

SHORT PROFILE

AUSTRIA

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1. Fact and figures

Political system:	Federal parliamentary republic
Population:	8 877 637 (2019)
GDP per capita in PPS Index (EU-27=100):	127 (2019)
General government expenditure (in % of GDP):	48.2 (2019)
Official language:	German

2. Cultural policy system

Objectives

In Austria, as a federal state, the majority of cultural competences is assigned to the cultural sovereign Bundesländer, while national cultural policy is the responsibility of the Arts and Culture Division of the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport. Hence, the national government and most of the Bundesländer draft their own legislative programmes or strategies for arts, culture and related policy. National cultural policy furthermore deals with the federal cultural institutions, the protection of cultural heritage, and art restitutions.

In recent years, the main priorities of the Austrian cultural policy have been: to promote emerging artists and contemporary art; to strengthen the presence of Austrian artists abroad; to mediate cultural values and create suitable conditions for a lively cultural scene and for broader cultural participation; to strengthen the role of cultural education; to generate wider interest in art and culture among children and young people; to create suitable framework conditions for cultural work with particular focus on female workers; and to promote new media and film.

Main features

The main features of Austrian cultural policy can be divided into three categories:

1. **Basic cultural needs:** freedom of art and artistic expression, diversity, equality, (media) pluralism, cultural rights, quality, creativity and innovation, sustainability, identity and internationalisation.
2. **Management:** public-private cooperation, flexibility, decentralisation, longer-term planning options, service orientation and evaluation.
3. **Socio-political objectives:** participation, integration, social security and inclusion, fair pay, representation and the economic effects of the cultural sector.

In January 2020, the Arts and Culture Division, previously allocated to the Federal Chancellery, was integrated into the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport. A Secretary of State is the head of the Arts and Culture Division, which is responsible for federal funding programmes for all segments of contemporary art including the performing and fine arts, music and literature, film, new media, photography, architecture and design as well as regional cultural initiatives. The Arts and Culture Division has the following tasks: promoting contemporary art in Austria and fostering the presence of Austrian artists abroad; the creation of adequate conditions for artistic and cultural production as well as participation in art and culture and its broad benefit for a majority of people; monument protection and cultural heritage; and EU culture policy and international cultural affairs.

On the regional level, all Bundesländer (federal provinces) have governmental departments responsible for cultural affairs. The legal basis of the promotion of arts and culture are the respective *Cultural Promotion Acts* (except Vienna), which stipulate the establishment of advisory boards and the publication of an expenditure report on the arts and culture. General cultural responsibilities of the federal provinces are: all legal agendas concerning cultural policy (Kulturhoheit, i.e. cultural sovereignty); promotion of cultural activities in the respective Bundesländ; promotion of activities to preserve the appearance of villages and towns; maintenance of the old town centres; promotion of contemporary art; foundations and funds owned by the Bundesländer; music schools; theatres, cinemas and events; heritage, tradition and folk art; and annual festivals. In addition to cultural support acts, several Bundesländer – as well as local authorities – set out cultural (development) strategies or guiding principles.

Political responsibility for culture at the local level rests with either the city/town councillor or in some smaller municipalities with the mayor. Their cultural departments (often combined with sports, tourism, science and education), are inter alia responsible for libraries, amateur art, folk culture, traditions and village renewal.

Background

1955-1980

The post-war cultural policy was mainly prestige-oriented and it supported federal theatres or festivals rather than contemporary literature, theatre, the visual arts and music. With the general European politicisation and radicalisation of the 1960s and 1970s, the post-war attitude toward culture changed. The cultural vanguard became a political factor and cultural policy was recognised as part of social policy. In 1975, a package of national cultural policy measures was adopted, aiming to improve the cultural habits and education levels of the public and to reduce the gap between city-dwellers and the rural population. The decisive step towards the current system of arts promotion was taken up at this time, including the establishment of various advisory and intermediary bodies.

1980-2000

In the 1980s, Austria was seized by a veritable culture boom. The number of large-scale events, festivals and major exhibitions increased, and so did the cultural spending. Consequently, cultural policy priorities shifted towards a focus on cultural sponsorship and privatisation. In 1988, public support for the arts was enshrined in the *Federal Arts Promotion Act*. In the 1990s, discussions on privatisation took place, especially in fields better positioned in the market, such as musicals, popular operas and museums. Entrepreneurial thinking became more important and the accession to the EU in 1995 reinforced the primacy of the economy.

2000-2007

The period 2000-2007 brought a political shift with the coalition between the Conservative Party and the right-wing Freedom Party. Its cultural policy objectives focused on the outsourcing of public cultural institutions and a reduction of the cultural budget, while greater emphasis has been placed on prestige culture, the creative industries and the promotion of economically oriented projects.

2007-2017

The commitment for the promotion of the arts and culture was reaffirmed. The social democratic culture ministers implemented measures such as scholarships for emerging artists and measures to improve the position of Austrian artists abroad. The main goals were: to reform the artists' social insurance; to support the Austrian film industry; to increase subsidies for federal theatres and museums; and to promote art and culture education in school.

2017-2020

Due to the refugee crisis and the migration flows since 2015, the Austrian parliamentary elections in 2017 resulted in a marked shift to the right. The concept of culture in the government programme has been characterised as being more traditional. Strategic cultural policy aims were: the promotion of contemporary art; the protection of cultural heritage; strengthening the Austrian cultural identity and the younger generation's cultural education. Arts and culture were likewise seen as locational and economic factors, while efficiency and profit-orientation have been increasingly emphasized.

Since January 2020, Austria is ruled by a coalition of the Conservative Party and the Green Party. The Minister for Arts, Culture, the Civic Service and Sport is from the Green Party. The Arts and Culture Division is headed by a Secretary of State, responsible for the realisation of cultural policy at a federal level. The task of Austrian cultural policy (government paper 2020-2014) is to create suitable conditions for a lively cultural scene. This includes the promotion of contemporary art work of various kinds, fair pay, the preservation of the existing wealth of culture, providing information and education about Austria's cultural heritage and better public access to arts and culture.

3. Current cultural affairs

Key developments

During the period of the social democratic government (2007-2017), Austria's cultural policy was committed to a sustainable safeguard for art and culture, by emphasizing the promotion of contemporary art and emerging artists; the strengthening of cultural education and mediation; internationalisation and the improvement of working conditions of artists, particularly of women. From 2017-2019, the centre-right government's cultural policy remained committed to the freedom of art and the governmental responsibility for the support of arts and culture. The main goals of the federal cultural policy, as outlined in the government programme for the years 2017-2022, were: to set key strategic focuses for Austria as a culture nation; to support Austrian arts and culture, improving the planning capabilities with a clear focus on results; to simplify structures, precise responsibilities and reduce bureaucracy for the federal cultural institutions.

The current Conservative-Green Coalition focusses on: the strengthening of art and culture in Austria and abroad; the visibility of Austria's cultural institutions; the strengthening of contemporary art; the cultural sector's role in sustainable development; and the sustainable anchoring of contemporary art in society.

In regards to Bundesländer, the regional cultural policies are mainly focused on: commitment to freedom of art; support of art and culture; creation of framework conditions for creative work; preservation and mediation regarding cultural heritage; equal opportunities for access and participation; and strengthening arts education and cultural diversity.

Key themes

Intercultural dialogue

In Austria, 'intercultural dialogue' is often used in regard to external relations, events, co-operation projects and the like, while the immigration and integration policy is very restrictive, even though Austria is an immigration country. Concerning the cultural field, apart from individual projects and the stipulation of cultural diversity in strategy papers and laws, there have not been cohesive programmes linking intercultural dialogue and culture so far. The awareness of the need to

promote intercultural dialogue is growing and there are a number of initiatives to support this, such as the *Outstanding Artist Award for Intercultural Dialogue*, fostering the understanding between people from different origins living in Austria.

In 2017, the policy on intercultural education (*Grundsatzvertrag zur interkulturellen Bildung*) defined its implementation, content and measures, with the goal to: strengthen the intercultural competencies of both students and teachers; acknowledge and respect social, cultural and linguistic differences; recognise the contingency of one's perspective; and learn ways to deal with differences and constructive conflict culture appreciatively and without cultural ascription.

Although intercultural dialogue is an objective of the cultural support acts/cultural (development) strategies of all Bundesländer and most municipalities, the visibility of migrants as cultural consumers and producers is still low. The essential actors when it comes to intercultural dialogue are primarily smaller initiatives and cultural associations (see [chapters 2.5.1. and 2.5.2. of the country profile](#)).

Digital policy and developments

In 2016, Austria adopted the *Digital Roadmap Austria*, which covers 12 topics, among them 'Media, civil courage and culture'. To address the existing challenges regarding digitalisation, measures include:

- Reforming press subsidies by promoting quality in the digital media world;
- Strengthening and improving journalists' media literacy;
- Expanding digital services of arts and culture facilities and improving the ease of access;
- Improving opportunities for using digital cultural content for education, science, tourism and the creative sector, taking into account the interests of the rights holders;
- Increasing participation in cultural programmes through digital solutions such as mobile services, live streams and augmented reality;
- Strengthening media literacy of contributors and users, in particular children and young people;
- Taking measures against hate speech online.

Since 2017, there has been a *Digital Overall Strategy for Schools* and in 2019 the Minister for Digital and Economic Affairs announced the government's *Digitalisation Strategy* as one of the main topics for the coming years. With the establishment of a digitisation agency under the umbrella brand [Digital Austria](#), the government provides a central platform for the implementation of relevant digitisation activities.

The [Kulturpool](#), an initiative of the Arts and Culture Division and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF), offers central access to digitalised Austrian cultural heritage resources in museums, libraries and archives.

In line with the Arts and Culture Division's task to promote contemporary art in Austria and the presence of Austrian artists abroad, comprehensive holdings of art and photography have been digitally recorded in the databases [Artothek](#) and [Fotosammlung](#).

The project ABO – Austrian Books Online has been running since 2010 as a private-public partnership between the National Library and Google. More than 600 000 copyright-free library holdings from the 16th to the 19th century have been digitalised and integrated into the online inventory of the National Library as well as the Europeana platform.

Culture and social inclusion

Austria has no cohesive programmes at a national level linking social inclusion and culture. In addition, after the recent migrant crisis, policy making and administration are facing great challenges regarding the social and cultural integration of people with a migrant background. Hence, the threat of cultural and social exclusion is particularly concerning people with a migrant background and people facing poverty. There is a sharp, legal distinction between citizens of Austria and the EU on the one hand and those of third countries on the other.

The Federal Chancellery's department for the *Volksgruppengesetz* (Ethnic Groups Act 2000) is responsible for providing support for cultural activities of ethnic minority groups. In particular, private (cultural) initiatives and NGOs are engaged in combating the risks of cultural and social exclusion, as well as churches and religious communities and their institutions, which can apply for funding for projects specific to ethnic groups.

The initiative Hunger auf Kunst und Kultur (hungry for arts and culture), founded by the network Conference on Poverty (*Armutskonferenz*) and the Viennese theatre Schauspielhaus, supports cultural participation of the disadvantaged. It is supported by different authorities as well as numerous sponsors and others promoters. More than 500 cultural institutions also provide free entrance to cultural events for unemployed citizens and those with lower incomes (see chapter 2.6. of the country profile).

Cultural sustainability

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the contribution of arts and culture is a cross-cutting issue. The role of the arts and culture sector toward sustainable development was acknowledged at national level: in its mission statement of the federal finance act 2020 the Ministry of Finance records the general conditions for the creation and communication of art and culture. Hence, its main objectives are: the sustainable anchoring of contemporary art in society; the guarantee of stable general conditions for artists and the sustainable safeguarding of state cultural institutions and cultural heritage; and better access to arts and culture for the public (see chapter 2.8. of the country profile).

Austrian Building Culture

Platform Baukultur fosters architectural policies and presents a report on Austrian building culture every five years, including recommendations in the fields of public awareness, production, economy, sustainability and more. The Austrian Building Culture Report from 2017 refers to strategies for the future up to 2050 with global, integral and national scenarios on the issues of 'Landscape as a resource', 'Cities and regions', 'Housing' and 'The public sector' (see chapter 2.9. of the country profile).

Art restitution

The restitution of artworks confiscated during the Nazi regime, and still in possession of the state, is an issue that repeatedly gives rise to debates. In 1998, the Commission for Provenance Research was established, in order to systematically examine the government's collections. That same year, the return of cultural objects to the original owners or their legal heirs was made possible with passing the *Law on the Restitution of Art Objects from the Austrian Federal Museums and Collections (Art Restitution Act)*. The Law was amended in 2009 and extended to movable cultural goods. The Austrian National Library as an example has drawn up a comprehensive report and since 2003 more than 40 000 objects have been restored to their legal owners (see [chapter 2.9. of the country profile](#)).

ANNEX

I. Organisational organigram

There is no official organigram available.

II. Governmental expenditure on culture

Level of government	Total expenditure (EUR)	% share of total
State (central, federal)	868 610 000	32,31 %
Regional (provincial, Länder, etc.)	988 800 000	36,78%
Local (municipal, incl. counties)	831 590 000	30,93
TOTAL	2 688 990 000	100%

Public cultural expenditure by level of government, 2018 (excluding intergovernmental transfer payments)

Source: STATISTIK AUSTRIA, Kulturstatistik 2018