

# THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR

HOW THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR REPRESENTS  
THE INTERESTS OF ALL WORKERS



GERECHTIGKEIT MUSS SEIN

**>BESSER INFORMIERT**  
Die Ratgeberreihe der AK Wien

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# Why is the Chamber of Labour so important?

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The Chamber of Labour serves the interests of its members by drawing on the combined strength of over three million people – the employees that make up Austria’s workforce. As a proactive social partner, we take our place at the negotiating table alongside the other participants in Austria’s economic and social partnership. We also provide our members with prompt and direct support.



The Chamber of Labour has a clear mandate, which is enshrined in Austrian law: it is “... *tasked with representing and advancing the social, economic, professional and cultural interests of employees.*”

(Section one of the *Arbeiterkammergesetz* [Chamber of Labour Act])

## What is the Chamber of Labour’s remit?

The Chamber of Labour is the statutory representative body for employees in Austria. In collaboration with the trade unions, we promote improvements in working life and consumer protection. We have four main tasks:

- 1** Playing an active role in the legislative process
- 2** Providing advice and support
- 3** Providing training and education
- 4** Conducting research into economic and social policy issues

## Participation in the legislative process

The Chamber of Labour plays an active role in the creation of laws. On behalf of our members, we assert their claims, undertake initiatives and address decision-makers. We examine proposed legislation to check that it serves the interests of our members. We develop recommendations for improvements and contribute to the lawmaking process through participation in advisory committees.




From a minimum of five weeks' annual holiday, to parental leave – many of the rights that we now take for granted were fought for by the Chamber of Labour in collaboration with the trade unions.

The right to part-time employment for working parents and to take leave to care for family and dependants are also the result of years of campaigning by us. Pensions in Austria are now significantly higher than in Germany because we successfully opposed many regressive changes when the last pension reform was pushed through.

We successfully advocated for massive income tax reductions in the course of the 2016 tax reform. Our calls for this had previously been met with a simple “no”. It is thanks to the major campaign mounted by the Austrian Trade Union Federation and the Chamber of Labour that the government initiated the reform in the first place.


The result: the tax burden on people in Austria has been reduced by an unprecedented EUR 5 billion.



The Chamber of Labour advocates for the interests of workers before and during the creation of new laws.

## Advice and support

The Chamber of Labour provides its members with uncomplicated support in many different areas, as well as broad-ranging information services covering important topics, primarily aimed at employees, apprentices, women, families and consumers.



We provide information that can be accessed quickly on a wide variety of topics on our website, [www.arbeiterkammer.at](http://www.arbeiterkammer.at). The information guides in the Service section are free to download.

We provide personal legal advice, as well as support in connection with labour and insolvency law proceedings and unemployment and social insurance.

Our members also benefit from sound tax and consumer law advice.


We carry out two million consultations every year (2017 figure) – on the telephone, by e-mail and face-to-face.



The Chamber of Labour helps all of its members! Even those who are exempt from paying membership contributions. Our legal experts provide you with free comprehensive advice, and negotiate and seek to reach settlements on your behalf. We will even represent you in court if the situation demands. In 2017 we won EUR 507 million for our members.

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One of our members had been employed as a pizza chef for almost a year, working 60 hours a week, before he became ill and was then dismissed while on sick leave. In court his former boss denied that his working hours were so long, claiming that he spent a lot of his free time in the restaurant. The Chamber of Labour won this member a settlement of EUR 9,100, which included unpaid salary, overtime and holiday pay. (August 2018)



Chamber of Labour membership contributions: EUR 451 million  
Total won on behalf of our members: EUR 507 million  
(Daten und Zahlen für 2017)

So for every euro that our members contribute, we win over a euro back for them.

## Training and education

As well as providing support, the Chamber of Labour also provides financial assistance. In the form of Chamber of Labour training vouchers, for instance, which can be used to pay for training and development courses that meet members' individual requirements..

We also operate numerous educational institutions across Austria. Young people can use our wide range of career advice services, encompassing application and interview training, simulation games and workshops.



Digitalisation is rapidly changing the world of work. Occupations and professions are disappearing or changing dramatically. Simple, routine tasks are becoming less and less significant, while specialist know-how and joined-up thinking in combination with digital and interpersonal competencies are becoming ever more important.

The right training and development helps to secure your future career prospects.

Together with the trade unions, we are continuing to invest in the training of our shop floor representatives, so we can expertly advocate for the interests of our members directly in the companies and organisations where they work.

## Research on economic and social policy issues

The world of work in Austria should continue to develop in line with the interests of employees. The Chamber of Labour therefore conducts extensive studies, and uses the results as a basis for effective policy work.



The economic analyses carried out by the Chamber of Labour have a real impact on workers' day-to-day lives. For example, trade unions use them to support their positions in collective agreement negotiations, giving them facts and figures to back up important demands.

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# What does the Chamber of Labour advocate for?

The chief objective of the Chamber of Labour is to secure good working conditions and living standards for its members, and it makes specific policy demands on this basis.

- 1 Employees must be paid fairly for their work**
- 2 Measures must be taken to combat unemployment**
- 3 Training and development must be open to all**
- 4 The taxation system must be fair**
- 5 Housing must be affordable**

## Who makes up the Chamber of Labour?

The Chamber of Labour is made up of all employees in Austria! It is organised into nine independent chambers, one in each of the country's federal provinces.

### Members

Under the Chamber of Labour Act, all employees in Austria have automatic membership of the Chamber of Labour, as well as apprentices, unemployed persons and people on parental leave. We are currently the voice of over 3.7 million people (2017 figure).

Chamber of Labour members are represented by the elected members of the Chamber of Labour assembly for their province. All members of the Chamber of Labour are eligible to vote in elections. The direct election process is the same in each province. Ballots are secret and take place every five years.

Who stands in these elections? The largest political groups are:

- the Social Democratic Trade Unionists \*
- the Austrian Federation of Workers and Employees \*\*
- the Freedomite Workers \*\*\*
- the Alternative and Green Trade Unionists \*\*\*\*

\*Sozialdemokratischen GewerkschafterInnen – FSG; \*\*Österreichische Arbeiter- und Angestelltenbund – ÖAAB;  
\*\*\* Freiheitlichen ArbeitnehmerInnen – FA; \*\*\*\*Alternativen und Grünen GewerkschafterInnen – AUGÉ

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## Administration

The General Assembly (parliament) is made up of elected members. They elect the Executive Board and President of the chamber in each province. The Chamber Office provides support to the regional chambers in carrying out their political work, and is managed by a directorate. The umbrella organisation for the chambers in the federal provinces is the Federal Chamber of Labour. Its activities are carried out by the Vienna Chamber of Labour.

## Funding

The Chamber of Labour's many activities are funded by the labour chamber contribution. Every member contributes 0.5% of his or her monthly gross salary, up to a defined assessment ceiling.



The Chamber of Labour membership contribution amounts to about seven euros a month for someone with an average income. This is much less than the cost of an hour's consultation with a lawyer, or private legal insurance.

Of course, individual circumstances are taken into account when collecting the mandatory contribution. Anyone who is unemployed or marginally employed is exempt from paying the membership contribution. In 2017 this applied to 803,000 members.

## How long has the Chamber of Labour been in existence?

The chambers of labour were established in 1920, explicitly as a counterweight to the chambers of commerce, which had been founded in 1848. The chambers of labour were intended to be equal partners to the chambers of commerce. In 1920, all of the parliamentary groupings in the National Council voted to pass the Chamber of Labour Act, giving the green light for the establishment of the regional chambers.

This meant that the trade unions gained an important source of support for the representation of their interests in the legislative process, and for academic formulation of their concerns.

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## **Attacks from the right**

On 1 January 1934, democratic self-administration of the chambers of labour was ended under the authoritarian reforms of the Dollfuss regime. Government commissioners were appointed, and administrative commissioners were nominated to replace the existing executive board. The chambers were subsequently integrated into the fascist unified trade union under the Austrian corporate state. In 1938, the Nazis dissolved the chambers of labour entirely.

## **Reconstruction and subsequent development**

After the end of the Second World War, the chambers of labour were re-established on 20 July 1945. In the decades that followed, they helped to develop Austria's economic and social partnership. This system, which assures social stability and the advancement of prosperity for all, is an achievement that is envied by many around the world – especially in tumultuous times.

# What is the economic and social partnership?

Cooperation of the representatives of employers and workers with each other and with the government.

Such cooperation does not only relate to negotiation of collective agreements, but encompasses all aspects of economic and social policy – for example those relating to the labour market and healthcare. As implied by the use of the word “partnership”, this is based on friendly relations: conflicting interests are resolved at the negotiating table first and foremost. Industrial actions such as strikes or lockouts are always a last resort.

## **Actors in the Austrian economic and social partnership**

- Austrian Trade Union Federation
  - Federal Chamber of Labour
  - Austrian Federal Economic Chamber
  - Austrian Chamber of Agriculture
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Because many interests have been negotiated and balanced in a spirit of partnership in recent decades, Austria is a country of strong social stability.

## What tasks are performed by the AK EUROPA office?

To support representation of its members' interests over the long term, the Chamber of Labour is always looking towards the future: we opened an office in Brussels three years before Austria joined the EU.

### **Representing the interests of Austria's workers**

Since Austria's entry into the EU, many Austrian laws have been determined in Brussels. The interests of employees in Austria are represented from the beginning of the European lawmaking process, via the AK EUROPA office.

### **Hands-on activities in Brussels**

#### **■ Position papers and expert opinions**

We work on the European Economic and Social Committee and other advisory committees, and play an active role in shaping political opinions by publishing position papers.

#### **■ Proposals during the legislative procedure**

We submit recommendations for changes to proposed legislation in the interests of workers, early in the legislative procedure.

#### **■ Events and campaigns**

We organise numerous events that draw attention to the concerns of working people. And we regularly conduct campaigns in collaboration with our network partners, in order to further highlight these concerns.

## ■ Confederations

We work closely with other organisations such as the European Trade Union Confederation.

## ■ European umbrella associations

We work as part of a number of European umbrella associations (e.g. BEUC, ETUI, ALTER-EU and Finance Watch).



Brussels is dominated by the finance and industry lobbies. In comparison with about 8,000 lobbying organisations for business, there are currently fewer than 100 interest groups like AK EUROPA – institutions that represent the interests of employees and consumers. Our work is essential:  
[www.akeuropa.eu](http://www.akeuropa.eu)

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## Important

**All current Federal Chamber of Labour publications** can be downloaded here: [wien.arbeiterkammer.at/publikationen](http://wien.arbeiterkammer.at/publikationen)

### They can also be ordered by contacting us:

- E-Mail: [bestellservice@akwien.at](mailto:bestellservice@akwien.at)
- Order hotline: +43 (0)1 501 65 1401

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