

# **Punishing the poor and fighting “immigration into the social system” – Welfare reforms by the conservative and far-right government in Austria 2017–2019**

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## **Abstract**

The paper analyses and assesses social policy reforms of the conservative, far-right and right-wing populist coalition government in Austria between 2017 and 2019 in the light of the debates about welfare chauvinist, authoritarian and populist social policies. The latter had gained in importance over the previous years due to the upsurge of far-right and right-wing populist parties and the (at least partial) accommodation of mainstream parties to this tendency in many countries. The policies of the government were based on the view that the social problems associated with immigration were (at least) one of the main underlying causes for the problems affecting the Austrian society. The paper shows that the government initiated strategies to tackle these developments via a re-nationalisation of social policies. The analysis is focused on implemented and planned activities geared mainly towards the (former) pillars of the Austrian welfare regime (social assistance, active labour market policies, unemployment assistance, youth integration policies) and on the ideological articulations the government uttered to justify these reforms via the combination of welfare chauvinist orientations with centre-right concerns about market dynamics and public finances. Our analysis concludes that nativist/racialised, nationalist and welfare chauvinist social policies transcend the distinction of deserving and non-deserving social groups, which raises the question about the social imaginaries that lie beneath the attempts of far-right political actors to shape societies through the reform of welfare.

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