



AUSTRIA



Civil Protection and Emergency Management Department (Zivilschutz, Krisen- und Katastrophenschutzmanagement)

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1. Legislation :

Austria is a federal state, divided into nine provinces. The provinces consist of districts, the districts of communities.

In addition to the National Council, the country's primary legislative power at federal level, each of the nine provinces has its own legislative power, the Provincial Council. The Austrian federal constitution (a federal act adopted with qualified majority vote) regulates the allocation of competencies between the federal and the provincial levels. The provinces are vested with important responsibilities with regard to legislative and executive powers, extending also to Civil Protection.

Under the constitutions division of responsibilities, laws on disaster prevention and control may be passed by the Federal Government and/or the provinces. Numerous laws regulating specific fields already exist at the federal and provincial levels (e.g. laws to regulate radiation protection, water rights, operation of the fire prevention board and rescue service).

To date, the concept of Civil Protection as such is not included in the Austrian federal constitution. It was integrated into Civil Defence, constituting part of Overall National Defence, which is regulated in the federal constitution. Article 10 of the federal constitution, containing essential regulations on the allocation of competencies and vesting the federal level with legislative and executive powers, will be amended to comprise the concept of Civil Protection, integrating it with the federal level's competence.

2. Mission :

Civil Emergency Planning can be seen as a sum of provisions regarding:

- Economic Defence and
- Civil Defence.

Civil Defence includes in particular the provisions regarding:

- civil protection
- preventive measures to protect the population
- continuity of Government
- maintaining public peace, law and order
- measures to receive refugees
- guarding of buildings
- maintaining the operability of state bodies in a crisis
- protecting cultural assets

Civil Protection is defined as the sum total of all precautionary measures and activities designed to enable the population to survive in any type of crisis situation.

Civil Protection proper covers:

- provision for relief missions, thus Disaster Protection
- measures for Self-Protection
- warning and alerting facilities
- construction of shelters
- provision for medical facilities
- provision for veterinary facilities
- protection against radiation fallout

Civil Protection thus includes all humanitarian activities to manage disasters and other major catastrophes. It includes precautionary action against natural or technical accidents, accidents in the chemical industry as well as accidents during the transport of hazardous goods or nuclear accidents.

3. Regulation and procedure :

The tasks allocated to the Civil Defence sector in general and to the Civil Protection sector in special are defined in the National Defence Plan. Pursuant to this plan, which is still in force but under discussion, Overall National Defence may be defined as the sum of all civil and military provisions and measures designed to counter threats. Overall National Defence includes in particular:

- Military Defence (i.e. defending sovereignty)
- Mental Defence (i.e. informing and motivating the population, developing an awareness for the basic values of the society)
- Economic Defence (i.e. maintenance of the economies)
- Civil Defence (i.e. protection of the population and continuity of government)

A Cabinet decision assigned working committees to each of the above aspects. The committees are chaired by the ministries responsible for the respective field; the Civil Defence Working Committee thus comes under the authority of the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

In addition to these working committees, the Military Defence Working Committee, the Mental Defence Working Committee and the Economic Defence Working Committee, a special committee for traffic and telecommunications was created.

Each province established a Provincial Coordinating Committee to coordinate measures required by the comprehensive national defence plan at a regional level. Supraregional and international crisis situations are coordinated by the National Crisis Management Board.

The Federal Ministry of the Interior is in charge of matters concerning the safety and security of the population

Such matters include:

- aid in the case of natural disasters and accidents, including rescue services and fire fighting squads, and
- civil protection matters except where they are the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs.

The Federal Ministry of the interior has the following structure:

- Directorate General I / Matters of staff and organization
- Directorate General II / Directorate General of Public Security
- Directorate General III / Foreigner Administration
- Directorate General IV / Legislative matters

The Fields of Tasks of the Department IV/1 are

- Civil Emergency Planning
- Civil Defence
- Civil Protection

The provinces have enacted comprehensive disaster relief acts which regulate the scope of action assigned to the individual relief organisations, identify the action management hierarchy and define performance requirement profiles.

Disaster relief and alerting plans have been drawn up for the federal, provincial, district and local authorities.

It is both practical and necessary for the Federal Government to assume responsibility in the following cases;

- large-scale crisis on a national or international scope,
- local crisis which:
 - threatens to escalate into a large-scale crisis, and
 - is so severe that it is expected to have an impact on the state as such,
 - inadequate human or material resources to combat the crisis in the disaster area,

- need for specific knowledge and information which is not quickly available to the local crisis management bodies,
- widespread anxiety in the population.

4. Organisation :

Civil Protection in Austria must be seen as a pluralist system to prevent disasters and provide aid, embedded in the hexagonal responsibility borne by the authorities at the federal, provincial, district and local level, by relief organizations and by the population.

The concept comprises supra-regional coordination on the one hand, but also the warning of the population via the provinces on the other. The government's declaration on this concept states the following areas as the main applications for the concept of the protection of the civilian population: National Defence/Civil Defence, NPP disasters and earthquakes. The federal provinces will remain competent for disaster protection at a solely regional level. Natural disasters affecting several provinces (e.g., Danube floods) need not necessarily fall into the federal competence provided the provincial levels can cope with the effects of the disaster.

However, the federal level may be competent if, for instance, only one province is affected by the consequences of an event abroad (nuclear accident, cloud of toxic gas, etc.).

The Federal Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the international level of Civil Protection and establishes inner-Austrian contacts within the EU in the main. Important activities are set within UN/OCHA and NATO/PfP as well as in connection with multi- and bilateral agreements concerning these fields.

The provinces are competent for protection against disasters and the establishing of fire brigades and emergency service units. Except for the major cities, the principle of voluntary membership applies for fire brigades and rescue services alike. This approach works well since in particular in rural areas most Austrians want to cooperate actively with these organizations.

5. Staff :

In contrast to other states, Austria has no special civil protection units.

Civil Protection in Austria is provided by existing relief organizations in particular the fire fighting squads, the Austrian Red Cross, the Workers' Ambulance Service of Austria, the Knights of St. John Ambulance Service, the Knights of Malta Hospital Service and the Austrian Mountain Rescue Service. In these organizations, some 300.000 well-trained and equipped men and women (about 4 % of the population) are available - mostly on a voluntary basis - to assume civil protection tasks.

The Austrian Federal Army can be also available and the military units will then report to civilian authorities.

6. Training / Information:

Training of relief workers is provided by Provincial Civil Protection Schools, schools run by relief organizations themselves, and by the Civil Protection School of the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

The Civil Protection School of the Federal Ministry of the Interior is designed as an interdepartmental institution that provides basic as well as advanced training.

Courses at the Civil Protection School of the Federal Ministry of the Interior cover:

- disaster relief
- radiation protection and
- transport of dangerous goods.

A Civil Protection concept cannot be implemented effectively without the acceptance and cooperation of the population. For this reason, the Federal Ministry of the Interior has developed the Self-Protection Information Centres concept in conjunction with the provinces, the Austrian Civil Protection-Association and the relief and rescue organizations

The Self-Protection Information Centres aim to:

- inform and advising the population on all aspects of Self-Protection,
- promoting neighborhood help,
- organizing courses, and
- generally improving the information level concerning Civil Protection and Self-Protection.

So far, Self-Protection Information Centres have been established in about 1.200 Austrian municipalities.

7. Finances :

Fire brigades and rescue services receive their financial resources from both the federal and provincial levels.

Brigadier Gerhard SULZ

Director of the Civil Protection and Emergency Management Department