

Social partner activities 2022/2023

The social partnership has been active on a wide range of **topics** in 2022 and Q1/2023, including:

- ✦ impact of COVID-19 on the domestic economy
- ✦ measures to cushion the economic effects of the conflict in Ukraine on the domestic economy (energy prices, rising cost of living, inflation, preservation of purchasing power)
- ✦ climate, energy and environmental issues
- ✦ labour market and skilled workforce
- ✦ social affairs and health
- ✦ education and vocational training
- ✦ collective agreement negotiations

In the period of 2022 and Q1/2023, the social partnership has been able to achieve and implement, among others, the following points relevant with regard to the National Reform Programme:

- ✦ Some **measures** that were introduced during the peak of the **COVID-19 crisis** continued into 2022 or were extended into 2022 due to the intervention of the social partners:
 - The application for the Hardship-Fund (“Härtefall-Fonds”) for those with multiple marginal jobs and case-by-case workers was extended until the end of April 2023.
 - The funding for in-**company testing** was extended until the end of March 2022.
 - The **General Collective Agreement** introduced by the social partners in September 2021 (with validity until the end of April 2022) regulated important employment law and operational support measures during the COVID-19 crisis.
 - The **COVID-19** pandemic-related special **leave for pregnant women** was extended until 30 June 2022.
 - The **COVID-19** pandemic-related special **leave for high-risk groups** was extended until 30 April 2023.
 - The COVID-19 pandemic-related **emergency childcare leave** was extended until 7 July 2023.
- ✦ With significant involvement of the social partners, the **short-time work model**, which is one of the international showcases, was implemented and successfully further developed. During the COVID-19 period, this also included solutions for apprentices. Implemented against the background of the COVID-19 crisis, several phases were successfully applied, and the short-time work model was continuously adapted and extended, for example short-time work phase 5 was extended from summer 2022 to the end of 2022, however with more difficult access conditions. Due to the economic impact of the war in Ukraine and the rising energy prices, the short-time work model was further adapted in the course of 2022 and extended until 30 June 2023 with essentially unchanged conditions while maintaining a restrictive approval practice. Apprentices are no longer included in short-time work as of 1

January 2023. Currently discussions including the social partners are ongoing to develop a permanent model from 1 July 2023. Overall, the short-time work model has been a great success: Due to this model over 1.3 million employees could be kept in work since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ✦ Against the background of the **war in Ukraine**, the social partners and the Federation of Austrian Industry have developed a **package of measures aimed at curbing rising costs** for private households and companies by proposing additional anti-inflationary measures. The package was submitted to the Federal Government in March 2022 and partially taken up by the Federal Government.
All social partners have expressed their support for decoupling the electricity price from the gas price at the European level. The Federal Government has adopted this position.
- ✦ The social partners were actively involved in various committees in 2022 and 2023 and regularly contributed their expertise.
- ✦ The social partners have strongly advocated for enabling **employment** and the **integration of Ukrainians in the labour market** and have presented a specific **labour market position paper to this end**.
- ✦ In the areas of **labour market, social affairs and health, social partner discussions** were ongoing and issues were driven forward, including the extension of the period of time spent in work life, working time arrangements, education and training account (“Bildungskonto”), rehabilitation before retirement, labour market integration before retirement, assessment of the new disability pension, 24-hour care and care reform, changes in heavy labour as part of the Heavy Labour Committee, lessons from the pandemic, fiscal equalisation scheme, financing of the healthcare system, to name a few.
- ✦ The social partners will focus on specific **challenges and -solutions for the labour market** in 2023 (e.g. qualification, continued employment of people entitled to retirement, increasing the employment rate of women, tax-privileged overtime, targeted labour migration etc.).
- ✦ In the field of home office, on the one hand the social partners have been invited to **evaluate the Home Office Act**, and on the other hand they have advocated for a simplification of **cross-border home office** (covering the aspects of labour law, social security and tax law).
- ✦ In Q2/2022, the **Umweltstiftung** (Environmental Foundation) was launched and established at the initiative of the social partners. The Labour Foundation aims to help people to get back into work through education and training measures, with a focus on the area of “green jobs”. Furthermore, the social partners advocate for a **work foundation in public transport**.
- ✦ A joint position of the social partners regarding a **legal right to a childcare place as of a child’s first birthday** has been developed. These demands will also be introduced by the social partners in the negotiations on the agreement under Article 15a of the Constitution regarding the field of elementary education.
- ✦ Elementary education lays the foundations for further educational progress and equal opportunities. The social partners are advocating for better framework conditions for elementary education across Austria. In January 2023, the social partners therefore

hosted a childcare summit with all relevant stakeholders. At this childcare summit in Q1/2023, leading social partner representatives called for a **better reconciliation of family and work, better childcare and child education as well as early childhood support.**

- ✦ A study jointly commissioned by the social partners from WIFO (Austrian Institute of Economic Research) on “**Older people in labour market: a forecast until 2040 as a basis for economic policy measures**” (Social Partner Advisory Council Study No. 90, 2023) has been completed and published as an Social Partner **Advisory Council Study.**
- ✦ In Q3/2022, the first 30 schools started with the school pilot of the “Stiftung Wirtschaftsbildung” (Economic Education Foundation). The foundation was created by the social partners and other organisations to anchor economic education more firmly in the Austrian education system. The pilot schools were provided with teaching materials, teacher training and other measures accompanying the project.
- ✦ Also, in 2022 and Q1/2023, with the involvement of the social partners, changes in apprenticeship trainings and in the **development of apprenticeship packages** (review of the rules for occupational profiles and better consideration of requirements of digitisation) were implemented.
- ✦ The social partners were involved in the **Just Transition Process** initiated by the Federal Government, which includes a new Action Plan for education and training with special focus on green jobs.
- ✦ In 2022 and 2023, the Advisory Council for Economic and Social Affairs focused on issues of transitional climate and energy policy (including investments, licencing procedures and qualifications for transition).
- ✦ **Collective bargaining:** Within the framework of the social partnership, the collective agreements for almost 98 % of Austrian employees in trade and industry, agriculture and forestry are regulated and negotiated. Collective agreements are generally concluded on the employer side by the respective professional association of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber or the employer associations in agriculture and forestry, and on the employee side by the respective trade union on behalf of the Austrian Trade Union Federation, and they regulate the core components of employment contracts. The framework conditions for collective bargaining were challenging and exceptional in 2022 due to the war in Ukraine and the economic impact on Austria and Europe.

The social partnership in Austria consists of the **Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ)** and the **Austrian Chamber of Agriculture (LKÖ)** on the employers’ side and the **Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour (BAK)** and the **Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB)** on the employees’ side.

See: <https://www.sozialpartner.at/>