

The foundations of social participation. New empirical findings from the PIAAC survey about the lower competence levels

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Austria did not take part in the PIAAC predecessor studies IALS and ALL (beginning in 1994), therefore there has been uncertainty to date about the population's competence level which is studied there and about the target group with low competences in particular. PIAAC 2011/12 now marks the first time that data is available for Austria about the basic competence dimensions. For the article, a risk group has been modelled which achieved low competence levels in all three measured test domains. The survey included those who scored at Level 1 and below in literacy and numeracy; as regards the 'problem-solving in technology-rich environments' skill, it was necessary to distinguish between different groups: people who had no computer experience, those who failed in the computer mouse test, and adults who 'opted out' of taking the computer-based assessment were counted as part of the risk group if they have attained correspondingly low values in literacy and numeracy because this makes the acquisition and application of ICT skills and the development of technology-related problem-solving skills more difficult. Of those respondents who took the computer-based assessment, those are counted among the risk group who scored below Level 1 as their maximum here (below 241 points) and less than 226 points in literacy and numeracy. The size of this group was determined as 11.4% of 16-65-year-olds in Austria, this corresponds to an absolute figure of some 640,000 people. This group was examined in terms of its social profile and its social participation/integration dimensions.

It could be proven, among other findings, that older people are affected to a higher extent, but gender-related differences cannot be discerned. Both people with German as their first language who were born in Austria and those with another first language who were not born in Austria are affected to the same degree. There are expected patterns regarding educational background and educational qualifications, such as the well-known inheritance of the educational status and the predominance of lower qualifications among the risk group. More than half of those who count among the risk group are integrated in the world of work, in many cases they belong to the major occupational group of unskilled workers, but are sometimes also in positions with higher requirements; job satisfaction of employees within the risk group is high. Other analysis results are available about issues related to participation in CET and social participation dimensions such as voluntary commitment, the subjective assessment that individuals are able to shape democracy, their own health as well as their integration in society and family. Based on these analysis results, evidence has been developed for educational policy governance issues and research desiderata made available.

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