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# Keep-on-Track! Project

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## Interviewed Experts

We would like to thank all interviewed experts for their very valuable input and their support for this study. We highly appreciate their expertise and their availability for the Keep on Track Project on behalf of the European Commission.

For this country study, the following experts were interviewed:

- Roger Hackstock, Klima- und Energiefonds (Climate and Energy Fund)
- Wolfgang Jank, BMLFUW (Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Department of Energy and Environmental Economics)<sup>1</sup>
- Ulla Rasmussen, VCÖ - Verkehrsclub Österreich, NGO

In addition, the Austrian Biomass Association, Member of the Austrian Renewable Energy Association, and Austria Solar were asked for input concerning the biomass and solar thermal industries in Austria.

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<sup>1</sup> The statements of Dr. Jank reflect his own opinion and do not necessarily reflect the Ministry's position.

## **The Austrian RES-E Sector**

Due to its favourable natural conditions, Austria's electricity generation mix is historically dominated by large hydro power plants. Therefore, Austria started with a very high share of electricity from renewable energy sources (RES-E), which was 62% in 2005 and reached 69% in 2010, in accordance with the National Renewable Energy Action Plan<sup>2</sup>, 58.5% of which were generated by hydro power plants. Hence, Austria can be considered the European leader regarding the share of RES in gross electricity consumption (RES Integration).

With the adoption of the first Green Electricity Act in 2002, the Austrian Government intended to bring new renewable energy technologies such as wind, solar or biomass closer to the market. The lucrative feed-in tariff attracted many investors and led to a swift development of these technologies in Austria (BMLFUW 2012).

In 2006 however, the Government reacted to the rapid increase of installed renewable capacity and revised the Green Electricity Act. Additionally, the feed-in tariffs were considerably lowered, which led to a sharp decrease in new installations.

In 2012, an amendment of the Green Electricity Act was passed, introducing a revised feed-in tariff system. The amendment set technology-specific targets for renewable energy expansion (additional 1,000 MW of hydro power, 2,000 MW of wind energy, 200 MW of biomass and biogas, and 1,200 MW of photovoltaic electricity) to be reached by 2020 and provided guaranteed feed-in tariffs over 13 years, for biomass-based power plants over 15 years. Another central element of the new legislation was the increase of the annual support cap, i.e. support is now granted on a first-come-first-served basis and only as long as funds are still available. After the adoption of the new law, the tailback of renewable energy projects could be reduced, and new projects could receive financial support.

Regarding the different technologies, there is a high potential for wind and PV. Hindered by political trends such as the regional planning programme ("Windeignungsflächen") in lower Austria, the development of wind power was significantly impeded in 2013. The use of biogenic material has a long tradition in Austria, but the expansion was undermined especially by the competition between the use of biomass as an energy source and its use as a material in the year 2013 (Jank, BMLFUW). Nevertheless, due to the fact that the last winter has been mild and therefore led to a decrease in heat energy demand, this competition has slightly decreased (Austrian Biomass Association 2015).

Concerning hydro power, the existence of the Water Framework Directive jeopardizes profitability. The measures to reach the ecological parameters stated in the directive are necessary but also increase the investment costs by approximately 10-20%. These additional costs are currently supported by ecological funding ("Förderung Gewässerökologie"), but the viability of this support scheme is questionable. If the ecological funding system is discontinued, the expansion of hydro power in Austria will be doubtful.

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<sup>2</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/energy/renewables/transparency\\_platform/doc/dir\\_2009\\_0028\\_action\\_plan\\_austria.zip](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/renewables/transparency_platform/doc/dir_2009_0028_action_plan_austria.zip)

In addition, the necessary amount of residual water decreases the production capacity of hydro power plants. These ecological measures have to be considered within the tariff system to prevent the possibility that the number of hydro power plants in the market decreases due to positive ecological improvements (Kleinwasserkraft Österreich, 2014).

## **Support scheme**

In Austria, electricity from renewable sources is supported mainly through a feed-in tariff system, which is set out in the Green Electricity Act<sup>3</sup> and the regulations related thereto. The operators of renewable energy plants are entitled against the government purchasing agency, the Clearing and Settlement Agency<sup>4</sup>, to the conclusion of a contract on the purchase of the electricity they produce as long as funds are available (RES LEGAL Europe Database).

The feed-in tariffs for the different renewable technologies are stipulated annually in a resolution of the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy<sup>5</sup>. The tariffs are granted for 13 or 15 years, depending on the technology used. After eligibility for feed-in tariff has expired, most installations can sell their electricity under a purchase obligation at market prices minus balancing costs for another 12 years (RES Integration - Country Report Austria). Nevertheless, those balancing costs currently put high pressure on renewable energy power plants, as the electricity market prices remained fairly low (€ct3-4 per kWh) throughout last year. Furthermore, in Austria the balancing costs of €ct 1.6 to 1.7 per kWh are up to 75% higher as compared to neighbouring countries such as Germany or Switzerland. To sum up, the high balancing costs combined with rather low electricity prices result in a very difficult economic situation for renewable power plants (IG Wind 2014a).

## **Barriers to the electricity sector**

### **Political and economic framework**

Concerning the **remuneration level for RES-E** installations, several barriers have been reported. For wind power, it was stated that the main barrier concerns eligibility for the feed-in tariff (13 years), which is much shorter than the expected lifetime of the installation (approx. 20 years). In addition, the currently low market price for electricity leads to a situation where the remuneration level of the feed-in tariff for wind power is too low (Jank, BMLFUW). In consequence, it is more profitable to decommission an installation and rebuild another one after the feed-in tariff support has finished. Another barrier relates to the fact that the annual amount of funding is capped by the available budget.

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<sup>3</sup> Ökostromgesetz (ÖSG)

<sup>4</sup> OeMAG- Abwicklungsstelle für Ökostrom AG ([www.oem-ag.at](http://www.oem-ag.at))

<sup>5</sup> Bundesminister für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Wirtschaft ([www.bmwf.gv.at](http://www.bmwf.gv.at))

As already stated in the last report, **the revenue risk under given support scheme** should be considered. While the applicable feed-in tariffs and other incentives for renewable energy projects can be generally considered as favorable for the development of PV, wind and other renewable energy technologies and the unclear funding situation due to the annual support cap leads to considerable latencies. This stop-and-go support policy could therefore scare off possible investors (Fechner, Technikum Vienna).

Another barrier has already been mentioned in Austria's last Keep on Track report and relates to the field of the **existence and reliability of the general RES-E strategy and support scheme** as the European Commission claims a support framework closer to the market. Critics of the feed-in tariff recommend switching to a different support scheme like tenders, a quota system and certificates. This kind of approach needs to be questioned, as the theoretical advantages of these models cannot be proven empirically. On the contrary, it seems to be the case that the development of renewable energy has been more efficient and cost-effective through the use of feed-in tariffs (Jank, BMLFUW).

A general major economic problem results from the dramatically low energy market prices which are on the same level as in 1987 (€ct3.4 per kWh) while running costs for the power plants are as high as ever. Only targeted reforms of the European energy market and the European emissions trading scheme can solve this situation (National profile of Austria, Barrier Ref. No. 52ATEHC, re-frame.eu).

### **Grid regulation & infrastructure**

A severe barrier hindering the development of renewable energy in Austria results from the high **costs of grid access**. Hence plant operators of RES installations in Austria bigger than 5 MW are burdened with grid expenses of approximately €ct 0.3 per kWh, while operators in the neighbouring countries are free of these costs<sup>6</sup>. This leads to a discrimination of domestic RES producers and to a situation where the political target of energy independence to secure future energy supply and to do without nuclear energy imports is highly jeopardized. Instead of lowering the charges, grid costs increased by 52% in 2013 compared to 2012 and by 84% compared to 2011.

In November 2014, E-control<sup>7</sup> proposed a further increase of grid costs, which is highly criticised by the stakeholders from the wind energy sector (IG Windkraft 2014b). If E-control's proposal is accepted, electricity imports, partly generated by nuclear power plants, will become even more attractive, while a noteworthy number of renewable energy power plants in Austria might be decommissioned.

Especially concerning grid access for small-scale PV installations, targeted regulations on accessing the grid infrastructure must be developed, as net operators can easily deny the installation of additional small-scale PV installations at the moment. Especially in case of feed-in capacity, improvements have to be made to reduce technical barriers. Therefore, detailed knowledge concerning consumption in the low voltage net is needed to make clear statements concerning grid accessibility (National profile of Austria, Barrier Ref. No. 42ATE, re-frame.eu).

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<sup>6</sup> In Austria's neighbour countries, the costs for grid operation are borne by the consumers.

<sup>7</sup> E-control is the Austrian deregulation agency (<http://www.e-control.at/de>).

### **Administrative processes**

As early as in January 2014, substantial barriers could be identified regarding the integration of RES-E in spatial and environmental planning. With the rapid expansion of wind energy in Austria (at the end of 2013, approximately 1,700 MW had been installed), an increase in conflicts due to different interests and the use of space can be observed. In the federal states of Lower Austria and Burgenland, where 93% of the Austrian wind power plants are installed, so-called eligibility spaces for wind power plants (“Windeignungsflächen”) have been declared in order to avoid conflicts in the future (Jank, BMLFUW). However, only 1.5% of the land area of Lower Austria is now eligible for the installation of wind power plants. Due to the resistance of certain communities, it is not even guaranteed that these chosen spaces can finally be used for wind power. Although it is not obvious, this barrier might lead to a deceleration of the development of wind energy.

### **Other**

One barrier concerning the public perception of RES-E arises from the conflict between the use of biomass as a material and its use as an energy source. Actors from the paper and cellulose industries demand an amendment to the Green Electricity Act in order to reduce the energetic use of biomass. The consequence of this (not always objectively) conducted conflict is a negative public perception of biomass as an energetic source. There is still huge potential in highly efficient CHP plants on the basis of biomass, especially for wood-processing companies. The current debate on biomass is clearly shaped by the self-interest of the industry (Jank, BMLFUW). Due to the current market situation of forestry waste products and the mild winter in 2014, the conflict between the pulp and paper industry and the biomass industry has subsided. Nevertheless, as this settlement is due to uncontrollable events, long-term solutions to this conflict still need to be found (Austrian Biomass Association 2015).

Moreover, building-integrated photovoltaic systems (BIPV) present a prosperous market opportunity for the PV industry. Nevertheless, as this industry branch is still in its infancy, this field is characterized by a lack of professionals. Therefore, the implementation of special training programs may be an opportunity for BIPV (National profile of Austria, Barrier Ref. No. 38ATE, re-frame.eu).

## **The Austrian RES-H&C Sector**

Regarding the use of renewable energy in the heating and cooling sector (RES-H&C), Austria has a favourable starting position. The Austrian heat supply is composed of four equally large fractions, with shares of about 20-25%, namely oil, gas (mostly used in urban regions), biomass (rural regions) and district heating (a mix of industrial waste heat, CHP, waste incineration and agricultural biomass plants).

In Austria, district heating networks are managed at the local level by the individual heat supply companies. In contrast to other countries with a considerable share of district heating, there is no federal regulation providing a legal framework for the connection of RES-H plants to the heating grid (RES LEGAL Europe database).

With regard to the different technologies, there is still a huge potential for the use of solar thermal installations for hot water supply. As the need for hot water supply is high even during the summer season, solar thermal installations could be used to a much larger extent. In Austria, only one per cent of domestic hot water demand and space heating is covered by solar heating systems. For the achievement of the 2020 goal (10% share of solar thermal energy), the new Solar Heat Roadmap has been set up in December 2014 (Hackstock, Klima- und Energiefonds).

## **Support schemes**

The most substantial form of promoting small-scale RES heating and cooling is applied on the level of the individual federal states (“Länder”). There are special investment incentives for solar thermal installations, heat pumps, geothermal plants and biomass heating plants. The funding guidelines are published separately for each federal state. These state-level funding systems make the support schemes unnecessarily intransparent and increase the bureaucratic efforts. Additionally, the eligibility criteria for funding and the amounts vary within the different federal states.

In principle, the investment grants for measures supporting the use of energy from renewable sources in the heating and cooling sector differ according to the technology used. Usually, a flat rate of de minimis support is calculated. “De minimis” allows for grants of up to € 200,000 to be provided from public funds over a period of three years<sup>8</sup>. Another option for support is the ‘standard reimbursement rate’ which mostly amounts to 25% of the environment-related investment costs and can be increased through awards (sustainability and gas-cleaning awards, etc.) to a maximum of 30%<sup>9</sup>. In some cases, the application must be made before the beginning of the project and the

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<sup>8</sup> For further details visit: <http://www.mustersanierung.at/foerderungen/investitionsfoerderungen-in-oesterreich/de-minimis-foerderung/>

<sup>9</sup> For further details visit: <http://www.mustersanierung.at/foerderungen/investitionsfoerderungen-in-oesterreich/foerderungen-finden/>



environment-related investment costs must amount to a certain minimum sum (RES LEGAL Europe Database).

## **Barriers to the heating and cooling sector**

### **Political and economic framework**

Most of the barriers reported in this category are related to the **existence and reliability of a general RES-H&C strategy and support scheme**. In Austria, there is a big stock of outdated heating systems, which would require modernization including the switch to renewable energy sources. However, for the time being there are no efficiency criteria for the renewal of existing heating systems. Therefore, the introduction of minimum efficiency criteria for all energy installations in households is needed. Secondly, Austria has 9 different building laws. As the building laws in Austria apply at the federal level, the legal framework and support schemes for renewable heating in the building sector vary throughout the whole country. This barrier was already part of the previous report, however no substantial evolution could be observed in 2014 (Hackstock, Klima- und Energiefonds). To promote the use of renewable energy and overcome barriers in the building sector, a harmonization of the legal framework would be beneficial.

Due to a lack of installations and currently low prices for fossil energy products, the solar thermal industry has been declining during the last few years. Therefore, clear initiatives such as additional support for solar thermal projects within urban and densely populated areas along with political measures have to be taken into account to make the 2020 goal accessible and keep on track with the 2025 Austrian Solar Heat Roadmap (AustriaSolar 2015).

Furthermore, the low prices in the fossil fuel industry are also a treat to the Biomass industry, as the European emissions trading scheme (ETS) does not work in case of market regulation. Still, the externalisation of costs, the low market prices and the poor functionality of the ETS system are a barrier to a broad development of renewable energy (Austrian Biomass Association 2015).

### **Market structure**

Several barriers concerning the market structure have been reported as further incentives for the use of conventional energy sources for heating. They are created by the existence of a nongovernmental support scheme for oil-based heating (“Förderaktion Ölheizungen”) financed by the gasoline industry. The implementation of such support mechanisms has an inherent potential to thwart the efforts of further developing renewable energy in the heating and cooling sector (Jank, BMLFUW). This barrier has already been mentioned in last year’s report. However, no market-changing effects have occurred.

### **Administrative processes**

For solar thermal energy, barriers concerning the **duration of administrative procedures** were mentioned, as considerable time is needed for the decision and planning process. In order to receive a positive administrative decision, too many public authorities have to be contacted, whereas projects cannot be started until the disbursement of subsidies is granted. Therefore, the implementation of solar thermal projects may be delayed. These barriers were already included in last year's report. However, the situation has not evolved since January 2014 (Hackstock, Klima- und Energiefonds).

## **The Austrian RES-T Sector**

The European Biofuels Directive 2003/30/EC has been implemented in Austrian law through the 2004 Fuel Order Amendment. As the share of renewable energy sources in the Austrian transport sector is relatively high, Austria met the EU target for biofuels for 2010 (5.75%) with ease.

In September 2012, the Austrian Government suspended the introduction of the E10 biofuel and declared to postpone its introduction until the situation was clarified on a European level. Previously, the European Commission announced to limit the production of fuels made from food crops to 5% until 2020 (EUbusiness).

Austria can also be considered as a European leader with regard to the use of renewable energy in the rail sector. 92% of the electricity used in the 16.7 Hz traction current net of the Austrian railway company ÖBB is generated from renewable energy sources, predominantly from ÖBB-owned large hydro power plants (ÖBB Infrastruktur AG 2013).

Regarding e-mobility, an “Implementation Plan on Electromobility in and from Austria” has been elaborated by three different ministries<sup>10</sup> in 2012. The plan includes specific measures to integrate electric mobility in the transport system, to establish intelligent incentive systems and to create the necessary infrastructure (BMLFUW, BMVIT, BMWFW).

## **Support schemes**

In Austria, gasoline and diesel with a minimum content of 4.6% and 6.6% of biogenic material, respectively, are subject to a lower mineral oil tax. Mineral oil solely from biogenic material and E85 are exempt from this tax (RES LEGAL Europe Database).

To ensure that biofuels make up a defined percentage of the annual fuel sales, there is a substitution obligation, in force since 2005. Since 2009, the substitution target has amounted to 5.75%, measured by the total fossil gasoline or diesel introduced or used within the federal territory (RES LEGAL Europe Database).

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<sup>10</sup> The plan was issued by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW), the Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVIT) and the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW).

## **Barriers to the transport sector**

### **Political and economic framework**

The most relevant barriers regarding the further development of biofuels in this category are related to the **European institutions' position on RES-T**. Actually, this position was already highlighted in the previous reports as a severe barrier that could jeopardize the achievement of the 2020 target. Currently, the European Commission is still discussing to introduce a so-called ILUC coefficient representing a surcharge for biofuel crops. ILUC relates to the unintended consequence of releasing more carbon emissions due to land-use changes induced by the expansion of croplands for ethanol or biodiesel. The Commission intends to quantify these ancillary carbon emissions and introduce a surcharge for biofuel crops. Different stakeholders argue that, in consequence of this ILUC coefficients-induced surcharge, biodiesel and vegetable oil would not produce the required target reduction in carbon emissions. Provided that this draft proposal is actually introduced, these fuels will no longer be deemed biofuels and will thus not contribute to the biofuel quota (re-frame.eu Database).

Depending on the exact coefficient for the different types of biofuels, this could mean a boost for biofuels from waste, with would have a low ILUC factor. Among other reasons, the introduction of E10 was prevented also due to public resistance resulting from the uncertainty of the potential of biofuels regarding climate-friendliness. Without introducing ILUC factors, there is no way to ensure that biofuels are not actually damaging the climate and thus the opposition will remain strong (Rasmussen, VCÖ).

In the case of e-mobility, barriers were reported in the field of the **existence & reliability of general RES-T strategy & support schemes**. There should be a sole responsible stakeholder as currently there are three ministries entitled to the introduction and further development of e-mobility<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, the development of e-mobility is hindered by the non-existence of sufficient incentives for the purchase of e-vehicles. Beside different pilot and demonstration projects, there is no national support scheme for the promotion of electric mobility. However, the remaining exemption of electric vehicles from the Austrian car registration tax (Normverbrauchsabgabe "NoVA"), which was last increased in March 2014, can be considered a positive development (Rasmussen, VCÖ).

Major potential for the development of electric mobility in Austria can be seen in company fleets, e.g. taxi businesses. Since more than 50% of new passenger cars in Austria are company cars, it would be interesting to provide better incentives for this segment. Currently, the taxation rules regarding company cars have no incentives or "push" mechanisms to promote electric cars (Rasmussen, VCÖ).

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<sup>11</sup> BMF (Federal Ministry of Finance), BMWFW (Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy), BMVIT (Austrian Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology).

### Grid regulation & infrastructure

Regarding e-mobility, a **lack of infrastructure and infrastructure development** was attested in last year's report and is still an issue. Stakeholders claimed that there is a lack of collaboration between the federal states of Austria regarding technical issues, e.g. charging plugs, accounting software and charging stations. In addition, the Austrian Energy Strategy expects up to 250,000 electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid vehicles by 2020. This goal seems quite exaggerated, bearing in mind that the number of electric vehicles at the end of 2014 was approximately 2,300 and that Austria has about 8.4 million inhabitants. The implementation of concrete measures to foster e-mobility is pending.

Another barrier to the infrastructure development is the missing introduction of electric vehicle facilities, e.g. charging plugs, parking devices etc. in buildings. If such devices were incorporated into the construction of new buildings, further development in this field could be made (Rasmussen, VCÖ).

Another deficiency regarding e-mobility concerns **technological issues**. There is a general potential for electric vehicles, for example in the taxi business or in vehicle fleets of companies. Therefore, it is necessary that this technology is capable to substitute gasoline-driven vehicles. However, the technology needs further improvement, for example regarding the lifetime of batteries (Fechner, Technikum Vienna).

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