Verband der öffentlichen Wirtschaft
und Gemeinwirtschaft Österreichs

VÖWG Activity Report 2024–2026

The Austrian Association of Public Services and Enterprises (VÖWG) represents the interests of the public economy, with a particular focus on services of general interest. Its members include public and municipal enterprises and institutions providing essential services in areas such as energy, transport, water and waste management, housing, health and social services.

VÖWG represents its members at both national and European level, promotes exchange between public enterprises, policymakers, business and academia, and provides expertise on relevant legal and regulatory developments. Through its policy, communication and networking activities, VÖWG works to ensure that the interests and specific characteristics of public and municipal enterprises are reflected in political decision-making.

As the Austrian section of **SGI Europe (formerly CEEP)**, VÖWG is also part of the European social dialogue. SGI Europe is one of the three European cross-industry social partners and represents employers and enterprises providing services of general interest. Through this network, VÖWG contributes to European policy discussions and represents the interests of its members at EU level.VÖWG Activity Report 2024–2026

Introduction

The years 2024 -2026 were marked by significant political and economic changes that had a lasting impact on the public and social economy. Against this backdrop, VÖWG further strengthened its role as a platform for exchange, analysis and strategic cooperation, identifying relevant developments at an early stage and providing its members with targeted information and guidance in an increasingly complex political and regulatory environment.

A central focus in 2024 was the political transition at European level, in particular the European elections and the subsequent formation of a new European Parliament and European Commission. Together with its members, VÖWG identified key issues concerning services of general interest and ensured that these were reflected in the preparations for the hearings of the Commissioners-designate. VÖWG also strengthened its presence in Brussels, engaging directly with political decision-makers and bringing its members' positions into the European debate.

At the same time, security of supply, strategic independence, energy crises, labour and skills shortages and the financing of sustainable infrastructure became increasingly prominent in political discussions. Against the backdrop of the European Green Deal, economic transformation and growing sustainability and reporting requirements, VÖWG addressed the framework conditions needed to ensure resilient and reliable public services.

With the new European Commission taking office, 2025 marked a new phase in European policymaking. While the preceding years had been strongly shaped by the European Green Deal and new regulatory frameworks in climate, energy and sustainability policy, **competitiveness, reindustrialisation, investment and the simplification of existing legislation** increasingly moved to the centre of the political agenda. This shift was particularly evident in the European Commission's simplification and Omnibus initiatives.

At the same time, resilience, security of supply and the robustness of public infrastructure remained important. Against this backdrop, VÖWG continued to monitor and analyse relevant developments at European and national level, engage with legislative processes and provide its members with practical information and opportunities for exchange.

EU Commission Hearings

The European elections and the subsequent formation of a new European Commission and Parliament were a central focus of VÖWG's work in 2024. Against this backdrop, VÖWG launched a comprehensive project to ensure that the priorities of public and municipal enterprises were reflected in the preparations for the hearings of the Commissioners-designate, while strengthening its network and presence in Brussels.

Preparations began in February 2024 with seven sector-specific working groups covering water policy, the circular economy, energy, housing, health and social affairs, transport, and economic policy, finance and funding. More than 70 participants contributed their expertise. Their input was developed into strategic questions, complemented by relevant background information and compiled in a catalogue of around 230 pages. Tailored sets of questions were also prepared for the relevant European Parliament committees.

From September to November, VÖWG significantly stepped up its presence in Brussels. By the end of calendar week 47, the VÖWG/VKÖ team had held **165 meetings** with Members of the European Parliament and their teams, political advisers, representatives of the European Commission, partner organisations and umbrella associations. VÖWG representatives also attended the hearings of the Commissioners-designate.

Each meeting was carefully prepared to reflect the responsibilities and policy priorities of the respective interlocutors. Tailored questions and briefing materials helped ensure that the perspectives of public and municipal enterprises were represented in parliamentary committees, political groups and the Commission hearings. The project also helped to expand VÖWG's network in Brussels and establish contacts for future dialogue and exchange.

Simplification Agenda

Simplification became an overarching theme of European economic policy in 2025. The European Commission linked its simplification agenda to reducing administrative burdens and strengthening the competitiveness of the European economy. VÖWG accompanied these developments through continuous information, analysis and communication between its members and the European institutions. Its work focused particularly on **Omnibus I on sustainability reporting, Omnibus II on investment and Omnibus IV on the Single Market**.

VÖWG actively followed the legislative process of Omnibus I from its presentation in February 2025 to the trilogue agreement in December 2025, keeping its members informed of key developments through numerous updates, webinars and direct exchanges. In March, VÖWG also prepared a comprehensive information dossier analysing the main changes introduced by Omnibus I and their implications for public and municipal enterprises.

Sustainability Reporting

Sustainability reporting was an important focus of VÖWG's work throughout **2024 and 2025**. In 2024, the VÖWG Sustainability Network supported member companies with the implementation of the new requirements, with particular attention to double materiality assessments and the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). Members were also given access to presentations and official

documents through a dedicated SharePoint platform, while exchange between sustainability managers in public and municipal enterprises was actively promoted.

In September 2024, VÖWG and VKÖ organised a two-day sustainability workshop in Linz focusing on sustainability management, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), the EU Taxonomy and sustainable procurement.

In 2025, VÖWG's work on sustainability reporting increasingly took place in the context of the European simplification agenda. Activities included webinars on the implications of Omnibus I for the CSRD and CSDDD, climate-risk analysis and the Voluntary Reporting Standard for SMEs (VSME). VÖWG also participated in the EFRAG consultation process on simplifying the ESRS.

Reform of the EU Electricity Market Design

The reform of the EU electricity market design was an important focus of VÖWG's energy-policy work in 2024. The reform covered several legislative acts, including the Electricity Directive, the Electricity Regulation and the REMIT Regulation. It addressed, among other issues, the integration of renewable energy sources, long-term instruments such as Contracts for Difference (CfDs) and Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), interventions in end-consumer prices during periods of particularly high prices and the role of capacity markets.

Monitoring, analysis and information for members throughout the legislative process on the reform of the EU electricity market design constituted a significant part of VÖWG's work in 2024.

European Affordable Housing Plan (EAHP)

The European Commission had announced the European Affordable Housing Plan (EAHP) in 2024 as a strategic framework for future measures in the housing sector. In summer 2025, the Commission launched a broad consultation process on the future direction of the plan. VÖWG participated in this process and coordinated its contribution closely with its members. Several internal working sessions were used to systematically assess the challenges facing Austria's limited-profit housing sector and to develop positions for the European level.

VÖWG advocated for the structural strengths of cost-rent and reinvestment-based models to be reflected in the emerging European framework. We also supported the visit of the European Parliament's Special Committee on the Housing Crisis in the European Union (HOUS) to Vienna through a specialist exchange focusing on the Austrian housing model, including cost-based rents, object-related housing subsidies and the State aid classification of limited-profit housing structures.

Revision of State Aid Rules for Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI)

The European State aid framework for Services of General Economic Interest in the field of social and affordable housing was an important area of VÖWG's housing-policy work in 2024. VÖWG participated in the European Commission's consultation on the revision of the relevant State aid rules and submitted a position emphasising the central role of limited-profit and municipal housing providers in Austria in providing affordable and high-quality housing.

VÖWG highlighted key characteristics of the Austrian model, including cost-based operation and the reinvestment of surpluses, and stressed the importance of these structures for the provision of affordable housing.

Revision of the EU Public Procurement Directives

The revision of the EU Public Procurement Directives was a central focus of VÖWG's legal-policy work in 2025. VÖWG became involved at an early stage, participated in the European Commission's public consultation and submitted a position in March addressing challenges arising from the practical application of the existing procurement framework.

The position focused on genuine simplification ("decluttering"), reducing administrative burdens and creating flexible and practicable procurement procedures. Particular importance was attached to in-house procurement and public-public cooperation as instruments for efficient and legally secure service provision. VÖWG remained in close exchange with national and European stakeholders and partner associations throughout the process.

Circular Economy Act

The Circular Economy Act became an important focus of VÖWG's work following its announcement in the European Commission's political guidelines in 2024. The initiative aims to promote demand for secondary raw materials and create a functioning internal market for waste, with particular attention to critical raw materials.

VÖWG began preparing for the dossier in 2024 in order to accompany the process at an early stage and in close coordination with its members. Potentially relevant issues included fair competitive conditions for secondary raw materials, the harmonisation of the respective market and the possible extension of extended producer responsibility to additional product groups. Together with Aqua Publica, VÖWG submitted a position on the Commission's open questions and exchanged views with representatives of the Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV) to bring its key technical positions into the discussion.

Beyond these key areas, VÖWG monitored and accompanied a broad range of other legislative and policy initiatives at European and national level throughout 2024 and 2025, keeping its members informed of relevant developments and contributing to consultation and legislative processes where appropriate: *Fit for 55 Package; EU Gas Package; EU Methane Regulation; F-gas Regulation; Renewable Energy Directive (RED III); Elektrizitätswirtschaftsgesetz (ElWG); Erneuerbaren-Ausbau-Beschleunigungsgesetz (EABG); EU Grids Package; Connecting Europe Facility – Energy (CEF-E); Air and Rail Passenger Rights; Multimodal Travel; Connecting Europe Facility – Transport (CEF-T); Clean Corporate Vehicles; High-Speed Rail; Sustainable Transport Investment Plan; European Ports Strategy; Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD); Waste Framework Directive; European Water Resilience Strategy; Environmental Omnibus; Reform of the Stability and Growth Pact; Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD); De minimis Regulation; Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034; European Health Data Space (EHDS); Revision of the EU General Pharmaceutical Legislation; Regulation on Substances of Human Origin (SoHO); European Cross-Border Associations; EU Action Plan on Labour and Skills Shortages; Platform Work Directive; Critical Medicines Act; Digital Euro; Digital Networks Act; Informationsfreiheitsgesetz (IFG); General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR); and Resilienz kritischer Einrichtungen-Gesetz (RKEG).*

Engagement in Research and Studies

Study on Relevant ESG Data Points

In 2024, public and municipal enterprises increasingly faced the challenge of implementing new sustainability reporting requirements. For municipal utilities in particular, whose activities span areas such as energy, water, waste management, mobility, heat supply and infrastructure, these requirements involved considerable additional reporting effort.

Against this background, VÖWG initiated a study in cooperation with the Institute of Management Accounting at Johannes Kepler University Linz (JKU) to systematically identify and prioritise relevant data

points for sustainability reporting. The study aimed to standardise data collection and establish common benchmarks for the public economy. Its findings were also intended to provide a basis for contributions to European consultation processes, including the further development of the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS).

The study analysed the ESG reporting of major Austrian and German municipal utility companies and identified around **14 material topics**, including security of supply, climate protection, compliance and attractiveness as an employer. In 2025, an analogous study involving hospital operators was carried out. The findings were used in exchanges with political decision-makers as a basis for a meaningful reduction in sustainability-reporting data points.

Study on Municipal and Public Network Operators

In 2025, VÖWG addressed the role of municipal and public network operators in the context of the planned Digital Networks Act. Together with European partner associations, VÖWG participated in the substantive discussion and initiated a study on the role of municipal and public network operators in the European telecommunications market.

The study focused on investment conditions, the contribution of public enterprises to the expansion of digital networks and fair competitive conditions in the European internal market. The results were subsequently published in 2026 as the *Municipal Network Report*.

Activities within CIRIEC

VÖWG's involvement in CIRIEC forms an important part of its international networking and its activities at the interface between research and practice. Through the international network, VÖWG promotes the exchange of scientific expertise and practical experience in the field of the public and social

International Seminar on ESG Reporting in Paris

In June 2026, VÖWG co-organised the CIRIEC International Seminar **"Making ESG-Reporting Strategic and Efficient for Public Enterprises"** in Paris. The seminar addressed the changing framework for sustainability reporting and its strategic relevance for public enterprises, particularly in relation to resilience, risk management, investment planning and long-term value creation.

The programme included presentations on recent OECD publications and the CIRIEC study on the most relevant ESG issues for municipal utility companies in Germany and Austria, followed by an expert discussion on relevant reporting requirements and indicators for public-sector companies.

CIRIEC Research Conference in Bordeaux

In October 2025, VÖWG participated in the CIRIEC Research Conference in Bordeaux with a delegation of representatives from Austrian public enterprises and organisations. The conference provided an opportunity for international exchange between researchers and practitioners on current issues concerning the public and social economy.