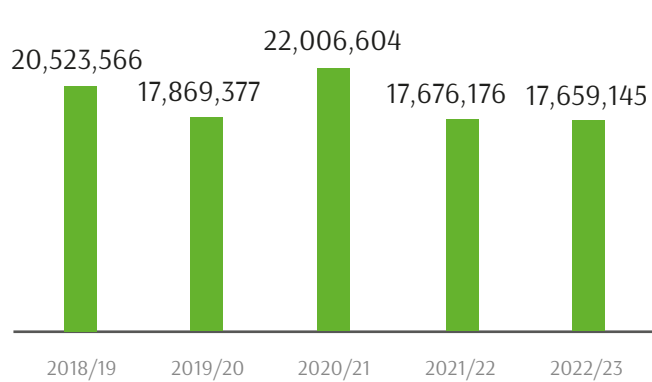
WIFI year 2023 at a glance – facts & figures



Participants by course year



Participant hours by course year



Sources: internal survey 2023



Here for you:



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