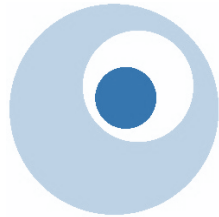




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LEO PIAAC 2023: Trends in the profile of adults with low skills in Germany, Austria and Switzerland



LEO



PIAAC

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Introduction

- Lifelong learning for all is a long-term discourse, and most countries have agreed to contribute to this goal through the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), and the Marrakech Framework for Action (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [UIL] 2022).
- Adult literacy (SDG 4.6) plays a key role within lifelong learning. Various literacy strategies are implemented by governments across the world (Belzer / Grotlüschen 2022).
- In 2015, the German national and federal ministries decided on a literacy decade (2016-2026) program to improve the skills of the adult population. This was an evidence-based policy that followed international role models, such as the French Information et vie Quotidienne (IVQ).
- With the **German literacy decade about to end in 2026, a new German government since 2025, and a new 2023 PIAAC dataset**, a fresh view on adults with low levels of literacy is urgently needed.




Outline

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2. PIAAC
3. PIAAC definitions of literacy and low literacy skills
4. Methods and Research Questions
5. Results
6. Summary

1. Overview PIAAC LEO 2023

- PIAAC LEO 2023, in Germany, was preceded by the **Level One Studies (LEO)**, conducted in 2010 and 2018 that assessed reading and writing skills in German language of adults ages 18–64.
- **PIAAC surveys in 2012 and 2023** were conducted by the OECD internationally. Germany, along with a number of other countries, also participated.
- **PIAAC LEO 2023** uses the **familiar term** in adult literacy policy and practice of the Level One Studies – **LEO** – to present the **results** of the estimations **based** on the **PIAAC 2012** and **2023**.
- Since no national surveys, such as LEO, are planned to be conducted, PIAAC data has the most updated information on adult literacy to this date.

2. Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

- measures adult's **information-processing and cognitive skills**—such as literacy and numeracy—focused on **skills needed for individuals to participate in society and for economies to prosper**.
- is developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (**OECD**) and administered in **Germany** by Bundesministerium für Bildung, Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (**BMFSFJ**) in cooperation with Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (**BMAS**)
- uses a nationally representative sample of **16- to 65-year-olds**
- In 2023
 - 31 countries, 27 countries overlap with 2012, including Germany
 - administered on tablets 
- In 2012
 - 39 countries, including Germany
 - administered on laptops and paper-and-pencil mode  
- Test language: Germany, Austria: German; Switzerland: German, French, Italian

1. PIAAC literacy and low literacy

- Literacy is defined as
 - “accessing, understanding, evaluating and reflecting on written texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society.”
- PIAAC 2023 definition of low literacy (Level 1 or below)
 - Below level 1: “process meaning at the sentence level, read short, simple paragraphs, and access single words or numbers in very short texts in order to answer simple and explicit questions”.
 - Level 1: “locate information on a text page, find a relevant link from a website, and identify relevant text among multiple options when the relevant information is explicit, understand the meaning of short texts, lists, or multiple sections within a page”

4. Methods and Research Questions

- Research Questions:
 - How has the composition of adults with low skills changed between 2012 and 2023 PIAAC?
 - How does the composition of adults with low skills in 2023 differ across countries?

4. Methods and Research Questions

- Percentages of adults with low PIAAC literacy skills, *level 1 or below* (higher PIAAC literacy skills: *level 2 or above*).
 - This cut off to indicate adults with low levels of literacy has been used in numerous other publications (OECD 2024a; OECD 2019; Massing et al. 2025)
- Focus on the German-speaking countries in PIAAC: Germany, Austria, and Switzerland
- Trends from 2012 to 2023 are reported for Germany and Austria
- Switzerland that did not participate in 2012, the data are reported for 2023 only
- Variables with trend - comparisons between 2012 and 2023: age, language and immigration background, highest attainment, formal and non-formal education, employment status and occupation, parental education
- Variables without trend - comparison between low and high skilled adults in 2023: social trust and political efficacy

4. Methods and Research Questions

- Operationalization of social trust and political efficacy is different between 2012 and 2023
- Social trust
 - **2012:** There are only a few people you can trust completely (5-point scale Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) – **negatively worded, 5-point scale**
 - **2023:** Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? Please answer using this card, where 0 means 'you can't be too careful' and 10 mean 'Most people can be trusted' – **neutrally worded, 10-point scale**
- Political efficacy
 - **2012:** People like me don't have any say about what the government does (5-point scale Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) – **negatively worded, 5-point scale**
 - **2023:** How much would you say the political system in #CountryName allows people like you to have a say in what the government does? Please answer using this card, where 0 means 'not at all' and 10 means 'completely'. – **neutrally worded, 10-point scale**



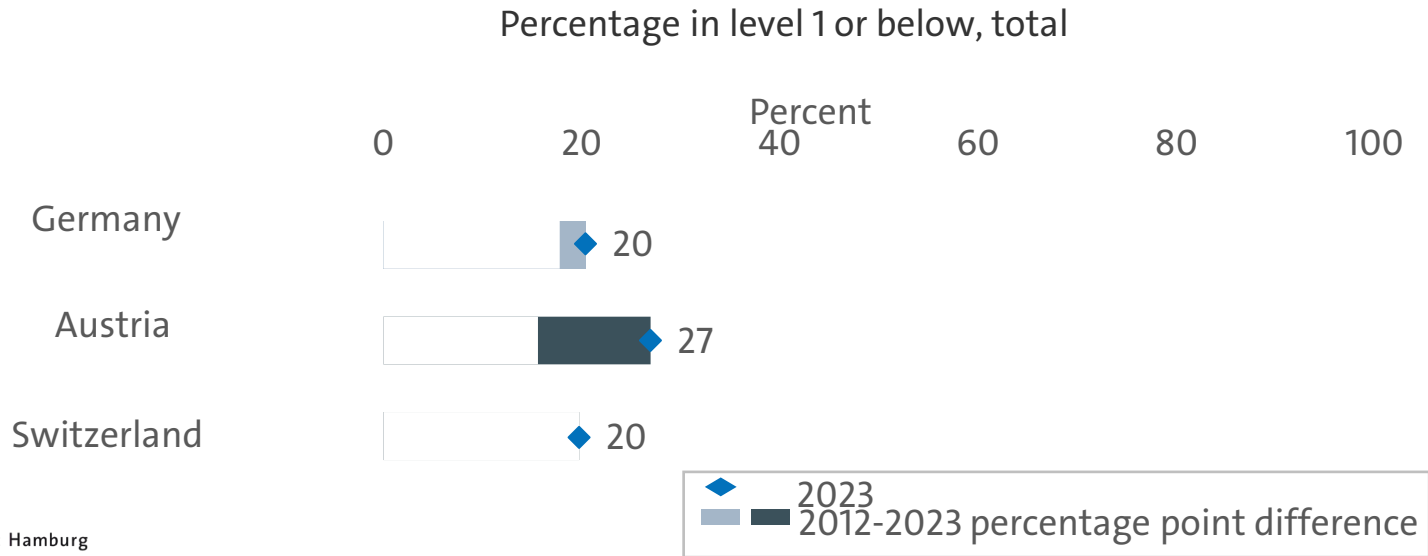
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5. Trends for adults with low skills 2012 to 2023

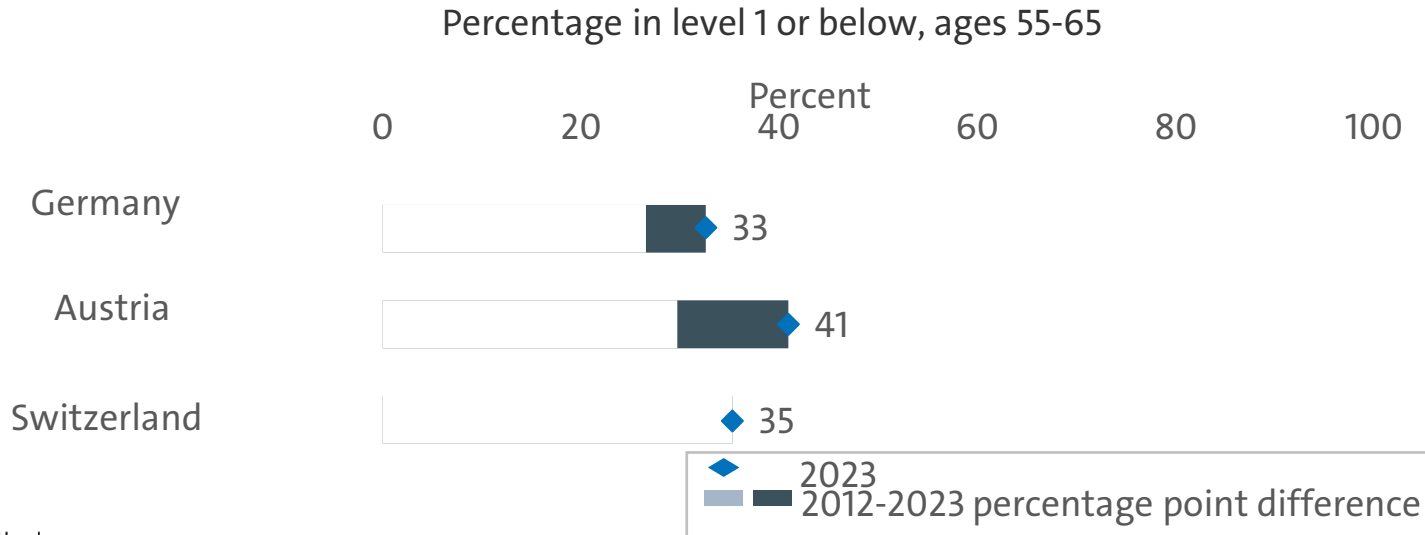
Total, ages 16-65

- Between 2012 and 2023, percent of adults with low skills increased in Austria, but did not differ significantly in Germany.
- In 2023, percent of adults with low skills in Germany is lower than in Austria, but similar to Switzerland



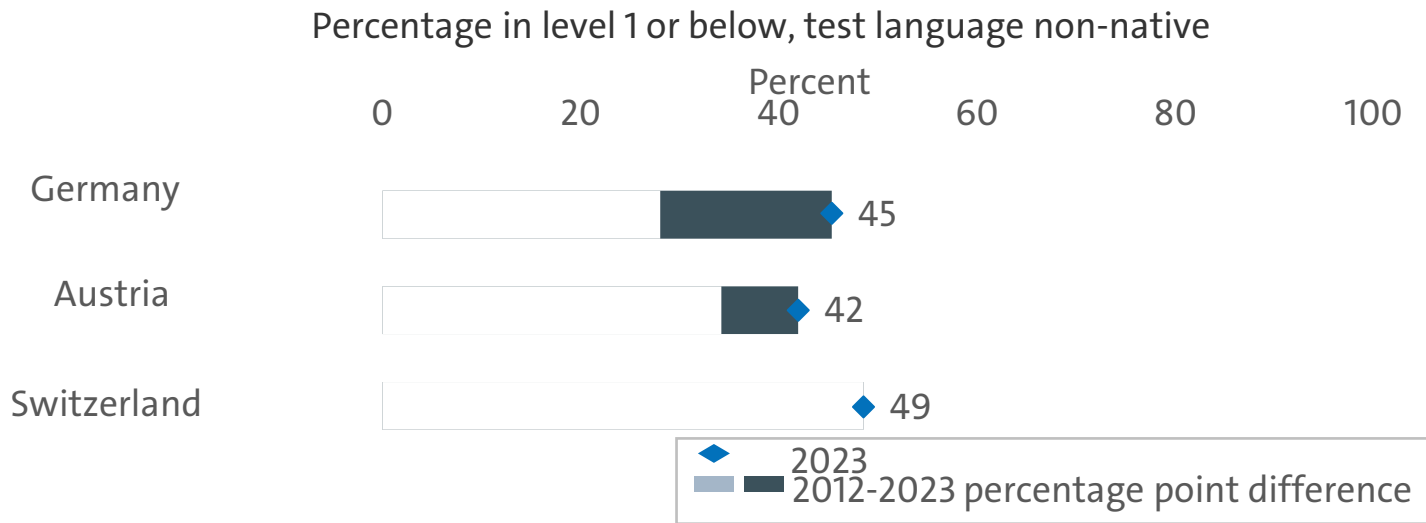
Age

- Between 2012 and 2023, percent of adults with low skills who are ages 55-65 increased in Germany and in Austria.
- In 2023, percent of adults with low skills who are ages 55-65 in Germany is lower than in Austria, but similar to Switzerland



Test language: Test language non-native

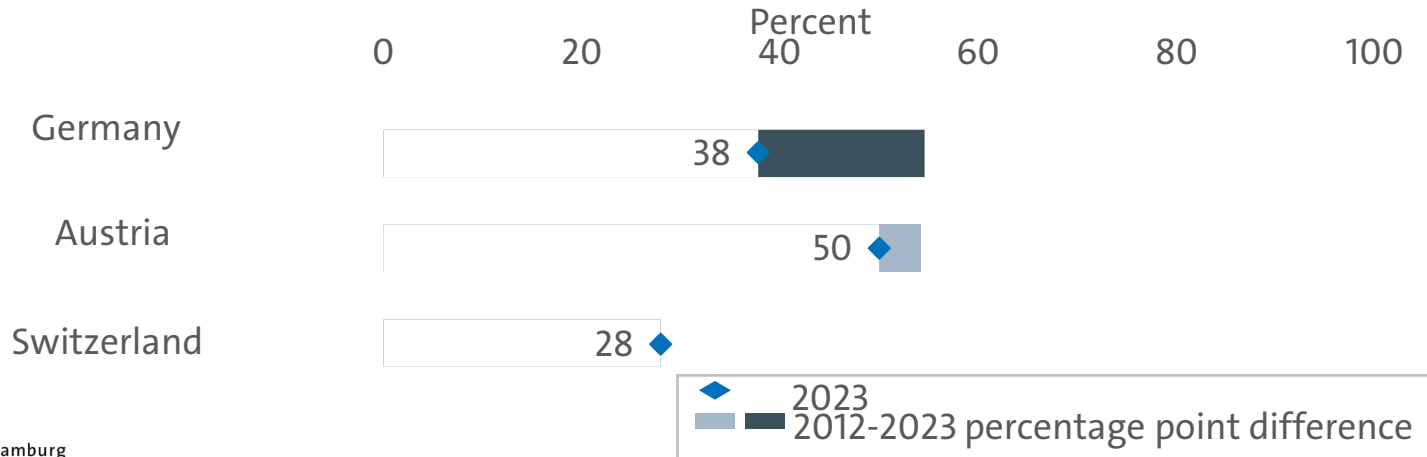
- Between 2012 and 2023, percent of adults with low skills whose native language was not German increased in Germany and Austria.
- In 2023, percent of adults with low skills whose native language was not German (or German, Italian, or French in Switzerland) were similar across all three countries.



Immigration: Native-born adults with native-born parents

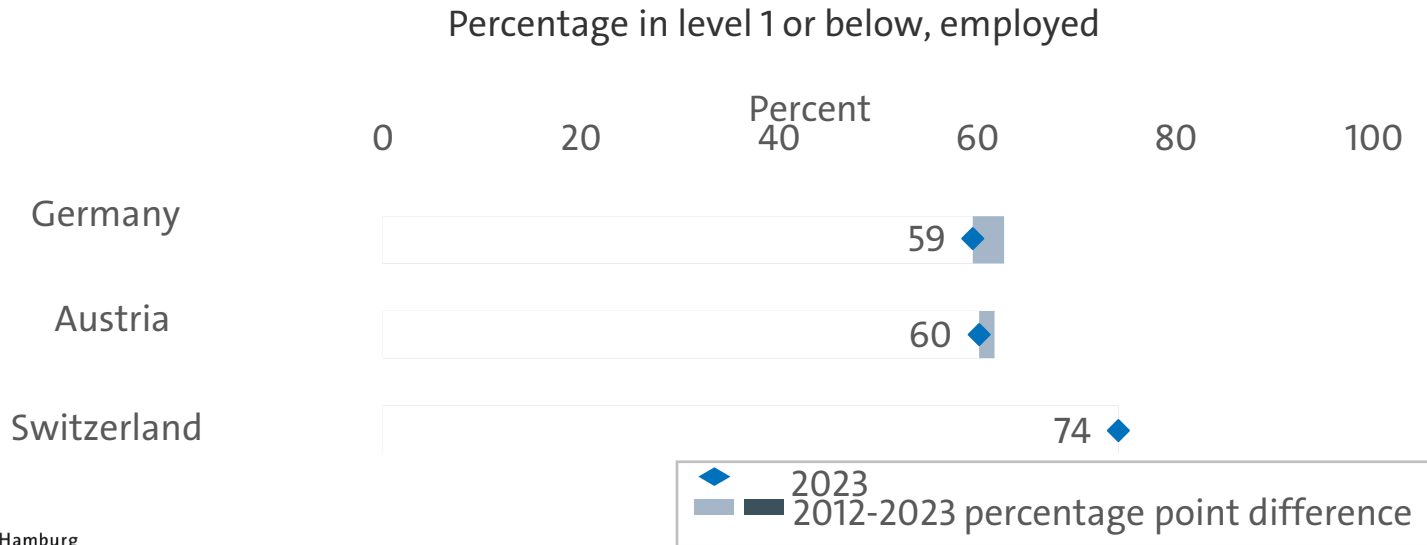
- Between 2012 and 2023, percent of adults with low skills who were native-born with native-born parents decreased in Germany, but did not differ significantly in Austria.
- In 2023, percent of adults with low skills who were native-born with native-born parents in Germany is lower than in Austria, but higher than in Switzerland.

Percentage in level 1 or below, native-born adults with native-born parents



Employment: Employed

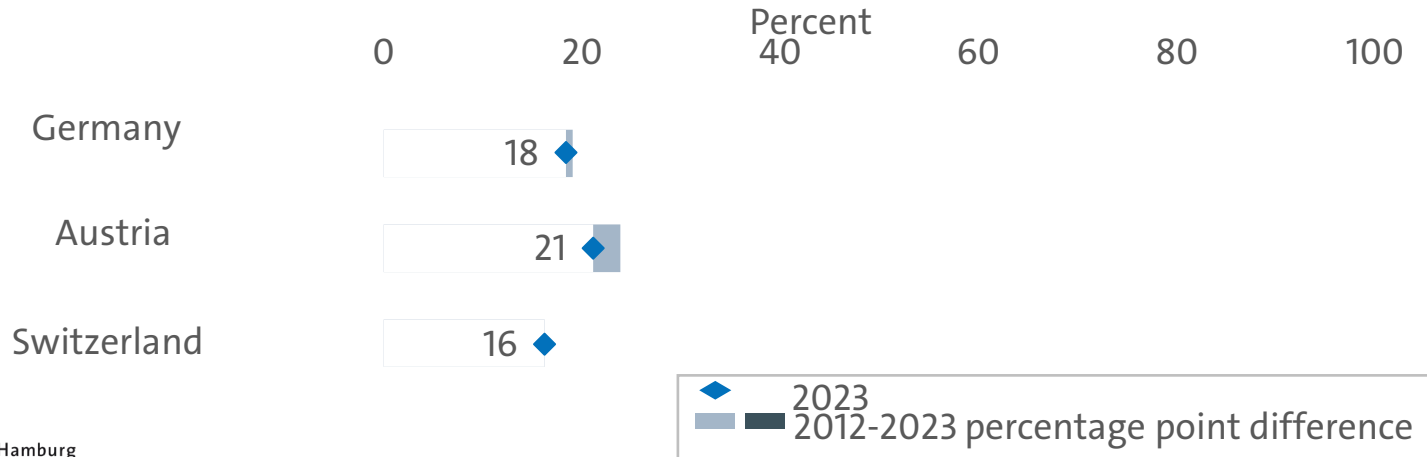
- Between 2012 and 2023, percent of adults with low skills who were employed did not differ significantly in Germany and Austria.
- In 2023, percent of adults with low skills who were employed in Germany was lower than in Switzerland, but similar to that in Austria.



Employment: Employed in elementary occupations

- Between 2012 and 2023, percent of adults with low skills who were employed in elementary occupation did not differ significantly in Germany and Austria.
- In 2023, percent of adults with low skills who were employed in elementary occupations was similar across all three countries.

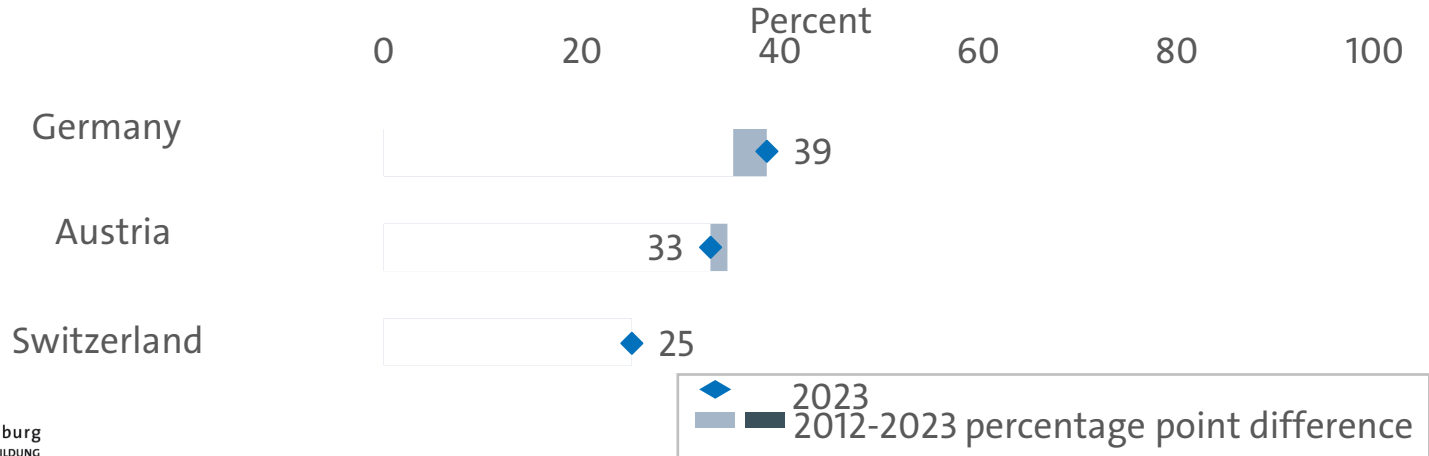
Percentage in level 1 or below, employed in elementary occupations



Employment: Employed in semi-skilled blue color occupations

- Between 2012 and 2023, percent of adults with low skills who were employed in semi-skilled blue color occupations did not differ significantly in Germany & Austria.
- In 2023, percent of adults with low skills who were employed in semi-skilled blue color occupations in Germany was higher than in Austria and Switzerland.

Percentage in level 1 or below, employed in semi-skilled blue color occupations





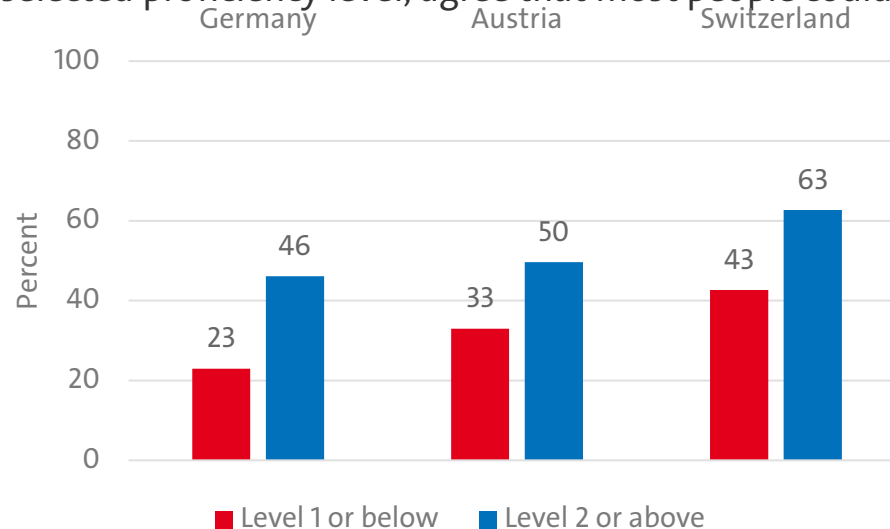
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5. Without Trend (2023)

Social trust: agree that “most people could be trusted”

- In 2023, adults with low skills had lower social trust than adults with higher skills in all three countries.
- In 2023, adults with low skills in Germany had lower social trust than adults with low skills in Austria and Switzerland.

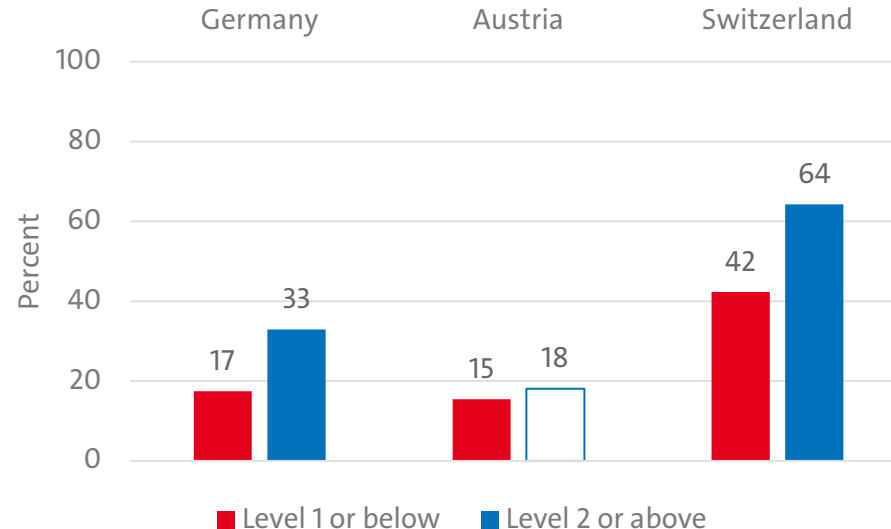
Percentage in selected proficiency level, agree that most people could be trusted



Political efficacy: agree that “people like me have a say in the government”

- In 2023, adults with low skills had lower social trust than adults with higher skills in Germany and Switzerland, but did not differ significantly in Austria.
- In 2023, adults with low skills in Germany had lower social trust than adults with low skills in Switzerland, but similar to those in Austria.

Percentage in selected proficiency level, agree that people like me have a say in the government







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6. Summary

How has the profile of adults with low skills changed **between 2012** and **2023** PIAAC?

 Percentage in 2023 lower than in 2012
 Percentage in 2023 higher than in 2012

| Characteristic of adults with low skills | Germany | Austria |
|--|---------|---------|
| Ages 55-65 | 6 | 11 |
| Male | 7 | |
| Language Non-native | 17 | 8 |
| Native-born of native-born parents | -17 | |
| Education less than secondary | | -14 |
| Education above secondary degree | 4 | 9 |
| Participated in formal education | | |
| Participated in non-formal education | | -9 |
| Employed | | |
| Semi-skilled blue-collar occupations | | |
| Elementary occupations | | |
| Parents less than secondary | | -8 |

- Germany: older, higher percentages of males or non-native language speakers and lower percentage of native-born with native born parents
- Austria: older, higher percentage of non-native language speakers, more educated parents
- Stagnation in the labor market in both countries

How does the profile of adults with low skills in 2023 differ across countries? Compared to Germany

■ Percentage in country lower than in Germany
■ Percentage in country higher than in Germany

| Characteristic of adults with low skills | Austria | Switzerland |
|--|---------|-------------|
| Ages 55-65 | 8 | |
| Male | | |
| Language Non-native | | |
| Native-born of native-born parents | 12 | -10 |
| Education less than secondary | | |
| Education above secondary degree | | |
| Participated in formal education | | |
| Participated in non-formal education | -6 | |
| Employed | | 15 |
| Semi-skilled blue-collar occupations | -6 | -14 |
| Elementary occupations | | |
| Parents less than secondary | 10 | 10 |
| Most people could be trusted: Agree | 10 | 20 |
| People like me have a say in the government: Agree | | 25 |

- Austria: older, higher percentage of native-born with native born parents, have higher social trust
- Switzerland: lower percentage of native-born with native-born parents, more employed and less in semi-skilled blue color, have higher social trust and political efficacy

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