

# **Austria 2024 Human Rights Report**

## **Executive Summary**

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Austria during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of serious restrictions on freedom of expression.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

## **Section 1. Life**

### **a. Extrajudicial Killings**

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

### **b. Coercion in Population Control**

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

## **Section 2. Liberty**

### **a. Freedom of the Press**

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent media, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for media members.

The law prohibited incitement, insult, or contempt against a group because of its members' race, nationality, religion, or ethnicity if such action violated human dignity, and imposed criminal penalties for violations. The law prohibited public denial, belittlement, approval, or justification of the Nazi genocide or other Nazi crimes against humanity in print media, broadcast media, the publication of books, and online newspapers or journals, and provided criminal penalties for violations. The law also prohibited disparagement of religious teachings in public.

### **Efforts to Preserve the Independence of the Media**

Parliament passed a new Freedom of Information Act in January, set to enter into force in September 2025. This law would require, for the first time, proactive publication of official information and included a constitutional provision providing the right to access such information.

## **b. Worker Rights**

### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The law provided workers the right to form and join independent unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively. It prohibited antiunion discrimination or retaliation against strikers and provided for the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The law allowed unions to conduct their activities without interference. All enterprise-level unions were part of the Austrian Trade Union Federation, which supported the individual unions in collective bargaining negotiation. The government effectively enforced the laws on freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike. Penalties for violations were civil, with fines imposed, and were commensurate with those under other laws involving denials of civil rights. Administrative, registration, and judicial procedures were not overly lengthy. There were no reports of antiunion discrimination or other forms of employer interference in union functions. The government and employers recognized the right to strike and respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Authorities effectively enforced laws protecting unions from interference and workers from retaliation for union activities. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

## **Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acceptable Work Conditions**

### **Wage and Hour Laws**

There was no legislated national minimum wage. Nationwide collective bargaining agreements covered 98 percent of the workforce and set minimum wages by job classification for all sectors. Where no such collective agreements existed, such as for domestic workers or custodial staff, wages were generally lower than those covered by collective bargaining agreements. The agreements set wages above the poverty line except in a few cases, such as for apprentices early in their programs, who tended to be age 16.

The law in general provided for a maximum workweek of 40 hours, although collective bargaining agreements established either 38 or 38.5-hour workweeks for more than half of all employees. Regulations allowed companies to increase work hours to a maximum of 12 hours per day and 60 hours per week for a short period of time and if they could provide a valid reason. Overtime pay took effect after 40 hours. Employees could refuse, without providing a reason, to work more than 10 hours per day.

Some employers, particularly in the construction, manufacturing, and information technology sectors, exceeded legal limits on compulsory overtime. Collective bargaining agreements could specify higher limits. An employee had to have at least 11 hours off between workdays. Wage and hour violations could be brought before a labor court, which could fine employers who committed violations.

Sectors with immigrant and migrant workers were particularly prone to violations of wage and hour regulations.

### **Occupational Safety and Health**

In accordance with applicable federal laws, the labor inspectorate effectively established mandatory occupational safety and health (OSH) standards appropriate for the main industries. OSH experts actively identified unsafe conditions in addition to responding to workers' OSH complaints. In cases of violations resulting in serious injury or death, employers could be prosecuted under the penal code. Hazardous sectors where the most accidents occurred included construction, manufacturing, and forestry.

Workers could file complaints anonymously with the labor inspectorate, which could in turn sue the employer on behalf of the employee. Workers rarely exercised this option and normally relied instead on a nongovernmental workers' advocacy group and the Chamber of Labor, which filed suits on their behalf.

Workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. The Employment and Labor Relations Federal Public Service protected employees in this situation.

### **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

The labor inspectorate effectively enforced mandatory wage, hour, and OSH standards. The number of inspectors was sufficient to deter violations. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. Resources and remediation remained adequate. Penalties for wage, hour, and OSH violations were commensurate with those for similar crimes. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

The country's informal sector was estimated to account for roughly 35 billion euros (\$38 billion), approximately 7.5 percent of GDP in 2023, the latest year for which data were available. The government enforced labor laws – including wage, health, and safety regulations – wherever it detected a violation, including in informal economic activity.

## **c. Disappearance and Abduction**

### **Disappearance**

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

## **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

### **d. Violations in Religious Freedom**

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

### **e. Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Section 3. Security of the Person**

### **a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, and authorities investigated credible reports of abuse by government officials.

Human rights monitors and media reported several complaints of police mistreatment; as of January 22, these were investigated by a newly

established office within the Federal Corruption Office of the Ministry of Interior. To address concerns about its independence, the office worked separately from the ministry's law enforcement directorate and had an advisory council of external experts, including nongovernmental organization representatives. As of October, the unit had begun investigations into 393 cases of alleged police mistreatment during the year. The advisory board also made progress to update educational materials and advise on protocols for law enforcement and judicial authorities.

## **b. Protection of Children**

### **Child Labor**

The law prohibited all the worst forms of child labor. The minimum legal working age was 15, with the exception that children who were at least 13 could engage in certain forms of light work on family farms or businesses. Children age 15 and older were subject to the same regulations on hours, rest periods, overtime wages, and occupational health and safety restrictions as adults, but were subject to additional restrictions on hazardous work or work detrimental to ethics and morals. Restrictions for hazardous jobs included work with materials considered dangerous for children, work in sawmills, on high-voltage pylons, and in specified construction jobs.

The labor inspectorate of the Ministry of Labor and Economy was



responsible for enforcing child labor laws and policies in the workplace and did so through regular and thorough checks of workplaces and special youth advisors in companies. Penalties in the form of fines could be doubled in cases of repeated violations of the child labor code. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous crimes.

Child labor occurred, but mostly in the context of working in a family business for longer than permitted hours. Children were trafficked to the country and subjected to forced begging and occasionally sexual exploitation. Forced labor or exploitation of children was treated under the criminal code as trafficking in persons, with criminal penalties of one to 10 years in prison, double the penalty for forced labor or exploitation of adults. Penalties were regularly applied to violators.

## **Child Marriage**

The minimum legal age for marriage was 18 and was effectively enforced by the government. Effective November 1, the government abolished a special permit allowing marriage from the age of 16 if the parents agreed.

## **c. Protection to Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum

seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

## **Provision of First Asylum**

The law provided for the granting asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees.

## **Resettlement**

While the government processed and granted applications for asylum, there was no active program for resettlement of refugees. UNHCR monitored and raised awareness of the country's refugee and asylum process, but did not provide legal counseling in the country, which was offered by specialized counseling services and lawyers. The integration section in the Ministry for Women, Family, Integration, and Media at the Federal Chancellery, with the government's Austrian Integration Fund, and provincial and local integration offices, coordinated measures for integration of refugees. The government offered naturalization to refugees residing on its territory and assisted in refugees' voluntary return to their homes.

## **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

According to figures compiled by the Jewish Community of Vienna (Israelitische Kultusgemeinde, IKG), there were approximately 12,000 Jews in the country, of whom 11,000 were in Vienna.

The Reporting Office for Antisemitism of the IKG reported 808 antisemitic incidents from January 1 to June 30, compared with 311 over the same period in 2023. These included physical assaults, name-calling, graffiti and defacement, threatening letters, dissemination of antisemitic texts, property damage, and vilifying letters and telephone calls. Of the reported incidents, 16 were physical assaults, 22 involved in-person threats and insults, 401 were letters and emails, 92 were cases of vandalism, and 277 involved insulting or abusive behavior. The steep increase in antisemitic incidents recorded following the October 2023 Hamas terrorist attack against Israel continued. In the first half of the year, the daily average of recorded incidents per day (4.46) was almost three times higher than the average prior to that terrorist attack (1.55).

The government enforced the laws against antisemitism effectively.

The government increased police protection to the IKG's offices and other Jewish community institutions, such as schools and museums, implemented additional measures of the 2021 National Strategy against Antisemitism, and presented a package of measures to specifically address antisemitism online. The government also added new measures to the National Strategy. A 2020 amendment to the citizenship law made descendants of Jews persecuted by the Nazi regime eligible for citizenship. By September, approximately 33,000 foreign-born persons received citizenship under this law.

For further information on incidents of antisemitism in the country, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, please see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.