

# 17 Antworten zur AK und ihrer Wahl

Was macht die Arbeiterkammer eigentlich genau?  
Für wen ist sie da?  
Wer kann wie wählen?  
Und wann sind die nächsten Wahlen?



## **1. WHAT – OR WHO – IS THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR?**

### **➤ Giving nearly four million people a voice**

The Chamber of Labour (AK) represents almost four million workers in Austria. We fight for their rights at work – making sure they are heard, paid fairly and get the necessary legal protection. And best of all: it doesn't cost a penny extra – thanks to the Chamber of Labour Act, every employee is automatically an AK member. From apprentices and the unemployed to workers on parental leave – they can all take advantage of the AK's comprehensive range of services.

## **2. WHAT DOES THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR DO, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

### **➤ Always on hand to stand up for employee rights**

All employees can count on the Chamber of Labour (AK) to fight their corner, defend their rights and make sure they always have a say in political decisions. We all want legislation that takes employees' interests into account. That's why our specialists take a very close look at what the law says, providing expert opinions, drafting proposals for legislation and safeguarding key labour rights for our members. Because fair working conditions and a highly developed welfare state must not be taken for granted.

Just to give you a few examples: from the right to a minimum of five weeks' annual holiday to parental and carer's leave – the AK, in collaboration with the trade unions, fought for many of the rights that we now take as read.

## **3. WHAT IS AN INTEREST GROUP?**

### **➤ Protecting the interests of large groups of people**

Some topics are not just of interest to individuals, but to whole groups of people. Workers have many interests in common: things like fair pay, regulated working hours and the right to paid holidays. And trying to defend these interests as individuals would be a big ask. This is where interests groups come in – standing up for shared rights and working to bring about improvements. The Chamber of Labour (AK) and the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) do exactly that in the name of protecting employees' interests. Businesses are represented by the national and

provincial economic chambers (WK) and the Federation of Austrian Industries (IV), while the Chamber of Agriculture (LK) defends farmers' rights.

#### **4. WHO ARE THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR'S MEMBERS? AM I A MEMBER?**

➤ **Basically, anyone who is employed is a member of the Chamber of Labour (AK)**

So besides salaried and non-salaried workers, this also includes people in mini-jobs, freelancers, workers on parental leave, the unemployed, apprentices, and people doing national or civilian national service.

Businesspeople, civil servants and farmers are not AK members.

#### **5. WHY IS STATUTORY MEMBERSHIP SO IMPORTANT?**

➤ **Without members' statutory contributions, there would be no such thing as the Chamber of Labour**

The Chamber of Labour (AK) does not receive any money from the government. Instead, employees are required by law to pay a small membership contribution. Without this, there would be no AK – and no-one to look out for workers' interests. The contribution ensures that we all receive full protection. Such as legal assistance if you have to appear before an industrial tribunal. Or support if your employer goes bankrupt. Or assistance if you need help with a consumer-protection matter. Everyone gets premium service – including those (like apprentices and people in mini-jobs) who are exempt from paying membership contributions. As an AK member, you have access to support from our leading experts.

What's more, the main advantage of statutory membership is that it cannot simply be scrapped – there are special legal safeguards in place. Without them, a government that primarily defended the interests of companies and conglomerates could easily abolish the AK – leaving workers without a voice.

## **6. HOW MUCH IS THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR MEMBERSHIP CONTRIBUTION?**

### **➤ Just €10 a month!**

For people on middle incomes, the monthly Chamber of Labour (AK) membership contribution is about the same as the price of two coffees in a cafe.

What you receive in return is pretty impressive: advice and support on topics like labour and tax law, consumer protection, social security and insolvency law. And don't forget that the membership contribution also means you have your say in new legislation. Because it pays for our all-important political lobbying activities.

Members who have mini-jobs or are not earning are exempt from the contribution, but still have access to the full range of AK services.

## **7. WHY DO WE NEED THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR (AK) AND THE AUSTRIAN TRADE UNION FEDERATION (ÖGB)?**

### **➤ Because together, they make an unbeatable team that stands up for workers**

The Chamber of Labour (AK) has a wealth of knowledge and expertise. The AK analyses laws, carries out studies and much more besides. We also offer advice on labour law and consumer protection, we can review pension statements, rental contracts or care allowance classifications; if needs be, we can even represent our members in court.

The ÖGB helps to organise works councils, young workers councils and staff representatives, trains their members and supports them in their day-to-day work. So by working closely with employees, trade unions can gain insights into their everyday activities. The unions also negotiate collective agreements, helping to reach terms that deliver the best possible results for workers. AK studies help them to achieve this, giving them facts and figures to back up important demands. Where necessary, the ÖGB organises works meetings, as well as industrial action such as strikes.

This teamwork between the AK and ÖGB ensures effective employee representation at all levels.

## 8. WHAT EXACTLY IS THE SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP?

### ➤ A key accomplishment

No other country in the world offers better protection under collective agreements. The social partnership brings together employees and employers. Trade unions and the Chamber of Labour stand up for employees' rights, while the economic and agricultural chambers protect the interests of companies and farmers respectively. This cooperation is all about achieving solid compromises that take their differing viewpoints into account. The two sides negotiate collective agreements every year, as well as discussing the implementation of new laws and various matters related to economic and social policies (for example, connected with the labour market and the health service).

## 9. WHY IS THE SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP SO IMPORTANT?

### ➤ Ensuring constructive industrial relations

In recent decades, the social partners have negotiated solutions that protect a range of different interests, and as a result, social harmony prevails here in Austria.

The main aim is to resolve conflicting interests at the negotiating table. Industrial action such as strikes are always the last resort. Actually, strikes are very rare in Austria compared with other countries. The reason: the achievements of Austria's social partnership over the years.

## 10. WHAT DOES THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR DO?

### ➤ Protecting workers' interests

Austrian law states that the Chamber of Labour (AK) is responsible for representing employees' social, economic, professional and cultural interests.

And that's exactly what we do. If you're having problems at work, with the public employment service (AMS), with care allowances or pension statements, or with anything related to consumer protection, education or housing – the AK is always at your side.

We give workers a voice in discussions with politicians and businesses, and we run the rule over new laws. From labour and social law to consumer

protection, national insurance or insolvency: every year, we carry out over two million consultations – on the phone, by e-mail and face-to-face. We don't just provide help, we also make demands. Take AK training vouchers, for instance. We operate numerous educational institutions across Austria and help young people with choosing a career. We carry out basic research and studies, too. The findings play an important part in our political work – for example, our analysis supports trade unions in collective bargaining.

## **11. THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR IS LIKE AN “EMPLOYEE PARLIAMENT” – WHY? AND HOW DOES THAT WORK?**

### **➤ The Chamber of Labour is made up of all employees in Austria**

The Chamber of Labour (AK) is split into nine independent chambers, one in each of Austria's federal provinces. The larger provinces have several AK offices.

Every five years, the AK members in each province elect their representatives – the members of the AK assembly. These elected Chamber members (the “MPs”, if you will) form the General Assembly, which in turn selects the executive board and the president of the chamber in each province. The umbrella organisation for the nine provincial bodies is the Federal Chamber of Labour, which is based in Vienna.

## **12. WHAT ARE THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR ELECTIONS?**

### **➤ Plotting the direction of Chamber of Labour policies**

Under the Chamber of Labour Act, every employee automatically becomes an AK member and is eligible to vote in its elections. Every five years, the AK members elect their representatives from the different political groups to the provincial chambers. These one person, one vote ballots are direct and secret. This means that the members' votes set the AK's political direction.

### **13. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO VOTE IN THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR ELECTIONS?**

- **Because only a strong Chamber of Labour has what it takes to protect your rights**

And because you have a say in setting the political direction that the Chamber of Labour (AK) will take over the next five years. Make sure you cast your vote! Your next opportunity is in 2024.

The more votes the AK receives, the stronger our platform to fight for your interests.

### **14. WHEN ARE THE NEXT CHAMBER OF LABOUR ELECTIONS? AND HOW DO THEY WORK?**

- **2024**

You can vote at work or by postal vote. Both are quick and easy, and the ballot is secret. As a Chamber of Labour (AK) member, you will receive everything you need to know about the process from the AK Election Office. They will let you know when and where you can vote, how and when you will receive your voting card, and whether you can be included on the electoral register if you are not automatically eligible to vote.

### **15. WHERE CAN I VOTE?**

- **Either at work or by postal vote**

You can vote at work if your company sets up a polling station. Most large and medium-sized companies do this. If you are on holiday or between jobs and cannot vote at your company, you can apply for a postal vote. Want to know how? The Chamber of Labour (AK) Election Office will send you all the details in good time.

And what if your company does not have a polling station? In this case, you will receive a voting card by post. You can cast your vote either by post, or in person at one of the public polling stations.

## 16. AM I EVEN ELIGIBLE TO VOTE?

### ➤ All Chamber of Labour members can vote in elections regardless of citizenship

You are automatically eligible to vote if you are in employment or working as a freelancer on the cut-off date, which is a few weeks before the elections. If you are an apprentice, in a mini-job, on parental leave, doing national or civilian national service, or unemployed on this date, you can apply to be included on the electoral register. The Chamber of Labour (AK) Election Office will send you full information beforehand.

## 17. WHEN WAS THE CHAMBER OF LABOUR SET UP?

### ➤ More than 100 years ago

The chambers of labour (AK) were set up in 1920 as a counterweight to the chambers of commerce, which had been founded in 1848. The AK was designed to be an equal partner. In 1920, the Austrian parliament passed the Chamber of Labour Act with cross-party support. After the second world war, the AK was closely involved in building Austria's economic and social partnership – a system that's the envy of the world.

