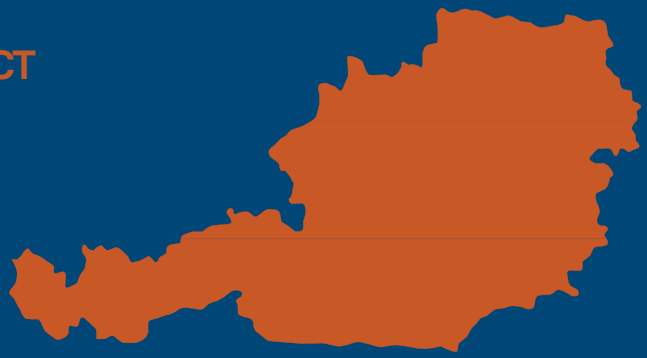


Country fact sheet

Austria



Context

Considering news deserts as areas where the citizens do not receive public interest information, **Austria does not (yet) have to contend with the phenomenon of news deserts.**

However, **each region is characterised by a dominant media outlet**, prominently represented in all sectors, which **raises concerns about plurality**, particularly when considering current funding practices and structural conditions.



The media are mainly a national responsibility. Notably, **there is no legal definition for 'local media'**, but one could refer to the legal guidelines for the allocation of subsidies.

It is common practice for regional media to refer to the federal provinces and local media to one or more municipalities or districts.



The financial situation of Austria's local media sector

In recent years, most media companies have seen their revenues decline, while others have recovered after a slump during the first year of the pandemic.

In general, **stagnating sales figures coupled with rising costs** (distribution, paper price, etc.) have heightened **economic pressures**; certain politicians and audiences are also calling for austerity measures concerning the PSM's structures and regional stations.



State subsidies are typically distributed transparently but not fairly, because the funding logic does not support journalistic quality and democratic relevance.

They rather favour large legacy media with high reach or circulation, while small, innovative outlets are not supported sufficiently.



A concentrated market



Regional publishing houses currently operate -after highly complex joint ventures- in an increasingly concentrated form and with constantly changing business models. **Four of them hold a total market share of around 16%, and over 70% in the regional market.**

Working conditions of local journalists under review

While the average age is increasing, local journalists are sometimes very young, with significantly more part-time contracts for women.

The salary of local journalists is below the nationwide average. Many freelancers practise journalism as a sideline. In **community media**, most contributors are volunteers.



The journalistic centre of the country is **Vienna**, where about 56% of all full-time journalists live and work.

Detected concerns regarding editorial independence

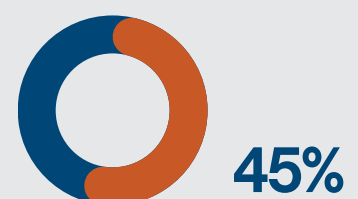
While no legislation prohibits to politically affiliated actors to control media outlets (with the exception of the PSM), legal entities under public law and political parties are prevented from providing private broadcasting.

In practice, the **Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) Act** fails to guarantee independence from political influence at the national as well as at the regional level. This '**politics-in-broadcasting system**' engenders politically motivated entanglements and the weight of the regional directors is remarkable.

More efforts needed for social inclusiveness

A study assessing the regional studios of the PSM found that despite a large market share, a notable percentage of Austrians do not perceive the regional news of the ORF as representative of the entire society.

Non-profit community media act locally and inclusively through rich participation and are by definition deeply engaged with their audiences. Still, without many volunteers, non-profit community broadcasting would not be able to fulfill their democratic role for economic reasons.



45% of Austrians in all provinces think that the "ORF's **regional news always focus on the same people.**"

