



Public administration characteristics and performance in EU28:

Austria

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1. SIZE OF GOVERNMENT

Total expenditures in percent of GDP are commonly used as a measure for the relative size of government. Austria, in this respect, is ranked rather high (51.6%) compared to other EU Member States and on the same level with countries such as Finland, France, Denmark, Belgium, or Greece. The by far largest share of expenditures goes into social welfare services, followed by the policy fields of health, general public services, economic affairs, education, public order and security, culture and recreation, defense, environment protection, and housing (Eurostat¹). The measure has decreased slightly but continuously for Austria over the last years (Eurostat²).

Table 1: General government budget data

AUSTRIA	Value 2010	EU 28 Rank	Value 2015	EU 28 Rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Total expenditures (in % GDP)	53.06	6	51.61	6	-1.45	0
Central government share (%)	66.51	15	67.00	15	+0.49	0
State government share (%)	18.21		17.96		-0.25	
Local government share (%)	16.31		16.76		+0.45	
Public investment (in % GDP)	3.26	23	2.92	20	-0.34	+3
Debt in % GDP	82.39	19	85.54	23	+3.15	-4
Deficit in % GDP	-4.5	8	-1.0	8	+3.5	+0

Sources: AMECO, Eurostat

Although Austria is organized as a federal republic, the central government level holds the financial reins and, by tendency, has increased its share on total expenditures over the years. Compared to other federal states such as Germany, Belgium, or Spain (with the lowest shares of central government expenditures in percent of GDP), Austria's 34.6% is remarkably high. At the same time, the central government accounts for only 37.9% of general government employment, with the majority of public employees working on the state or local government level – however, sometimes being paid directly by the central government (such as in education). As a consequence, 21.6% of total expenditures account for remunerations (in total around EUR 36 billion, thereof federal level: EUR 15.2 billion, states: EUR 11.5 billion, municipalities: EUR 9.1 billion, social insurances: EUR 2 billion)³, with public employment in education and health – representing the largest professional groups within the Austrian public sector – accounting for over 50% of the amount.

Table 2: Public sector employment*

AUSTRIA	2005	OECD EU21 rank	2011	OECD EU19 rank	Δ Value
General government employment in % of total labour force	11.30	18	10.70	16	-0.60

Sources: OECD- Government at a glance

*According to the OECD, general government employment does not include public corporations.

¹<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/infographs/cofog>

²<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tec00023&language=en>

³ https://www.oeffentlicherdienst.gv.at/fakten/publikationen/PJB_2017.pdf?66rd86

Compared to other countries, and at least at first glance, general government employment in Austria is moderate; public employment as share of total employment has remained stable for the period 2011-2015 and is just under the EU28-average. In 2000, Austria's public sector employed about 500,000 people; for 2016, statistics report 349,173 (FTE) public employees. What looks like a significant cutback of public employees is largely attributable to a distinctive model of decentralization and corporatization in which governmental units or agencies were converted into legally independent organizations under private or public law (Egger-Peitler et al., 2015). In 2016, 55,627 (FTE) employees worked in public corporations at the state level, and another 20,076 (FTE) at the central government level. And although general public services went through distinct cutbacks and several periods of hiring freeze, public sector employment in total has been rather stable over the last decade with a slight increase over the last years (police, schools, and justice). According to NACE data, both total employment and public employment increased from 2011 to 2015, the latter even slightly stronger (3.7%).

Table 3: Public sector employment in Austria

AUSTRIA	2015
(1) General government employment (in million)*	0,346626
thereof share of central government (%)	37,9%
thereof share of state/regional government (%)	40,7%
thereof share of local government (%)	21,4%
(2) Public employment in social security functions (in million)	0,026998
(3) Public employment in the army (in million)	0,013533
(4) Public employment in the police (in million)	0,030243
(5) Public employment in employment services (in million)	0**
(6) Public employment in schools and daycare (million)	0,105856
(7) Public employment in universities (million)	0**
(8) Public employment in hospitals (million)	0,044335
(9) Public employment in core public administration (in mio.); calculated as (1) minus (2)-(8)	0,125661
(10) Core public administration employment in % of general government employment (9)/(1)	36,25%

Sources: Personal des Bundes 2016,

https://www.oeffentlicherdienst.gv.at/fakten/publikationen/PJB_2016_BF.pdf?5rh0q5

Personal des Bundes, Übersicht gemäß §42 Abs. 4 BHG 2013, 2015,

https://service.bmf.gv.at/BUDGET/Budgets/2016/beilagen/Personal_des_Bundes_2016.pdf;

Statistisches Handbuch der österreichischen Sozialversicherung 2016

<https://www.sozialversicherung.at/cdscontent/load?contentid=10008.555191&version=1474454013>

*According to the OECD, general government employment excludes public corporations.

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Sozialversicherung

2. SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT

2.1. State system and multi-level governance

2.1.1. Key features of the state/government system

The Federal Constitution, the State Treaty, the Declaration of Neutrality, and the EU Accession Agreement form the constitutional basis of the parliamentary republic, founded on democratic principles and the separation of powers. In Austria, the political power is somewhat concentrated in the hands of the Federal Chancellor as the head of Federal Government. The two parliamentary chambers and legislative bodies are the National Council and the Federal Council; the former represents the electorate and thus the citizens directly, while the latter represents the interests of the nine Austrian federal provinces/states. Austria, much like Germany and Switzerland, is categorized as a continental European federal state characterized by the political-administrative importance attached to the state level and the principle of subsidiarity (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2014).

Austria is a federation of nine federal provinces/states, led by state governments and headed by a state governor. Vienna is both the nation's capital city and also one of the nine federal states in its own right – which means the city council also serves as the state parliament, the city senate as the state government, and the mayor as the state governor. The relatively high number of around 2,100 municipalities constitutes the local government level, complemented by 79 districts as administrative territorial units with only executive functions on the state and federal level.

Compared to Germany or Switzerland, Austrian federalism is considered underdeveloped as the constitutional "general competence" of the Austrian states (i.e., responsibilities not explicitly labeled as federal ones remain at the state level) is thwarted by the numerous responsibilities across various policy fields that have been declared federal competences. Austria is therefore regarded as a "centralized federal state" (Pelinka, 2009), with the principle of subsidiarity not adequately anchored (Bußjäger, 2016). Despite such relatively clear domination by the central administration, the states play an important political role within the Austrian multi-level system. They have their own "subnational identity", also due to strong political traditions and long-serving state governors who use "anti-centralist" arguments (Pelinka, 2009) to demonstrate pragmatic political power and to document their significant influence, also on the federal level. Their standing within the Austrian federal architecture, due to certain rights within indirect federal administration, and in combination with complex informal relationships, puts things into perspective when it comes to issues of multi-level governance. De facto, the constitutional primacy of the federal level is limited and the hierarchical structure mutates into the praxis of a complex negotiating system with significant political influence (complemented by the institution of "social partnership" involving key socio-economic interest groups). Formal agreements between levels of government are, in this sense, politically less significant when compared to the informal relations between federal and state executives; negotiated rules and norms, cooperation, and coordination are a central feature of Austrian federalism (Karlhofer, 2016).

2.1.2. Distribution of powers between different levels of government

The distribution of powers between different levels of government in Austria is fragmented and confusing for external observers to a degree that is sometimes referred to as a "Gordian knot". It suffers from insufficient systematization and a plurality of competence types, often appearing in a casuistic manner. Scattered competences and

regulations of authority (*Kompetenzordnungen*) beyond the Austrian federal constitution (*Kompetenzdeckungsklauseln*) further impede a clear mapping of competences in the Austrian federal system (Gamper, 2016). The competence ascertainment procedures of the Austrian Constitutional Court, which are of constitutional rank, add another challenging dimension to the picture. As of today, Austria has about 50 constitutional laws and another 500 laws with constitutional requirements (Karlhofer, 2016). It is in this way that the Austrian federal constitution does not holistically arrange government tasks; instead, it induces the fragmentation and, oftentimes, the allocation of single competences to the legislative bodies. As a result, Austria has numerous cross-cutting issues (e.g., environmental protection, regional planning, migration and integration) that fall within the responsibilities of both the federal and the state level (Bußjäger, 2016).

Table 4: Distribution of competences

Key policy fields	Legislation		Regulation		Funding		Provision	
Defense	fed gov		fed gov		fed gov		fed gov	
External affairs	fed gov		fed gov		fed gov		fed gov	
Internal affairs (incl. police)	fed gov		fed gov		fed gov		fed gov	
Justice (incl. courts and prisons)	fed gov		fed gov		fed gov		fed gov	
Finance/tax	fed gov		fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov
Science and research (incl. universities)	fed gov		fed gov		fed gov		fed gov	
Economic affairs	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov
Environmental protection	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov
Public utilities	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov
Social welfare	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov
Health	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov
Education	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov	fed gov	state gov

Continental European federal states are characterized by one dominating principle: legislation at the federal level and implementation at the state/regional level. While this is in fact common practice in Germany and Switzerland, Austria is somewhat different with an emphasis on both legislation and implementation at the federal level in many areas; in addition, when competences are divided between the federal and the state/regional level, the federal level is entitled to a broad range of supervisory measures that limit the autonomous implementation of the states. Both the federal and the state/regional level are not constrained by the constitutional division of powers when acting outside their sovereign function in providing public services. These activities, however, again result in a strong financial interdependence between the federal, the state/regional, and the local level. As a consequence, especially social welfare, education, health, or public utilities have become fragmented and, at the same time, interlinked policy fields with opaque constructions concerning competences, funding, and provision. This is noteworthy in view of the fact that only federal government has the competence to redistribute public funds among the states (*Finanzausgleichsgesetz*). In general,

Austria can be characterized as more centralized in legislative and funding terms, and more decentralized in broader administrative terms.

2.1.3. Fiscal federalism

The fiscal relations across levels of government are regulated in the Fiscal Constitutional Law (*Finanz-Verfassungsgesetz*) setting the principles for the fiscal equalization scheme (*Finanzausgleichsgesetz*), that details the rules of tax revenue, cost bearing, and transfer payments between the federal level, the states, and the municipalities. Every four years, these details are formally re-negotiated between the Federal Minister of Finance and the states – however, often resulting in the continuation of the status quo. Quite recently, an attempt by the Federal Ministry of Finance to improve the alignment of the fiscal equalization scheme and responsibilities between the levels of government for the period 2017 to 2021 fell short of expectations and the intended task orientation as the basis for the allocation of funds could not be realized (currently the revenues are mainly allocated per capita). Minor measures were set, but there has been no considerable progress in terms of tax autonomy, task orientation, or the streamlining of fiscal relations. The states, however, signaled the implementation of expenditure and task monitoring, and the benchmarking of administrative performance is intended to increase transparency and efficiency of public service delivery.

The federal level can legislate for a certain tax in case it is entitled to do so, otherwise legislation remains with the states (currently around 86% of all revenues are legislated by the federal level); local government taxes are regulated by municipalities if they are entitled to do so by federal or state law. About 95% of total revenue is currently levied by federal revenue offices, about 4% by municipalities, and 1% by the states (Federal Ministry of Finance⁴). In addition, there are a number of federal (e.g., stamp duties, legal fees, *Dienstgeberbeitrag zum Familienlastenausgleichsfonds*) and local revenues (e.g., municipal tax, property tax) that are not part of the fiscal equalization process. All other revenues are regarded as shared revenues and distributed between the federal, state, and municipal level based on a two-step procedure including a number of criteria such as demographic factors and financial requirements. After intergovernmental transfers as a second part of fiscal equalization (mainly to cover the transfer of federal tasks to the state level), the distribution is as follows: 57% for the federal level, 31% for the state level (including Vienna), 9.4% for the municipal level (excluding Vienna), and 2.6% for EU membership (Federal Ministry of Finance⁵).

Overall, the distribution of powers is considered to be the part of the Austrian constitution with the most urgent need for reform (Karlhofer, 2016). The division of responsibilities between federal, state, and local government is unsatisfactory and has led to a multiplicity of regulatory regimes causing efficiency losses and blockades on reform in crucial sectors such as education and health. Problems are more pronounced when legislation, regulation, financing, and/or provision of services do not lie within the same level of government. Structural reforms (also addressing the informal power of the states) and the streamlining of responsibilities and respective funding (i.e., clear fiscal competences, transparent transfer systems, streamlining of tasks and competences,

⁴ <https://www.bmf.gv.at/budget/finanzbeziehungen-zu-laendern-und-gemeinden/besteuerungsrechte-und-abgabenertraege.html> (23.03.2017)

⁵ <https://www.bmf.gv.at/budget/finanzbeziehungen-zu-laendern-und-gemeinden/besteuerungsrechte-und-abgabenertraege.html> (23.03.2017)

and/or a stronger task orientation) as well as increased transparency (currently prevented by Austria's complex relations between the federal and the state level) are urgently needed in order to design and implement comprehensive policy reforms (Karlhofer, 2016).

State structure (federal – unitary) (coordinated – fragmented)	Executive government (consensus – intermediate – majoritarian)	Minister- mandarin relations (separate – shared) (politicized – depoliticized)	Implementation (centralized – decentralized)
centralised federal, fragmented	grand coalition, consensual	fairly politicized, separated careers, mandarins enjoy strong tenure	depending on policy field, but rather decentralized

2.2. Structure of executive government (central government level)

2.2.1. Executive government

Currently, the Austrian Federal Government is organized in 13 ministries. The Federal Chancellor presides over the federal government but is formally equal to the Federal Ministers who act at the helm of each ministry and can be accompanied by so-called State Secretaries (at the moment, one state secretary is assigned to the Federal Chancellery and one to the Federal Ministry of Science, Research, and Economy). In each ministry, a General Secretary can be installed in a supporting role, whereas the directorates general (*Sektionen*) are obligatory. Austria has about 70 of these directorates general that are subdivided into directorates (*Abteilungen*) and units (*Referate*). Powers and tasks of the respective ministries are established in the Federal Ministries Act (*Bundesministeriengesetz*), which also describes the organizational structure and principles governing the assignment of tasks. About 92% of ministry staff works in governmental bodies that are subordinated to the ministry (e.g., schools, tax offices, police stations, courts).

The Office of the Federal President, the Parliamentary Administration, the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Administrative Court, the Ombudsman Board and the Court of Audit are also part of the Federal Civil Service, but do so outside the organizational structure of ministries as they enjoy a significant level of autonomy and independence due to their monitoring or control functions (Bundeskanzleramt, 2015).

Among the various ministries, the Federal Chancellery and the Ministry of Finance have a key role and are the center of government coordination. The former has the whip hand on personnel capacities, the latter on budgetary issues. Personnel are allocated by law each year, concurrent with the passage of the budget. The staff appointment plan (*Stellenplan*) defines the number and grades of staff for each ministry. The total number of posts within a ministry is defined and cannot be changed; a cost-neutral adjustment within a ministry must be carried out by a government decree (Egger-Peitler et al., 2015). Additionally, the Federal Chancellery has a coordinating function as far as the Federal Administration is concerned (e.g., salaries, controlling, service regulations for the federal staff, training, public service reform).

2.2.2. Budgeting and monitoring mechanisms

The second stage of the federal budget reform in 2013 led to clearer budgeting and monitoring mechanisms, but also to a wide range of procedural regulations as well as a high degree of reporting obligations towards the Ministry of Finance, the Parliament, and the Federal Chancellery. The new budget law introduced a medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF), incorporated new constitutional principles (i.e., outcome orientation, efficiency, transparency, true and fair view), implemented a number of performance management instruments, and introduced accrual accounting based on the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS). One objective of the reform was to create improved information for politics, administration, and the public about the financial status of the ministries and the federal sector in general. Accounting and budgeting are now integrated into a consistent management information framework and conceptual links have been created between the different elements thereof.

As far as the budgeting process is concerned, the government presents, in a first step, the MTEF and the budget strategy report that explains the main budget priorities to the parliament which discusses the proposal not in detail but on a macro-level and passes the expenditure ceilings for the chapters. These expenditure ceilings can only be changed by amending the MTEF. The budgeting process is completed upon presentation of the annual budget bill that contains the details for each chapter to the parliament.

The Austrian Court of Audit regularly produces a report on the Federal Financial Statements that comprises the results of the federal financial administration and serves the parliament as a basis to exercise its control prerogative. Performance management and regulatory impact assessments have been introduced over the last years, and (expected) results and indicators are part of a broader political discussion. The Federal Chancellery (more precisely, its *Wirkungscontrollingstelle des Bundes*) assesses the effectiveness of the introduced reforms and used methodology. In terms of administrative reform and its coordination, both the Federal Chancellery and the Ministry of Finance somewhat claim the lead – occasionally in a more competitive than cooperative way, with one firmly holding personnel, the other financial power.

Overall, on the one hand, and given the tight legal framework (especially in terms of personnel and detailed legal determination), the managerial autonomy of public sector organizations and executives to live up to the principle of performance and impact orientation is rather limited. On the other hand, Austria has a large number of legally independent and semi-dependent entities that enjoy various amounts of managerial and policy autonomy (Hammerschmid et al., 2012). These organizations differ strongly regarding their forms and functions (Leixnering & Meyer, 2015), leading to a complex and highly fragmented organizational landscape. This development has raised new challenges with regard to the governance and control of these autonomous units (Seiwald et al., 2013), also triggering debates of reintegration and recentralization.

3. KEY FEATURES OF THE CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM

3.1. Status and categories of public employees

3.1.1. Definition of civil service and types of employees

The Austrian civil service is employed either based on public law as tenured civil servants (*Beamten-Dienstrechtsgesetz 1979*) or based on private law as contractual staff (*Vertragsbedienstetengesetz 1948*). At the federal level, 45.7% of employees are tenured civil servants, with the proportion however varying significantly across policy fields and professions. For instance, around 26% of all federal teachers are civil servants;

the same holds true for 94% of all police and prison officers, and for 90% of military staff; with regard to the occupational group of judges and public prosecutors there is no alternative to entering into an employment relationship under public law. A small group of federal civil servants (about 20,000) also works in various agencies and corporatizations (including the successor companies of the Austrian Postal Office) while remaining employees of the federal civil service.

Traditionally, permanent tenure under public law carries absolute protection against dismissal (the so-called "*Pragmatisierung*"). In the late 1990s, first measures were launched in order to reduce the proportion of civil servants in those occupational groups where private law employment represents an alternative. In 2003, public law appointments ceased for certain groups. In practice, however, there is hardly any difference between the two groups as contractual staff also enjoys strong protection against dismissal. Nevertheless, one major difference remains: At the end of their careers, tenured civil servants do not leave the public sector – they are transferred into a retirement relationship and continue to appear in the federal budget; contractual staff receives a pension like all private sector employees, in line with the General Social Insurance Act (Demmke & Moilanen, 2010).

At the state and municipal level, standards for both tenured civil servants (41% of public sector employees in 2015) and contractual staff are further regulated by the specific law of each state. As a consequence, there are remarkable differences concerning organizational structures and the volume of tasks carried out. For instance, Kindergarten teachers are usually employees of the municipalities – not so, however, in the state of Lower Austria where a part of this group is employed by the state. The same holds true for music school teachers or nursing staff. Teachers employed at the state level constitute an interesting group also: not only are they the largest group of employees (66,300 FTE), but teachers working in primary and lower secondary schools are financed by the federal level (Federal Chancellery, 2016).

3.1.2. Civil service system

For both forms of public employment, at the federal and state level alike, payment, promotion criteria, recruitment procedures, training, working time, as well as other rights and obligations are regulated in great detail. Compared to private sector employment, public sector employment is characterized by career paths tailored to life-long employment, specific criteria for initial entry, and a strong emphasis on career development and seniority. By tendency, mobility or transition between the sectors is unusual and can be considered the exception rather than the rule. Thus, the Austrian system has been characterized as a career-based system (Demmke et al., 2006; Egger-Peitler et al., 2015; Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2014). Even today, and especially at the federal level, Austrian civil servants' understanding and interpretations of their role within society are strongly oriented towards the Weberian model. Serving a public good by executing political rules and laws in an impartial way is still highly valued and continues to play a major role in terms of identification and social identity. Nevertheless, the values of ideal-typical Weberian-style bureaucracy have been more and more combined with reform orientation and openness towards new concepts, mechanisms, and instruments in order to increase overall quality, efficiency, effectiveness, and professionalism (Meyer et al., 2013).

3.2. Civil service regulation at central government level

Public employment is based on special service regulation laws for employment both under public law and private law. All relevant terms and conditions are defined at length

and in great detail, leading to numerous regulatory systems in Austria (about 30 different ones). With the Federal Chancellery, Austria still has a central HRM body that sets and monitors the pay system and the number and type of posts for the entire federal level. This advantage is counteracted by a rigid, seniority-based salary and promotion system that leaves little to no room for performance-related incentives and leads to prevalent difficulties in attracting young employees (resulting in demographic problems such as an over-aging civil servant population), motivation deficits, and problems with regard to the intra-sectorial mobility of managers and experts. Also, the current system in Austria does not offer the possibility to systematically plan or shape individual careers (Egger-Peitler et al., 2015).

Proposals to solve these issues have been widely discussed but have not yet resulted in a comprehensive HR reform program to overcome substantial structural weaknesses. In fact, Austria has set numerous HRM initiatives (e.g., mentoring programs, e-recruiting, mobility initiatives, traineeships), but none of them has ever really targeted civil service at its core. In fact, Austria's distinctive legal regulations (i.e., the Civil Service Act 1979 and Contract Staff Act 1948) have not been significantly modified by any of these reform efforts over the last decades. Instead, a restrictive personnel policy at the federal level was pursued in form of a hiring freeze, and another 4,000 permanent positions should be axed in the near future by not refilling vacancies. Moderate wage increases are additional measures for consolidation of the personnel budget. Without doubt, the civil service reform is a highly sensitive but equally urgent reform issue for Austrian public administration; without any serious attempts to resolve these crucial matters the country will be ill-prepared for contemporary and future challenges.

Effective improvements will entail the reform of the current rigid employment law. There is appeal towards a coherent civil service regulation for the federal, state, and municipality level. More coherence could also increase career mobility. Instead of the outdated staff appointment plan, administrative entities need more personnel autonomy which would also result in both stronger awareness of the importance of HRM and integrated personnel development as well as the further professionalization of HRM policies and practices. Most of all, extensive structural reforms are needed – especially in areas where professions have created inertia through powerful lobbying – in order to tackle issues such as managing an ever ageing workforce, increase intra- and inter-sectorial mobility, foster performance orientation, and overall enhance the attractiveness of the public sector as an employer.

3.3. Key characteristics of the central government HR System

3.3.1. Organization of HRM

The allocation of manpower is centrally controlled through the staff appointment plan, determining the number of staff, as well as the grades of staff, for each ministry. Civil service regulations also rest within the competence of the Federal Chancellery, which additionally takes up a coordinating function (e.g., controlling, training, HRM tools, standards). Other HR tasks (e.g., recruitment, selection, promotion, appraisal) are organized in a decentralized way and are within the responsibility of the ministries. As far as professional training is concerned, two standard approaches exist: centralized via the Verwaltungsakademie, the training institution of the Federal Chancellery; and decentralized through the individual HRM departments of the ministries (Egger-Peitler et al., 2015).

In terms of remuneration, the Austrian system is based on a detailed salary scheme and guaranteed career advances (defined by law). Different government levels result in a

great variety of salary schemes as classifications and assessments may differ. In general, remuneration is not merit-based but depends on the classification and assessment of the job content without any leeway for negotiation. Seniority and qualification as highest influence for both individual grading and the level of wages are distinctive of a career-based system.

Despite a rigid salary scheme, there is a gender pay gap of 12.8% at the federal level, compared to 18.4% within all Austrian non-self-employed workers (Bundeskanzleramt, 2016). Compared to the private sector, public employees earn less than white-collar workers in the private sector on average. While the public sector offers higher pay in the lower income brackets, even top salaries in the public sector appear meager when compared with top salaries in the private sector (Bundeskanzleramt, 2015). Despite improvements, political patronage and politicization of recruitments/appointments remain an issue.

HR system (Career- vs. position-based)	Employment status (civil servant as standard; dual; employee as standard)	Differences between civil servants and public employees (high, medium, low)	Turnover (high, medium, low)
career-based	dual	low	low

3.3.2. Senior executive system

The Austrian federal administration is a closed and internally highly politicized body. A group of about 70 directors (approximately 25% female) traditionally hold a both exceptionally powerful and exposed position at the interface between the political and administrative level. This role requires a fine understanding of political rationales as well as the mastery of the tools of political communication. Depending on the respective structures, processes, and managerial instruments in place, the role of top civil servants varies with regard to the way they provide advice for the minister and their advisers (Gratz, 2012). In the more recent past, and also linked to more variation in the political landscape, the traditionally powerful role of top civil servants has been challenged by increasingly influential cabinets.

Fully in line with the Austrian career-based-system, life-long public service careers in the same ministry are the rule; high seniority and political networks remain crucial for promotion to the executive level. While, historically, top civil servants have been portrayed as the “wise civil servants”, or “the crypto-ministers”, this is no longer the case. Political-administrative relationships are at eye level these days, and the term of appointment for top civil servants is formally limited to five years (but usually renewed). In addition, top civil servants are increasingly evaluated by performance.

In Austria, the scope of the top servant position goes far beyond the mere implementation and execution of laws, regulations, and programs (Holzinger et al., 2006). Many parliamentary systems do not develop law texts in the legislative body, but do so mainly in the ministerial bureaucracy. This also applies to Austrian practices where federal laws are usually initially drafted by civil servants. In this way, top civil servants have considerable influence over legislative and programmatic matters, and are also responsible for the development and implementation of reform initiatives and cost-cutting measures. Thus, top positions are increasingly filled by experts with adequate professional and/or managerial backgrounds. Due to decentralized responsibilities and the resulting heterogeneity, no standardized or centrally defined skills profile for top civil servants is currently in place (Egger-Peitler et al., 2015).

Coherence among different government levels (high, medium, low)	Compensation level vs. private sector (much higher, higher, same, lower, much lower)	Formal politicization through appointments (high, medium, low)	Functional politicization (high, medium, low)
high	lower	low	high

3.3.3. Social dialogue and the role of the union

Social partnership and employee co-determination are core components of the Austrian political system, and therefore of relevance as far as regulations for public employees are concerned. The role of the labor union ranges from salary negotiations to employment frameworks or the review of diverse relevant standards. Traditionally, there are annual salary negotiations between the Austrian Federal Government and the union, with results serving as benchmark for negotiations on the state and municipality level.

The Austrian public administrative system also knows a highly differentiated system of personnel representation ("Bundes-Personalvertretungsgesetz 1967") that provides various legal rights regarding information and co-determination of personnel representation. Personnel representations in the Austrian public sector play a special role: they guarantee the correct execution of civil service regulations. In this capacity, they make for an important actor on the highly (party-)political playground. Unions and personnel representations are influential and powerful, especially when organizational or structural reforms are concerned. For example, teachers or judges have extremely strong lobbies pushing back against any comprehensive reform concerning their profession or related infrastructure.

4. POLITICAL ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

4.1. Policy-making, coordination and implementation

Austria, as a centralized federal state, has been characterized by a complex corporatist governance system with a long tradition of consensus-building through the involvement of a large number of potential interest groups. This specific feature has influenced, among other things, the depth and scope of public administration reform in various ways. The still well-established idea of social partnership is a core component of the Austrian political system. It is built upon a tacit and informal agreement between the government and the major employer and employee associations and has dominated the socioeconomic environment to such an extent that the Austrian system generally ranks near or at the top in empirical studies on corporatism (e.g., Lehmbruch & Schmitter, 1982). Until 2003, and for a period of several decades, Austria's parliament had not passed a single social or economic law without consulting the social partners in advance. Their predominant strategy of regulating conflicts by way of institutionalized bargaining and compromise without involving the public resulted in social peace and the postwar "economic miracle" and is denoted by the catchphrase of "a class struggle on the green table". In turn, democratic legitimacy deficits resulting from the secrecy and informality of political decision-making and a politicization of the economy were the price to pay, as was inertia in terms of public sector reform, often also due to the relatively strong influence of unions and staff councils.

Distribution of powers	Coordination quality (high, medium, low)	Fragmentation (high, medium, low)
highly fragmented	medium	high

Relatedly, Austria's social and political system has been, for most of the time since World War II, embossed by a two-party hegemony with exceptional stability – often in form of a grand coalition between the Social Democratic Party (*SPÖ*) and the conservative Austrian People's Party (*ÖVP*). Decision-making predominately entailed a contest between the two political parties, bargaining, and assertiveness, but, at the same time, the coalition partners were extremely consensus-oriented with a high level of conflict avoidance. As a consequence, the Austrian way often led to a compromise if not right up to stagnation due to the disagreement between the coalition partners. In 2000, a change in government injected strong momentum and drove socio-economic decision-making away from consensus towards conflict democracy, with competition between political parties increasing and social partnership less frequently called upon for mediation. In fact, social partnership temporarily lost relevance, but regained its influence once more with the return of the grand coalition in 2006. Over the last years, other parties have gained more relevance and consensus orientation in the policy-making process has decreased once again. Another essential – and related – feature to understand the Austrian political system is the so-called "*Proporzsystem*". The term denotes the consensual distribution of major political, economic, and administrative functions according to the current political strengths of parties in parliamentary elections. Originally, the party proportional representation was established to ensure political balance between the two dominating parties after the turbulences before and during World War II. Today, it has been criticized as outdated and anti-performance-oriented. Nevertheless, the filling of top positions is still strongly influenced by political aspects. As a consequence, the Austrian administrative system has been considered indirectly politicized, as top civil servants, executives, and board members are commonly associated with a political party.

Political economy (liberal – coordinated)	Interest intermediation (corporatist – pluralistic)	Citizen participation (strong – weak)	Policy style
coordinated	corporatist	weak; direct participation of citizens is still very uncommon	high importance of social partnership and political clientele

Sources of policy advice (mandarins, cabinets, external experts)	Administrative autonomy (high – medium – low)	Patronage & politicization (formal, functional) (merit – patronage) (high – medium – low)	Public Service Bargains (Agency – Trustee)	Stability (high – low – no turnover after elections)
mainly cabinets and mandarins, depends on the federal minister (also scientists, consultants, international experts)	medium	high at the top level, functional rather than formal	rather agency	high, no turnover after elections

4.2. Administrative tradition and culture

Austrian public administration has been described as pronouncedly Weberian, embedded in a traditional legalistic administrative culture, with hierarchy as the prevailing mode of governance; hence, Austria has often been portrayed as the home of legalistic administration (e.g., Hammerschmid & Meyer, 2005). Until the present day, the imperial tradition of a centrally administered bureaucratic state still denotes a key element of the Austrian socio-cultural and administrative landscape. The character of administrative practice is heavily imprinted by bureaucracy in the Weberian sense, with a strong focus on formal processes, rules, and directives (alongside a relatively high amount of informal procedures), a high level of continuity, career-based personnel policy, indirect politicization through staffing procedures, monocratic status hierarchy, a strong focus on formal and informal modes of control, and quite rigid and centralist personnel management regulations (e.g., Egger-Peitler et al., 2015; Leixnering et al., 2016).

Beyond doubt, the reforms of the last decades have left noticeable effects and prepared the ground for more recent initiatives. Today, the processes and instruments introduced by public administration reforms demand strategic and managerial know-how, with a particular view to outcome orientation as the central guiding principle for action at all administrative levels. Further, the role of the state has increasingly changed: from the exclusive provider of services to the guarantor of delivery of those services by a multiplicity of public and private providers. Overall, the still traditional Austrian public administration has incorporated several elements of different reform paradigms and trends over the last decades. As a result, today's Austrian administrative tradition might be described as Neo-Weberian (Meyer et al., 2013) – a blend of legalistic Weberian-style administrative tradition with several managerial and governance elements (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011).

Administrative culture Rechtsstaat, Public Interest	Welfare state (liberal, conservative, social-democratic)	Public Sector openness (open, medium, closed)
rule-of-law (Rechtsstaat), legalism	social democratic/conservative	closed

Key PA Values	Managerial vs. Procedural (managerial, mixed, procedural)	Red Tape (regulatory density) (very high to very low)	Discretion/autonomy (high, low, medium) low
legality, impartiality, loyalty, neutrality, equality	procedural logic (with increasing managerial influences)	high level of bureaucracy and red tape	medium to low

For comparative reasons, many studies have employed Hofstede's national culture dimensions. While insightful for fields such as international business and cross-cultural management, these dimensions prove less insightful when it comes to administrative culture. For instance, the indicated low value of power distance is not at all in line with the Weberian-style, strongly legalistic and bureaucratic administrative system in Austria. In a similar vein, the high value of masculinity (interpreted by Hofstede as highly success-oriented and driven; with employees living in order to work; managers expected to be decisive; emphasis on equity, competition, and performance; conflicts being resolved by fighting them out)⁶ is not consistent with other evaluations of the Austrian administrative culture.

Hofstede national culture dimensions		
Dimension	Value	Average EU28
Power Distance	11	52
Individualism/Collectivism	55	57
Masculinity/Feminity	79	44
Uncertainty Avoidance	70	70
Long-term Orientation	60	57

⁶ <https://geert-hofstede.com/austria.html> (29.03.2017)

Source: Hofstede's national culture dimensions.⁷

5. GOVERNMENT CAPACITY AND PERFORMANCE

5.1. Transparency and accountability

Traditionally, the specifics of the Austrian administrative system foster a certain degree of political secrecy and non-transparency. Against this backdrop, the increase of transparency of government and rank 4 of EU28 (see figure below) is not easily comprehensible. Of course, Austria has in fact seen several initiatives over the last years with the new budget law having pushed the overall development; which may, at least to some extent, explain the higher value concerning access to government information and accountability. But after all, Austria merely filled some of the major potholes while the road to transparency still remains bumpy. The 'miscarriage' of the Austrian Transparency Portal is of symbolic importance. The results of the COCOPS-study provide additional evidence for our evaluation: external transparency and openness, citizen involvement, citizens' trust in government and social cohesion are perceived significantly worse than five years ago (Leixnering et al., 2015). In particular, decision-making processes and legislative or programmatic processes are known to preferentially be in hiding.

Indicator	Value 2014	EU28 rank	Value 2016	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Access to government information (1-10)	8.00	8	8.00	10	0.00	-2
	Value 2013	EU28 rank	Value 2015	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Transparency of government (0-100)	67.86	4	73.00	4	+5.14	0
	Value 2010	EU28 rank	Value 2015	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Voice and accountability (-2.5,+2.5)	1.47	6	1.40	7	-0.07	-1
Control of corruption (-2.5,+2.5)	1.63	8	1.49	10	-0.14	-2
TI perception of corruption (0-100)	79.00	7	76.00	9	-3.00	-2
	Value 2010	EU28 rank	Value 2014	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Gallup perception of corruption (%)	42.00	6	50.00	10	+8.00	-4

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung, European Commission, Worldbank, Transparency International, Gallup World Poll.

Note: The ranking of the Gallup perception of corruption is based on 27 countries, and on the 2009 values for Estonia and Latvia.

Although services and accessibility have been improved, a high number of citizen relations based on trust and a wider understanding of citizenship including political participation and a sense of community have been neglected (Leixnering et al., 2015). The potential with regard to ensuring transparency, participation, and the prevention of

⁷ Interpretation: power distance (high value = higher acceptance of hierarchy and unequal distribution of power); individualism (high value = stronger individualist culture); masculinity (high value = higher masculinity of society); long-term orientation (high value = stronger long-term orientation); indulgence (high value = indulgence)

corruption is by far not exhausted, and Austria still has a significant need to catch up in the dimension of transparency and vertical accountability.

5.2. Civil service system and HRM

As has been indicated before, even today, the role understanding and values of Austrian civil servants, especially on the federal level, are strongly oriented towards a Weberian model. Serving a public good by executing political rules and laws in an impartial way is highly valued. These core values still play a crucial role in terms of identification and identity and may explain the high value of impartiality (see table below). Nevertheless, strong state and Weberian-style bureaucracy values are more and more combined with reform orientation and the openness towards new concepts, mechanisms, and instruments in order to increase overall quality, efficiency, and professionalism (Meyer et al., 2013), and may be one explanation for the very slight decrease and lower ranking.

53.0% of Austria's current federal civil servants will retire by 2027, and the average age of public servants has increased from 40.5 years in 1995 to 45.6 years in 2015 (Bundeskanzleramt, 2015) – both facts have veritable impacts on performance and motivation, training and development, working time, use of new technologies, and the transfer of know-how. Especially the general administration and the education sector depict a disproportionate number of older employees.

Indicator	Value 2012	EU28 rank	Value 2015	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Impartiality (1-7)	2.10	7	2.20	10	+0.10	-3
	Value 2012	EU26 rank	Value 2015	EU26 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Professionalism (1-7)	4.45	11	4.37	15	-0.08	-4
Closedness (1-7)	5.77	7	5.76	5	-0.01	+2

Source: Quality of Government Institute Gothenburg

At the moment, the capacity of HR can be assessed as stable with a strong tendency to turn problematic in the near future. There are veritable deficits concerning Austria's civil service system, including an overdue reform of the rigid civil service regulations, personnel autonomy for the ministries, openness and mobility, fast tracks and merit-based careers, transparency of staffing procedures, the degree of politicization and patronage, integrated personnel development and professionalization, digitalization, task and performance responsibility, and public service role and identity.

5.3. Service delivery and digitalization

Overall, cost and efficiency, service quality, and innovation are assessed as having continuously improved over the last years. Austria's administration reform ambitions are strongly characterized by digitalization and IT-based public services in order to promote inclusiveness and efficiency. Despite the role as a top-performer concerning the state of e-government development, Austria improves and extends its services continuously at all government levels (see table below).

Indicator	Value 2013	EU28 rank	Value 2015	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
E-government users (%)	27.83	9	31.02	11	+3.19	-2
Pre-filled forms (%)	51.86	13	61.86	12	+10.00	+1
Online service completion (%)	86.00	6	98.14	2	+12.14	+4
Indicator	Value 2010	EU28 rank	Value 2016	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Online services (0-1)	0.48	12	0.91	5	+0.43	+7
Indicator	Value 2013	EU27 rank	Value 2015	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Barriers to public sector innovation (%)	18.37	22				
Indicator	Value 2011	EU28 rank	Value 2016	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Services to businesses (%)			46.00	16		
Ease of Doing business (0-100)	76.71	8	78.92	9	+2.21	-1

Sources: European Commission Digital Economy and Society Index UN e-government Index, EU Scoreboard Public innovation, Eurobarometer num.417, Worldbank Ease of Doing Business

In general, the capacity and performance of the Austrian public sector with regard to the use of potentials of new technologies and digitalization can be assessed as high. Especially e-government stands for a modern and innovative state in which quality, trust, and speed are central elements. The improvement of e-government services continues to be a priority for citizens, but especially with a view to services to businesses (see table). In order to continue to improve, Austria has to take further steps towards deregulation and simplification as well as a reduction of administrative burden, whereby services to businesses should be in focus. Cross-border perspectives especially need to be enhanced by improving the accessibility for users in EU Member States, in particular by making portals available in various languages. Nevertheless, the potential for reform effects by digitalization measures and e-government draws to a close. It is in this sense that Austria needs structural and legal reforms in order to reduce regulatory barriers and burdens.

5.4. Organization and management of government

Driven by austerity and strong efficiency arguments, the years 2000 to 2006 were characterized by restructuring, downsizing, merging, and agencification. Today, there are veritable challenges with regard to the governance and control of these autonomous units. Due to the generally strong process-orientation of the Austrian system, reform initiatives target processes or implement procedures instead of paradigms and attitudes. The outcome-orientation marks a current and rather prominent example of this phenomenon. Discourse is dominated by procedures and the compliance with formalities while the underlying governance paradigm seems to be secondary. Austria has implemented a broad range of management instruments. Nevertheless, management capacity and managerial autonomy remains low.

Indicator	Value 2014	EU28 rank	Value 2016	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Strategic planning capacity (1-10)	6.00	10	6.00	11	0.00	-1
Interministerial coordination (1-10)	4.83	25	4.83	25	0.00	0
SIG Implementation capacity (1-10)	7.14	8	7.14	7	0.00	+1
Indicator	Value 2012	EU26 rank	Value 2015	EU27 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
QOG Implementation capacity (1-7)	5.80	3	5.43	7	-0.37	-4

Sources: Bertelsmann Stiftung; Quality of Government Institute Gothenburg

In a multi-level system governance issues remain an important issue, especially in complex policy fields such as education or health care. Austria has apparent weaknesses in terms of strategic planning or inter-authority coordination and needs new ways and forms of cooperation and a better management of government levels. In fact, there is a lack of know-how in order to manage comprehensive and cross-sectoral reform projects with many stakeholders and actors involved. Overall, the Austrian discourse is dominated

by a strong political logic, whereas the material logic often seems to be of minor importance.

5.5. Policy-making, coordination and regulation

Austria has been frequently depicted as the “home of legalistic administration” (Naschold 1996, 43; Hammerschmid & Meyer 2005), drawing on historical arguments and arguing that a rule of law-tradition is still eminent at the core of Austria’s public administration (Meyer et al., 2013). Nevertheless, policy-making appears informal and lacks overall transparency, as many government levels and interest groups are involved in social and economic decision- and law-making processes. Standardized and transparent processes of involvement and quality assurance during the development of a law text (e.g., expert groups, systematic stakeholder involvement, consultations) are not established. Also settings that admit the direct participation of citizens are still very uncommon. Austria remains governed by strong political networks and informal elite alliances with a high degree of closedness.

Indicator	Value 2014	EU28 rank	Value 2016	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Societal consultation (1-10)	8.00	4	8.00	4	0.00	0
Use of evidence based instruments (1-10)	7.00	8	7.00	8	0.00	0
Indicator	Value 2010	EU28 rank	Value 2015	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Regulatory quality (-2.5,+2.5)	1.46	9	1.43	10	-0.03	-1
Rule of law (-2.5,+2.5)	1.81	6	1.85	6	+0.04	0

Sources: Bertelsmann Stiftung; Worldbank

As a “*Rechtsstaat*”, Austria is governed by law, with all dysfunctionalities such as red tape, casuistics, agreements in the “shadow of the law”, weakening effectiveness of laws, limited calculability of complexity or dispositive norm compliance in terms of “comply or explain”. In this context, proportionality, sustainability and quality should be guiding principles in order to avoid a flood of regulation, red tape and bad quality (König et al., 2014). Regulatory impact assessments were introduced as part of the budget reform. However, they appear to be of conceptual nature and are understood as top-down task rather than as evidence-based decision support allowing for comparisons to be made between different policy options other than the envisaged legislative proposal. From a governance perspective Austria needs more awareness about governance modes and cooperation/coordination tools that lie beyond the law.

5.6. Overall government performance

Although reform initiatives in Austria over the last two decades have embraced a number of NPM-inspired measures and instruments, the model of bureaucratic governance based on the legalistic principle is still eminent. Far-reaching administrative changes have therefore proved to be too slow, come with too much compromise, avoid hard decisions, and are sometimes quite tedious processes (Hammerschmid & Meyer, 2005). As Meyer and colleagues (2015) aptly put it, “Austrian executives express a rather critical view on reforms in their policy field, and they are hesitant in giving a clear assessment of the overall success. They see reforms as reactive rather than proactive and as implemented without consulting public administration and the public. Thus, it can be assumed that there is a rather low level of commitment to the reform measures in public administration and consequently, a low level of using and developing the related management instruments can be observed. Reforms are assessed as improving efficiency, service and innovation, but as impacting rather negatively on the working climate in public administration and on policy effectiveness, coherence and coordination. However,

management reforms have left traces in the Austrian public sector. Managerial criteria such as efficiency, service quality, and innovation improved, while working climate in public organizations, policy effectiveness and coherence as well as social relations and trust between administration and citizens deteriorated.”

Indicator	Value 2010	EU28 rank	Value 2016	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Trust in government (%)	54.00	3	36.00	9	-18.00	-6
	Value 2011	EU27 rank				
Improvement of PA over last 5 years (%)	12.00	4				
	Value 2010	EU28 rank	Value 2015	EU28 rank	Δ Value	Δ Rank
Public sector performance (1-7)	5.48	6	5.05	9	-0.43	-3
Government effectiveness (-2.5,+2.5)	1.84	4	1.47	9	-0.37	-5

Sources: Eurobarometer 85, Eurobarometer 370, Worldbank, World Economic Forum

In sum, Austria is performing well in the area of public administration and has been considered a reluctant but steady reformer (Wutscher & Hammerschmid, 2005) – albeit with veritable shortcomings concerning the implementation of reforms. Still, despite all reform endeavors, our report clearly indicates that there are some significant needs for reform that have either not been tackled or have failed multiple times. We see, in particular, an urgent need for serious and far-reaching reforms of Austria’s federal structure as well as the alignment of the complex relations between the various levels of government, including a clear distribution of tasks and responsibilities across all actors involved; and observe veritable deficits concerning Austria’s civil service system, including an overdue reform of the rather rigid Service Code for Civil Servants as well as the professionalization of HRM measures more broadly.

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