



COVID-19 – Structure and scope of the financial aid measures

Performance audit

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[FULL REPORT \(DE\)](#)



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What we assessed and why

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic required public authorities to rapidly implement financial assistance measures, making significant use of public funds and involving a wide range of departments. For example, it has required cooperation among all local and regional authorities, in particular Austria's federal and provincial governments, and all funding and support bodies. We are the sole external public audit institution for all local and regional authorities.

Our report provides a systematic overview of the structure and scope of financial assistance measures implemented by the federal and provincial governments to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic during the reporting period (March 2022 until the cut-off date of 30 September 2020).

The aim of the audit was to provide transparency on the use of public funds.

The data for this report was updated upon publication of the report "COVID-19 – Structure and scope of financial assistance: data update" (published on 8 April 2022).

What we found

Our report shows how complex, multifaceted and extensive the funding flows were, and who benefited from these funds. In addition to presenting the legal bases, we mainly reported on the different types of aid measure such as grants, contributions in kind, liabilities and guarantees, and deferred and foregone revenue. Recipient areas were: the labour market, education, fiscal equalisation, health, arts and culture, media, mobility, social security (including care), sport, the economy (including agriculture and forestry, tourism and the restaurant trade), science and research, and cross-cutting financial support measures. Beneficiaries included undertakings, non-profit organisations and private individuals.

The vast majority of the laws related to the COVID-19 pandemic was adopted on the basis of motions brought by MPs. The regulations were mostly adopted without any involvement from the Federal Chancellery's constitutional office, and without any impact assessment. The provincial financial assistance measures were mostly decided by the provincial government or Vienna's city council.





The structure and scope of financial assistance were characterised by considerable complexity, combined with a high level of public funding. The complexity resulted from the many different types of aid and areas benefiting from it, the many stakeholders involved (federal ministries, provincial governments and intermediaries at both federal and provincial level), as well as the documentation and reporting requirements of the implementing local and regional authorities, including internal administrative checks. Overall, during the reporting period, the financial assistance measures were characterised by the complex web of different stakeholders.

What we concluded

- In the interests of quality assurance in drawing up rules and standards governing aid schemes, it would be beneficial to involve the constitutional office in a timely and regular manner.
- The guidelines or application forms for financial assistance should be labelled as *de minimis* aid, in accordance with the European Commission Regulation on *de minimis* aid.
- It should be clarified with the European Commission whether financial aid measures are subject to approval under EU state aid law.
- It became clear that there was a need for alignment and coordination within and between federal ministries and local authorities.
- At federal level, a public reporting system was put in place for financial assistance measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. There was no such publicly available reporting system at provincial government level.
- The federal and provincial governments' Transparency database showed gaps during the reporting period particularly in relation to the recording of indirect funding.