

## Interview Climate Austria

### 1.) Who is behind Climate Austria?

**Wolfgang Diernhofer:** The Climate Austria initiative was launched in 2008 in collaboration with the Ministry of the Environment, Austrian Airlines, and Vienna Airport by Kommunalkredit Public Consulting (KPC) to support climate protection efforts in Austria.

KPC is the economic sponsor of Climate Austria and is responsible for all aspects of voluntary climate protection measures and related services.

### 2.) What does Climate Austria do?

**Wolfgang Diernhofer:** Climate Austria enables companies and individuals to make voluntary contributions to climate protection beyond their own value chains. Starting from the premise that emissions must first be avoided and reduced, we facilitate voluntary support for high-quality national and international climate protection projects. It is crucial to understand that climate action is not solely the responsibility of government entities; every individual and company must actively contribute to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. We place great emphasis on sustainable and impactful projects that undergo rigorous selection and review processes to ensure the highest quality. Only by doing so can we play a credible role in achieving global climate protection in 2025.

### 3.) What approach does Climate Austria follow?

**Wolfgang Diernhofer:** We follow the approach: Avoid – Mitigate – Contribute. Many companies, especially those in hard-to-abate sectors (industries where decarbonization is particularly challenging, such as steel or aviation), face the challenge that some emissions cannot currently be avoided. In such cases, it is essential to promote complementary climate protection measures outside the company and its value chains. This approach is also recommended by the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi), the leading global initiative that helps companies and organizations set and implement science-based climate targets. It is vital to emphasize that voluntary climate contributions must never replace or delay internal decarbonization efforts — they should always be seen as complementary yet essential (!) contributions to global climate protection.

#### 4.) What types of projects does Climate Austria support?

**Wolfgang Diernhofer:** Climate Austria supports a portfolio approach to climate protection projects — ranging from energy efficiency measures such as boiler replacement in Austria to renewable energy installations, clean cookstoves, reforestation, and mangrove restoration in countries of the Global South. This diversity reflects our portfolio strategy, which also strengthens risk management. By bundling different project types, we ensure that even if there are unexpected deviations in CO<sub>2</sub> savings or performance of individual projects, the overall contribution of our portfolio remains robust and credible.

#### 5.) How is the quality of the projects ensured?

**Wolfgang Diernhofer:** For our national projects in Austria, we ensure quality and effectiveness by complying with the Environmental Support Act (Umweltförderungsgesetz, UFG), which sets the legal framework, and the corresponding guidelines for environmental funding in Austria (Umweltförderung im Inland, UFI). These frameworks guarantee clear and verifiable project implementation. If a project fails to meet the agreed requirements, it is withdrawn and replaced with equivalent substitute projects.

For international projects, we consistently rely on those certified under the Gold Standard or Verified Carbon Standard. It is important to us that these projects not only reduce emissions but also deliver positive socio-economic impacts. Compliance with the applied standards is not only assessed by us but also verified by independent auditing organizations such as TÜV Germany.

#### 6.) How does Climate Austria address the issue of greenwashing?

**Wolfgang Diernhofer:** At Climate Austria, we take the issue of greenwashing very seriously, especially in the light of regulatory developments (e.g., EU Green Claims Directive, Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), etc.). Our goal is to enable credible climate protection measures based on robust standards.

The voluntary carbon market is undergoing dynamic change: methodologies are evolving, new scientific findings are being incorporated into existing standards, and independent initiatives and rating agencies are increasingly contributing to quality assurance, transparency, and environmental integrity. We closely follow these public debates and developments and actively incorporate our assessments into client consultations.

Avoiding greenwashing starts with careful selection of climate protection projects. We exclusively use projects certified under internationally recognized standards such as Gold Standard or Verra, with CO<sub>2</sub> savings verified by independent third parties.

## 7.) “Offsetting” versus “Contribution”

**Wolfgang Diernhofer:** These terms are often confused. Offsetting refers to compensating (ton-for-ton) CO<sub>2</sub> emissions through certified climate protection projects, focusing on accounting to support claims like climate neutrality. A voluntary climate protection contribution shifts the focus from emissions accounting to the positive effects of the contribution on global climate protection (impact focus), independent of the company’s own emissions balance.

At Climate Austria, we deliberately recommend avoiding potentially misleading environmental claims and instead emphasize specific climate protection contributions. This aligns with the upcoming EU Green Claims Directive, which will only allow environmental claims with clear substantiation.

In our view, it is essential to communicate as transparently as possible about one’s own emissions, including details on measurement methods, reduction strategies and targets, and offset or contribution measures. Only through consistent transparency can credibility be established — forming the foundation for effective and sustainable climate protection.

\* If you would like to learn more about this topic, check out our webinar organized by EY/Denkstatt, where we contributed to the debate on CO<sub>2</sub> certificates:

[CO<sub>2</sub> Certificates and Corporate Climate Transformation | EY – Austria \(DE\)](#)