

New smoking ban for restaurants and bars in Austria

On Nov 1, 2019, Austria introduced a total ban on smoking in bars and restaurants. Under the previous policy, designated indoor smoking areas were permitted in larger establishments and the owners of smaller establishments were free to allow smoking throughout. "Austria now has a comprehensive smoke-free law; although this could have been done some years ago, it is still a very welcome development", commented Vera Luiza da Costa e Silva (WHO, Geneva, Switzerland).

Austria first passed legislation mandating a complete ban on smoking in indoor public places in 2015. It was scheduled to take effect last year. However, after the 2017 general election, the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) formed a coalition government with the right-wing nationalist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). The FPÖ made

their support conditional on the withdrawal of the 2015 legislation. In March, 2018, the Austrian Parliament voted to overturn the smoking ban. Little more than a year later, the government collapsed, in the wake of a scandal involving the leadership of the FPÖ. The Austrian Parliament then passed new legislation reinstating the total ban on smoking in enclosed public places. The ban came into force on Nov 1, 2019.

24% of Austrian adults are smokers. The country has lagged behind other European nations in tackling its tobacco epidemic. Cigarettes remain affordable and there has been little sign of a decline in smoking prevalence since Austria ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2005. But da Costa e Silva does not see any reason why Austria cannot turn things around. "France has already shown that a culture of

smoking while drinking coffee can be overcome", she said. "Ireland, with their culture of pubs, also showed that it is possible to implement full smoke-free policies." Crucially, tobacco control policies have public backing in Austria. Almost 900 000 Austrians signed a petition in support of the comprehensive smoking ban.

"I think we are seeing real progress", said Manfred Neuberger (Medical University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria). But he is concerned that the FPÖ might return to power. Negotiations are ongoing to form the next government after an election in September, 2019, left the ÖVP as the largest party. "If the ÖVP choose again to be partnered with the FPÖ, that would be very bad for tobacco control", said Neuberger.

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For more on the **new smoking ban in Austria** see <https://www.vox.com/2019/10/31/20936017/smoking-ban-austria>

For more on the **Austrian Government's 2018 vote to overturn the smoking ban** see [News Lancet Oncol 2018; 19: e234](#)