

## Evaluation of the "Digi-Winner" and Reflection on the Perspectives of the Further Education Market in Vienna

Short summary of a study conducted by L&R Sozialforschung on behalf of Arbeiterkammer Wien and Wiener ArbeitnehmerInnen Förderungsfonds

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Vienna, January 2022

The "Digi-Winner" is a financial support instrument introduced by waff and AK Vienna in 2019 that provides financial support for the use of further education in the field of digital skills. This new funding instrument was evaluated as part of the present study, which also took into account the digitalization surge triggered by the COVID-Pandemic. The study used a variety of methods, including structural data analysis, online surveys and focus group discussions, with the concept of "digital divides" (Van Dijk 2005, 2020)<sup>1</sup> as a theoretical basis.

The structural data analysis, which included 1.513 persons who completed their courses by June 2021 (overall 2.808 grants approved, but not completed by June 2021), comes to the following picture: almost two-thirds of the customers were women, an above-average number of people (60%) had a tertiary education, and there was a tendency for younger people (75% of customers are up to 40 years old) and people without a migration background (72% have Austrian citizenship) to take advantage of the "Digi-Winner". As confirmed by the training institutes, there are still many occupational groups that are more difficult to reach - especially low-skilled and older employees. More than half of the courses supported are in the IT sector (55%). Although overall more women took advantage of Digi-Winner funding, they are underrepresented in the IT sector, with gender differences also evident in course costs.

The Digi-Winner is seen by both customers and training institutes as an important tool for developing and expanding training in the area of digital skills: Half of the customers (50%) would not have completed any further training without funding, and another third (35%) would have taken up further training, but to a cheaper or lesser extent. It can be seen that, on the basis of self-assessment, further training leads to a significant improvement in skills, especially among those who assessed their digital skills as low before the further training. The training courses were based on the goal of either gaining a career advancement or reorientation, or keeping up with the increase in skills. More than one-third succeeded in achieving the desired career advancement, and 41% succeeded in achieving career reorientation.

The digitalization push induced by the pandemic also had a significant impact on how training courses could be conducted. This has led to a shift in format planning from purely face-to-face formats to more digital offerings. This shift includes many positive aspects, but can be to the detriment of target groups who already participate disproportionately in digital offerings. Therefore, the expansion of hybrid offerings was discussed as a way to make a longer-term contribution to reaching as diverse a group of people as possible. Low-threshold offerings for low-skilled, older workers and workers with a migration background were mentioned here as one way to counteract identified digital gaps. In view of the high level of customer satisfaction with the "Digi-Winner" and the benefits derived from it, it is particularly advisable to broaden

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<sup>1</sup> Dijk, Jan van (2005): The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society. London: Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications; Dijk, Jan van (2020): The digital divide. Cambridge: Polity Press.



this circle of addressees, as was the case with the disproportionately high number of female participants who could have been reached.

Diese Publikation wird aus Mitteln der Arbeiterkammer Wien und des Wiener ArbeitnehmerInnen Förderungsfonds gefördert

