

Eurosystem Household Finance and Consumption Survey 2023: first results for Austria

The fifth wave of the Austrian HFCS (2023) confirms enduring structural features of household balance sheets: Wealth remains highly concentrated and dominated by owner-occupied housing. Debt is mainly mortgage-based in volume terms and concentrated in higher-income and higher-wealth households. Relative inequality is stable, but absolute wealth gaps have widened. Intergenerational transfers play a growing role in wealth accumulation.

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Growing importance of intergenerational transfers

Almost 41% of households have received an inheritance or gift, up from 35% in 2010. Among recipients, the average transfer is about EUR 315,000 – nearly four times the median – highlighting how concentrated inherited wealth is.



Debt is rare and of two types

Only about 30% of Austrian households hold debt. Out of these, roughly half have mortgage loans secured by property, the other half have smaller unsecured loans, and very few have both types of debt. Mortgage debt makes up about 90% of total volume. Risk indicators for mortgage holders remain stable.



Saving rises with income

Most Austrian households save primarily to build a financial buffer. Their median monthly saving is about EUR 300, and saving rates increase steadily with income – from below 10% in the lower half to above 20% at the top of the income distribution.

Opinions expressed by the authors of studies do not necessarily reflect the official viewpoint of the Oesterreichische Nationalbank or the Eurosystem.

Abstract¹

This report presents first results from the fifth wave of the Austrian Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS), which was conducted in 2023. The data confirm the long-standing structural features of household balance sheets in Austria: Wealth is highly concentrated and largely composed of owner-occupied housing, while household debt remains limited in prevalence and amount and primarily mortgage-based. Collateralized loans are held almost exclusively by higher-income and higher-wealth households, whereas uncollateralized debt is concentrated among financially constrained households and represents only a small share of total debt. Relative measures of wealth inequality have remained stable across survey waves, yet absolute gaps have widened, particularly at the top of the distribution. Saving capacity rises systematically with income, and precautionary motives for saving dominate across all household groups. Intergenerational transfers continue to gain importance as a source of wealth accumulation, especially for first-time homeownership. The report also provides an integrated view of levels and distribution of wealth by linking HFCS microdata with macroeconomic aggregates through the Distributional Wealth Accounts (DWA), highlighting the persistence of wealth structures and their growing intergenerational dimension.

The primary aim of the Eurosystem Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS) is to collect harmonized microdata on the financial situation of households, in particular their balance sheets (see ECB, 2023a, and ECB, 2023b). This unique dataset allows for a comprehensive analysis of the distribution and composition of assets and liabilities across the entire household population. In the HFCS, a household is defined as either a single person living alone or a group of people living together in the same private dwelling who share expenses and jointly provide for the essentials of living. The target population excludes individuals living in institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes, student residences, boarding schools, convents, prisons and military barracks (see Albacete and Lindner, 2025 for all details on the survey methods).

The HFCS is the only data source in Austria that enables an integrated assessment of households' real and financial assets, debt and net wealth for the full household population. Gross wealth is defined as the sum of real and financial assets, and net wealth as gross wealth minus debt. The HFCS has become increasingly important for monetary policy analysis by enabling models that account for household heterogeneity, particularly in savings and asset allocation. From a financial stability perspective, the survey is an essential source for assessing household vulnerabilities. In Austria, where there is no comprehensive credit register for natural persons, the HFCS remains indispensable for the analysis of household debt, especially for identifying risk concentrations and evaluating borrower resilience (see e.g. Albacete et al., 2018). The HFCS also serves as the main source of input for the Eurosystem's Distributional Wealth Accounts (DWA), which complement the national accounts with distributional information (https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/ecb_surveys/hfcs/html/index.en.html; <https://data.ecb.europa.eu/data/datasets/DWA/data-information>).

The analysis of the distribution of net wealth remains essential for any central bank. Wealth distribution determines how monetary policy is transmitted through interest rate changes, asset price movements and credit channels, as households with different balance sheet structures respond differently to policy measures. It also affects aggregate consumption and saving behavior, the buildup of financial vulnerabilities and the resilience of borrowers to shocks. From a financial stability perspective, we need to understand which households hold debt, which bear liquidity risk and which are exposed to asset price volatility

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to be able to assess systemic risk and design targeted macroprudential measures (Luetticke, 2021; Auclert, 2019; McKay and Wolf, 2023; Albacete and Lindner, 2017; Cima and Moreno, 2025; Flodén et al., 2021; Fessler and Schürz, 2018; Albacete et al., 2025b). Furthermore, in a monetary union, consistent distributional data are critical for comparing vulnerabilities across countries, identifying asymmetric effects of common policies, and informing euro area-wide coordination. This is particularly important because in Europe, institutional settings are highly heterogeneous: Differences in tax systems, welfare states, housing market regulations and credit market structures fundamentally shape wealth accumulation, portfolio composition and households' ability to absorb shocks. Without taking these differences into account, cross-country comparisons could be misleading and policy design less effective (Mandler et al., 2022; Brissimis and Skotida, 2008; Lee, 2009; Jondeau and Sahuc, 2008). Finally, detailed distributional evidence is also crucial for informing and calibrating contemporary macroeconomic models – such as heterogeneous-agent New Keynesian (HANK) frameworks – that explicitly incorporate household heterogeneity in wealth, income and portfolio structure to assess the effects and transmission of monetary and fiscal policy.

The fifth wave of the HFCS in Austria was conducted in 2023. It offers new insights into household finances during a period marked by sharp increases in interest rates and substantial changes in asset prices. This wave introduced detailed questions on crypto assets, enabling a first assessment of their ownership, motives for holding them and their role in household portfolios. The overall results confirm long-standing structural patterns in Austria's wealth distribution: high wealth inequality, the central role of owner-occupied housing and the low prevalence of debt. At the same time, they reveal important upward shifts in the upper part of the distribution, particularly in absolute net wealth levels.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows: Section 1 presents an overview of Austrian households' balance sheets, including the distribution of real assets, financial assets, debt and net wealth, as well as participation and conditional values for specific asset and liability categories. Section 2 examines the dual structure of Austria's household credit market, its socioeconomic drivers and its implications for financial stability, including a detailed analysis of mortgage holders' vulnerability. Section 3 discusses household saving behavior, while section 4 focuses on income and consumption patterns. Section 5 covers the role of inheritances in shaping the wealth distribution. Section 6 concludes.

For methodological details of the HFCS in Austria, see the accompanying HFCS – Methodological Notes (Albacete and Lindner, 2025) and the HFCS website (www.hfcs.at). The ECB published a euro area-wide report on the fourth HFCS wave (ECB, 2023a) as well as the corresponding methodological volume (ECB, 2023b) and will publish reports for the fifth wave as soon as all data are available. Access to the full dataset for all participating countries and waves can be requested from the ECB for research purposes. For an international comparison with Austria's closest economic and institutional peer, we refer to the Deutsche Bundesbank's latest HFCS report for Germany (Deutsche Bundesbank, 2025).

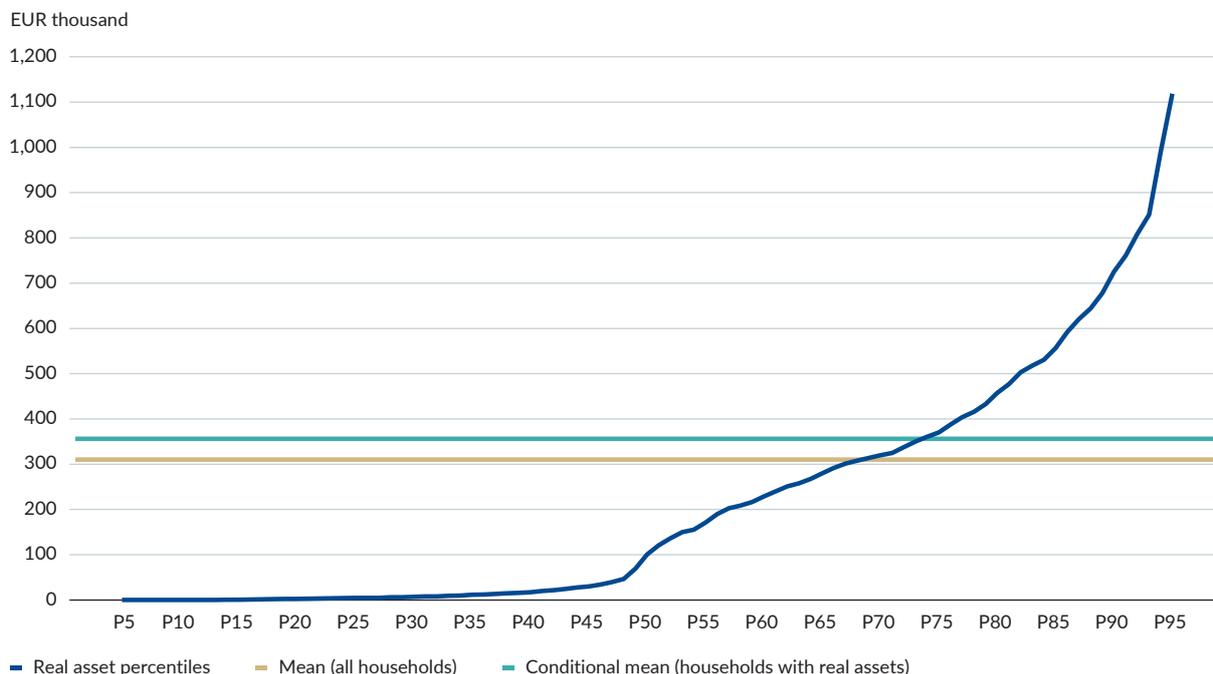
1 Households' balance sheets

This section summarizes Austrian households' balance sheets: It documents the distribution of real assets, financial assets, debt and net wealth; subsection 1.1 presents portfolio participation and conditional values, with crypto assets reported separately, while subsection 1.2 highlights measures of wealth inequality.

Understanding the distribution of real assets, financial assets and debt is essential for analyzing households' economic positions and their capacity to absorb shocks. While real and financial assets represent the resources households can draw upon, debt reflects their obligations. Taken together, these components determine net wealth. Net wealth is the key summary measure of a household's balance sheet and is calculated as real assets plus financial assets minus debt (see Fessler et al., 2010, and Fessler et al., 2012, for the definitions of wealth applied in the HFCS). Examining each component separately, and then in combination, provides insights into both the composition of, and the inequality in, household wealth.

Chart 1

Distribution of real assets



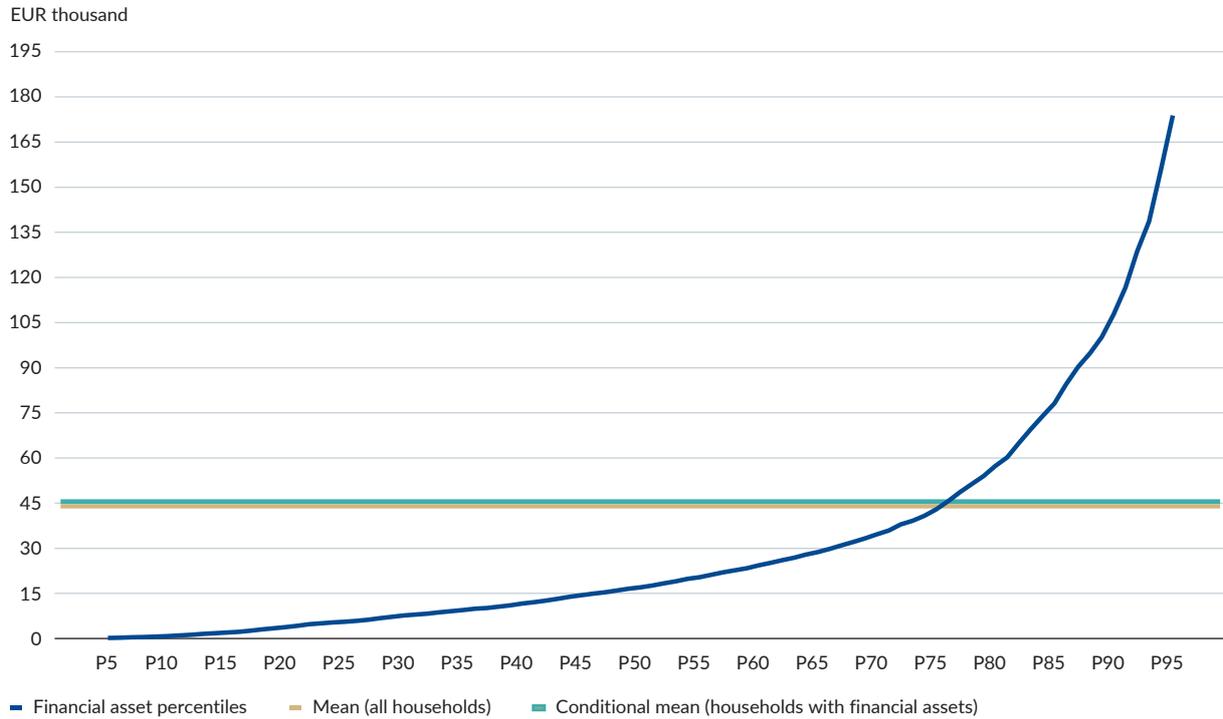
Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

Chart 1 shows the distribution of real assets from the 5th to the 95th percentile. Values below the 5th and above the 95th percentile are not displayed, as survey-based estimates at the extremes, particularly at the top, are subject to higher uncertainty due to the underrepresentation of very high-wealth households. For estimates for the top of the distribution, see the DWA figures below. The distribution is highly skewed, with values remaining very low up to around the 40th percentile and rising sharply thereafter. This reflects the fact that there are hardly any owner-occupiers in the lower half of the wealth distribution, while real assets in the upper half consist mainly of owner-occupied housing. Only in the top decile do other real assets such as additional real estate or investments in self-employed businesses and farms become more important, dominating at the very top. Median real assets amount to roughly EUR 100,000, while the mean (and conditional mean), driven by high holdings in the upper tail, is substantially higher at about EUR 310,000 (conditional at about EUR 360,000). Households in the top decile hold real assets exceeding EUR 700,000, with the top 5% surpassing EUR 1.1 million. This pattern underlines the central role of owner-occupied housing and other property in household wealth, with a significant concentration of other real estate and investment in self-employed businesses and farms among the wealthiest households.

Chart 2 shows the distribution of financial assets from the 5th to the 95th percentile. Compared with real assets, financial assets are more evenly distributed in Austria, but they still display a marked skew, with holdings increasing notably from around the 70th percentile upward. Median financial assets amount to roughly EUR 17,000, while the mean is more than twice as high (unconditional mean at about EUR 43,000; conditional mean at about EUR 45,000), reflecting the concentration of large holdings in the upper tail. In the top decile, financial assets exceed EUR 107,000, with the top 5% holding more than EUR 173,000. Savings deposits, life insurance products and savings plans with building and loan associations dominate portfolios across most of the distribution. Riskier instruments, such as shares, bonds, mutual funds and – newly included in this survey wave – crypto assets, are concentrated in the upper wealth brackets.

Chart 2

Distribution of financial assets

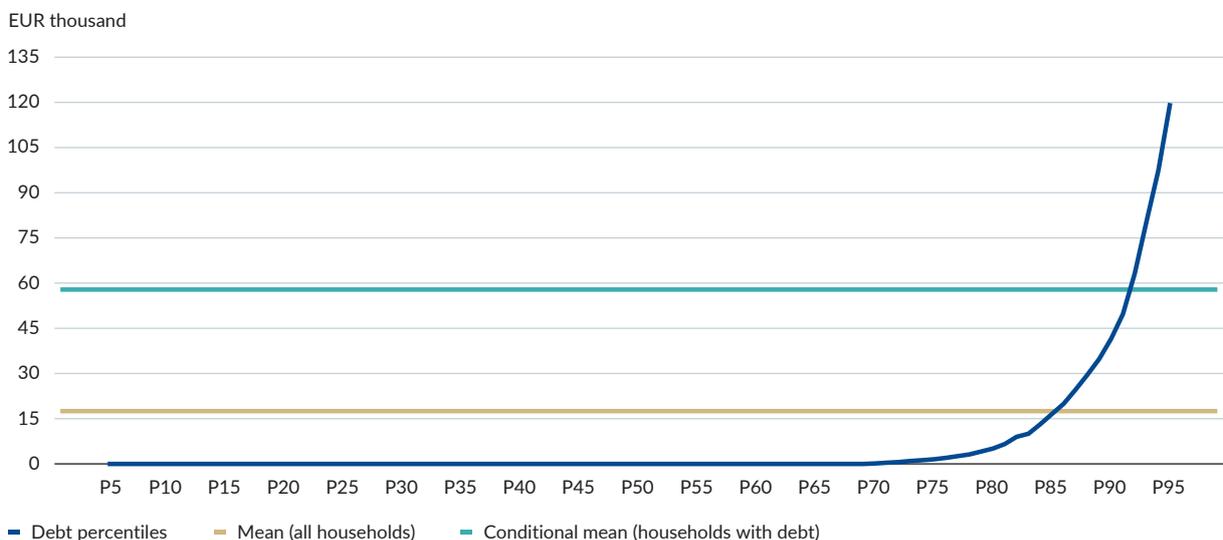


Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

Chart 3 shows the distribution of debt from the 5th to the 95th percentile. Debt is far less widespread than assets, with only about 30% of households holding any debt at all. As a result, values remain at zero for roughly 70% of households and rise only from around the 80th percentile upward, where debt exceeds EUR 5,000. Median debt across all households is zero, while the mean (including all households) is about EUR 17,000. The conditional mean – considering only indebted households – is around EUR 58,000. In

Chart 3

Distribution of debt



Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

the upper tail, debt holdings exceed EUR 100,000, driven mainly by relatively recent mortgage borrowing, whereas consumer credit and older mortgage contracts play a larger role in the lower part of the positive debt distribution. Overall, the concentration of debt in a relatively small group of households contrasts sharply with the broad ownership of real and financial assets. In most other European countries, the share of indebted households is substantially higher.

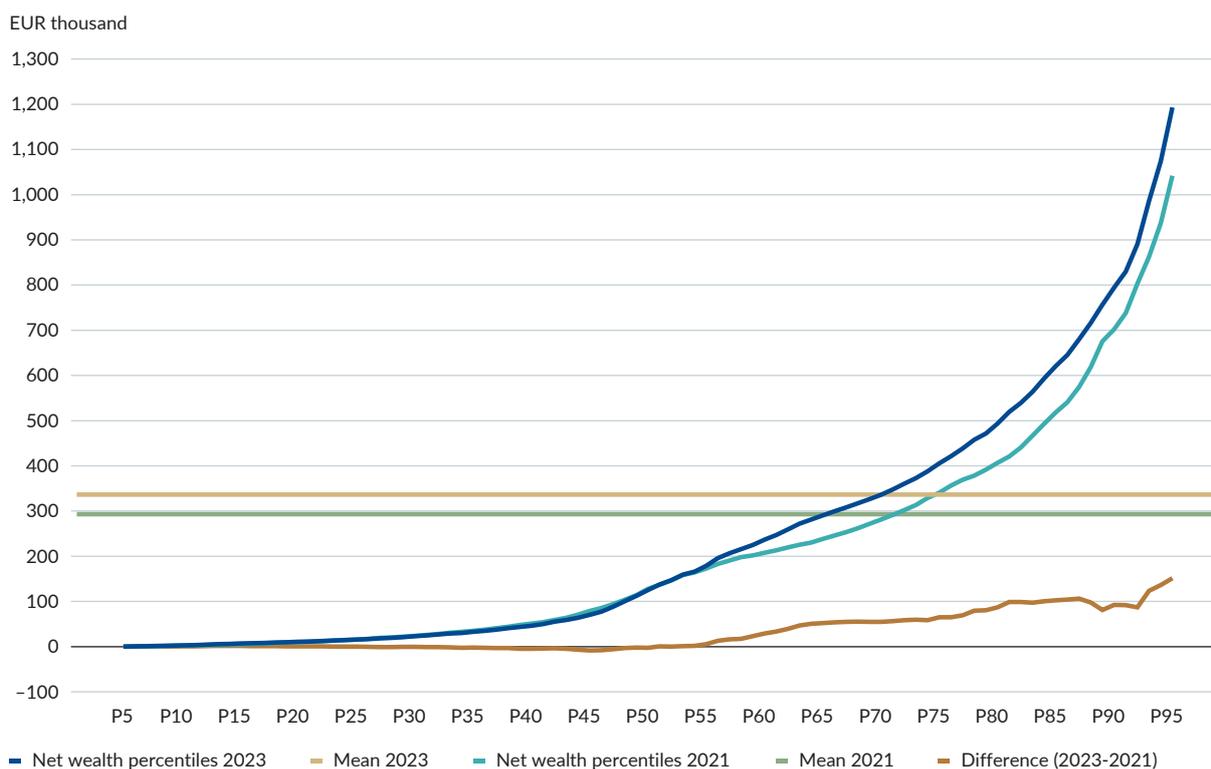
Chart 4 shows the distribution of net wealth – defined as the sum of real and financial assets minus debt – from the 5th to the 95th percentile for wave 5 (2023), alongside the corresponding distribution for wave 4 (2021). Net wealth is highly concentrated: Values remain below EUR 20,000 for more than a quarter of households (P25), and below about EUR 50,000 for about 40% of households. Then, in the upper half of the distribution, net wealth increases steeply. The median net wealth in 2023 is about EUR 125,000 (EUR 128,000 in 2021), while the mean reaches roughly EUR 336,000 (EUR 293,000 in 2021), driven by very high holdings at the top. The top 10% of households hold net wealth exceeding EUR 795,000 (EUR 700,000 in 2021), and the top 5% surpass EUR 1.2 million (EUR 1 million in 2021).

Compared to 2021, net wealth stayed almost the same in the lower half and increased somewhat in the upper half. In absolute terms, increases are most pronounced in the upper percentiles (small decrease of the median, +EUR 6,000 at P55, +EUR 30,000 at P60, +EUR 100,000 at P85 and +EUR 150,000 at P95); in relative terms, increases are stable between 10% and 20% across the full upper half of the distribution. The mean gain for the top decile exceeds EUR 100,000, while increases in the lower half of the distribution are more modest in both absolute and relative terms. These differences highlight the unequal pass-through of asset price growth to household balance sheets, with households in the lower wealth percentiles – often renters with fewer assets – benefiting much less from asset price increases.

Overall, the pattern underscores both the skewness of the wealth distribution and the role of asset price dynamics in widening absolute differences in net wealth between richer and poorer households.

Chart 4

Distribution of net wealth 2021 and 2023



Source: HFCS Austria 2021, HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

1.1 Portfolio composition

The components of net wealth can be analyzed in detail at the level of their subcomponents. First, we determine household participation, i.e. the share of households that hold a specific asset or liability. Second, we compute the conditional median and the conditional mean for households reporting this component. The median divides a distribution into two halves, while the arithmetic mean is the value that would result for every household owning such an item if the entire volume of wealth were equally distributed. The median is a statistically robust measure, while the mean is not. The mean-to-median ratio is used as an indicator of the skewness of the distribution within each wealth component.

Table 1 provides an overview of the key components of net wealth. All wealth components have a positively skewed distribution, with the mean exceeding the median. Around 48.2% of households own their main residence at least partially. For owner households, the median value is about EUR 318,000, while the mean amounts to around EUR 437,000, making the main residence the single most important asset in terms of volume. 80.5% of households own vehicles, with a median value of EUR 12,000. About 18% of households own other valuables, such as gold, works of art, jewelry or collections, with a median of EUR 5,000. Roughly 11.9% of households own other real estate, with a median value of EUR 200,000 and a mean of EUR 392,000. Investments in self-employment businesses (including farms) are reported by 5.2% of households, with a high conditional mean of around EUR 711,000, reflecting a concentration of such assets at the top.

Sight accounts remain nearly universal (99.7%), though their median balance is only EUR 1,600. Savings accounts, held by 84.1% of households, have a median of EUR 15,200 and a mean of EUR 30,300. Savings plans with building and loan associations (31% participation) and life insurance contracts (30.4%) have

Table 1

Components of net wealth

| | Participation | Conditional median | Conditional mean | Mean-to-median ratio |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| | % | EUR thousand | | % |
| Real assets | | | | |
| Vehicles | 80.5 | 12.0 | 17.6 | 1.5 |
| Main residence | 48.2 | 317.6 | 437.2 | 1.4 |
| Other valuables | 18.0 | 5.0 | 10.1 | 2.0 |
| Other real estate property | 11.9 | 200.0 | 392.4 | 2.0 |
| Investment in self employment-business (incl. farms) | 5.2 | 196.8 | 710.5 | 3.6 |
| Financial assets | | | | |
| Sight accounts | 99.7 | 1.6 | 5.1 | 3.2 |
| Savings accounts | 84.1 | 15.2 | 30.3 | 2.0 |
| Savings plan with building and loan associations | 31.0 | 4.5 | 6.4 | 1.4 |
| Life insurance contracts | 30.4 | 12.0 | 18.4 | 1.5 |
| Voluntary private pension plans | 6.1 | 12.0 | 24.8 | 2.1 |
| Mutual funds | 11.6 | 20.6 | 46.7 | 2.3 |
| Money owed to households | 5.2 | 1.5 | 6.1 | 4.1 |
| Stocks | 6.4 | 16.7 | 47.0 | 2.8 |
| Bonds | 3.2 | 20.9 | 64.4 | 3.1 |
| Crypto assets | 3.9 | 3.0 | 5.4 | 1.8 |
| Other financial assets | 3.2 | 13.0 | 24.9 | 1.9 |
| Debt | | | | |
| Collateralized debt | 15.1 | 68.4 | 104.3 | 1.5 |
| Main residence | 14.0 | 68.6 | 103.6 | 1.5 |
| Other real estate property | 1.3 | 61.2 | 90.7 | 1.5 |
| Uncollateralized debt | 18.0 | 2.7 | 10.0 | 3.7 |
| Overdrafts | 10.5 | 1.2 | 2.1 | 1.7 |
| Uncollateralized loans | 9.7 | 7.1 | 16.0 | 2.3 |
| Loans from family and friends | 4.0 | 3.2 | 6.9 | 2.2 |
| Outstanding balance on credit cards | 2.2 | 0.8 | 1.1 | 1.4 |

Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

median values of EUR 4,500 and EUR 12,000, respectively. Voluntary private pension plans are held by 6.1% of households, with a median value of EUR 12,000. Mutual funds are owned by 11.6% of households, with a median value of EUR 20,600 and a mean of EUR 46,700. Around 6.4% hold stocks and 3.2% hold bonds, both with substantially higher means than medians, indicating a concentration among wealthier households. Crypto assets, which were for the first time included in the latest HFCS wave (see also box 1), are held by 3.9% of households, with a median value of EUR 3,000. Other financial assets are reported by 3.2% of households, with a median of EUR 13,000.

On the liabilities side, 15.1% of households have collateralized debt, mainly in the form of mortgage loans on their main residence (14%). The median value of main residence debt is EUR 68,600, while the mean amounts to EUR 103,600. Loans collateralized by other real estate property are rare (1.3%), but their average size is also relatively large (mean EUR 90,700). Uncollateralized debt is held by 18% of households, with a median of EUR 2,700 and a strongly skewed distribution (mean-to-median ratio 3.7). Overdrafts on accounts (10.5%) have a median of EUR 1,200, while uncollateralized loans (9.7%) have a median of EUR 7,100. Loans from friends and family (4%) and credit card balances (2.2%) also remain relatively minor in volume, with low median and mean values. Note, however, that relative to available income and financial assets, the fairly small amounts of uncollateralized debt are often more burdensome for households than the rather large absolute amounts of mortgage debt (see also section 2). Taken together, these figures highlight the predominance of housing assets in household portfolios, a pattern that becomes even clearer when looking at homeownership rates across the wealth and income distributions.

Box 1

Crypto assets in Austrian household balance sheets

The 2023 HFCS wave was the first one in Austria to collect comprehensive information on households' crypto asset holdings. While a smaller pre-survey had tested the collection of such data (see Fessler and Weber, 2024), the 2023 HFCS was the first full-scale measurement within the household balance sheet framework. The decision to incorporate these data reflects the growing economic relevance of crypto assets and the need for consistent monitoring across asset categories. This step was supported by the Crypto-Asset Monitoring Expert Group (CAMEG), which coordinates data needs and methodological standards for integrating digital assets into economic statistics.

Crypto assets differ from conventional financial assets in several respects. They are digital representations of a value or of a right that is able to be transferred and stored electronically using distributed ledger technology or similar technology (Regulation - 2023/1114 - EN - EUR-Lex), their market value often exhibits high price volatility, and they can take a considerable variety of forms (e.g. non-backed crypto assets like Bitcoin or Ether, stablecoins, which are typically pegged to a currency, or tokens with specific functions). Including them in the HFCS allows us to assess their distribution across households, their role in portfolio composition, and their interaction with socioeconomic factors such as income and wealth or occupation, education and age.

First results indicate that about 3.9% of Austrian households own crypto assets. Participation is thus lower than for any major conventional financial asset but comparable to smaller categories such as bonds. Ownership is concentrated among younger households (8% under 30), men (5.4% vs. 2.9% for women), highly educated people (7.6% vs. 0.3% for low education), the self-employed (13.3%), and those living in urban areas.

Most holders first purchased crypto assets between 2019 and 2021, with a peak in 2020. The majority (75%) bought assets via online exchanges, with smaller shares using custodial services provided by banks or fintechs. Bitcoin is held by around 80% of crypto asset-owning households, and Ether by about 40%.

Median crypto asset holdings amount to EUR 3,000, rising to EUR 20,000 at the 95th percentile. In most cases, crypto assets represent less than 20% of total financial assets. The main motivation for ownership provided by respondents is investment/speculation (40%), curiosity (24%) and trend participation/FOMO (16%), while only few cited payment-related uses.

Portfolio analysis shows that crypto assets complement traditional risk assets. Among crypto holders, risk asset participation rises from 16.6% (excluding crypto) to 39.0% (including crypto). For many lower-wealth households, crypto represents their primary or sole risk asset exposure.

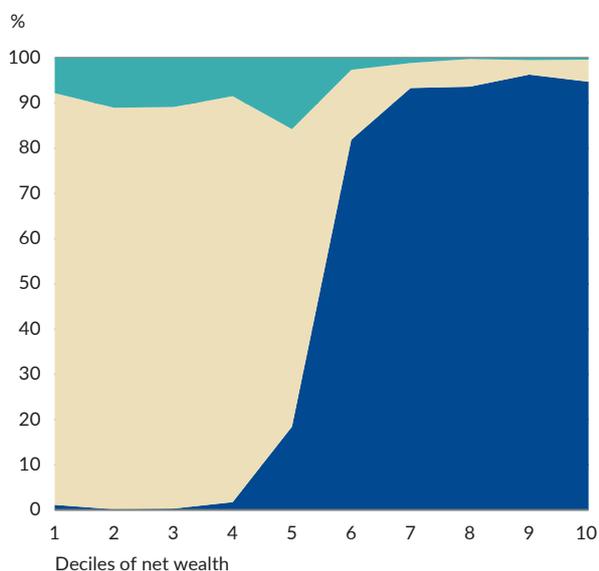
For more detailed results – including the sociodemographic profile of owners, acquisition channels, portfolio composition and international comparison – see Fessler and Weber (2025).

Chart 5 illustrates the close link between homeownership and households' position in the wealth and income distributions. Housing, in particular ownership of the main residence, is the single most important component of Austrian household portfolios, and its distribution is highly unequal. Homeownership is concentrated in the upper half of the wealth distribution; it is virtually nonexistent among the bottom deciles and increases steeply starting from the 5th decile onward. By contrast, renting is the dominant tenure form among households in the lower half of the wealth distribution². A small share of households live in dwellings free of charge, mostly either because they have already transferred ownership to their children while continuing to live in the property, or because they are younger households that live in housing owned by their parents.

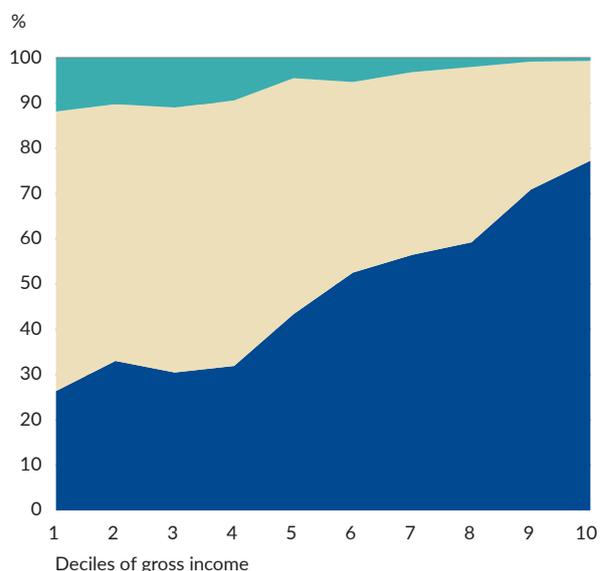
Chart 5

Housing status

Housing status across net wealth deciles



Housing status across gross income deciles



■ (Partly) owned ■ Rented ■ Free use

Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

² Note, however, that this pattern is not a given: Under standard assumptions of perfect capital markets, no borrowing constraints, and equal risk-adjusted returns, owning and renting should be equivalent in present-value terms, implying no systematic relationship between wealth and the probability of homeownership.

When we investigate income deciles rather than wealth deciles, the gradient is noticeably flatter. Even in the lower income deciles, around one-quarter to one-third of households own their main residence, while ownership rises only gradually with income. This contrast underlines that housing status is more strongly correlated with wealth rather than current income (not counting the imputed rent as income). In Austria, homeownership is often achieved through intergenerational transfers rather than only through households' own saving out of current income. This mechanism reinforces the dominance of housing in portfolios and contributes to the persistence of wealth inequality.

The strong role of housing is further reflected in differences by occupational status. Table 2 provides a complementary perspective by showing portfolio composition across occupational status of the financially knowledgeable person. Strikingly, self-employed households (roughly EUR 900,000) and farmers (roughly EUR 1.5 million) hold by far the highest average real assets and also relatively large financial assets. Their debt levels are higher than those of most other groups but still small relative to their asset holdings, leaving them with net wealth above EUR 1 million. By contrast, blue-collar workers display the lowest average levels of both real and financial assets, resulting in average net wealth below EUR 220,000. White-collar workers and civil servants are in between, with the latter showing somewhat higher financial assets and lower debt than the former, which translates into higher net wealth. Pensioner households have already paid down most of their debt and hold sizable real and even financial assets, thus maintaining average net wealth above EUR 300,000.

Overall, these figures underline that portfolio composition and balance sheet strength are closely linked to occupational status. Households with access to self-employment opportunities accumulate markedly larger stocks of real assets, while wage-earner households remain more constrained, reflecting both differences in income trajectories and access to other asset-building channels.

Table 2

Mean components of net wealth across occupations

| | Real assets | + Financial assets | - Debt | = Net wealth |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------|--------------|
| | EUR thousand | | | |
| Self-employed | 868.1 | 111.9 | 30.8 | 949.2 |
| (Skilled) blue-collar worker | 221.3 | 22.9 | 25.3 | 218.9 |
| White-collar worker | 314.8 | 47.0 | 32.1 | 329.7 |
| Civil servant | 354.4 | 52.2 | 16.9 | 389.6 |
| Farmer | 1531.1 | 85.3 | 32.0 | 1584.4 |
| Pensioner | 264.5 | 43.7 | 4.1 | 304.2 |
| Unemployed | 62.7 | 8.6 | 4.9 | 66.4 |
| Other | 366.6 | 27.7 | 13.1 | 381.2 |

Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

Chart 6 highlights how the role of different wealth components shifts across the distribution. In the bottom half, households typically hold only modest financial buffers and durable goods, and uncollateralized consumer debt often is a large burden relative to these households' assets. Wealth here serves mainly a precautionary function, used for covering emergencies or short-term consumption needs rather than enabling asset accumulation. From the median up to around the 90th percentile, balance sheets are dominated by owner-occupied housing. In this segment, wealth is primarily tied to the use function of housing: It provides shelter and a flow of non-cash income through imputed rent. Often, entry into this position depends less on active saving than on intergenerational transfers, underlining the central role of inheritances and family support. Above the 90th percentile, portfolios broaden substantially. Additional

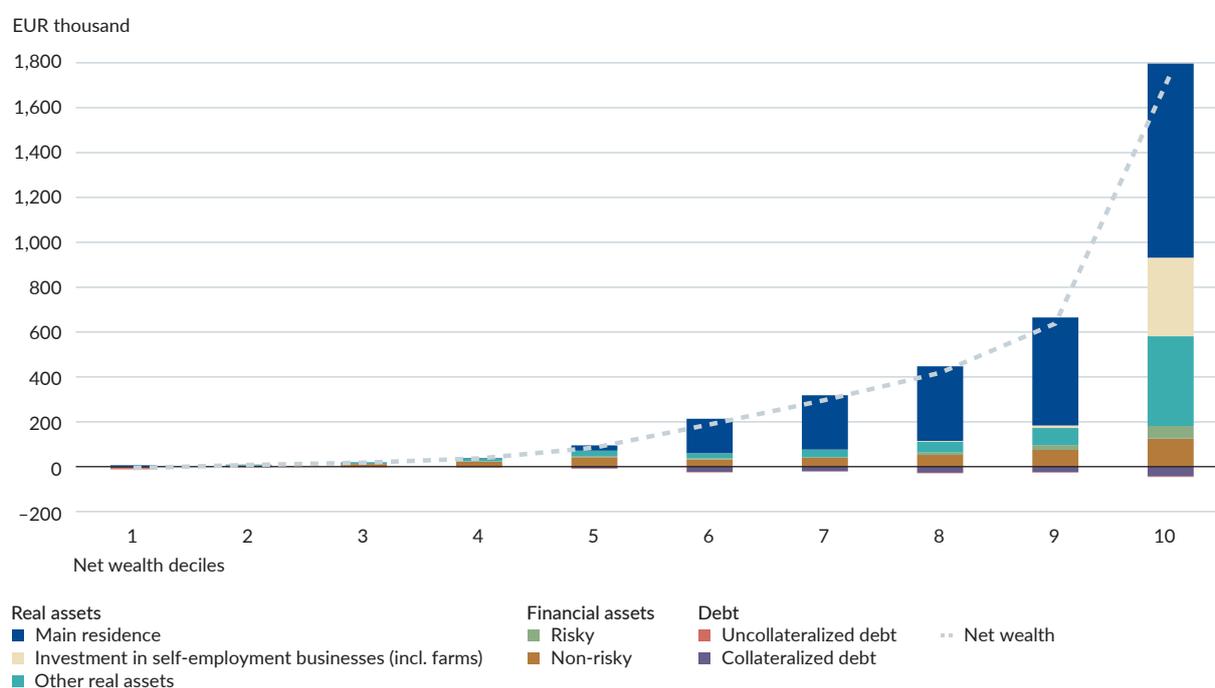
real estate, business assets and risky financial instruments (stocks, bonds, mutual funds and crypto assets) become increasingly important, and wealth assumes a distinct capital function, generating cash income and capital gains. At this level, debt only plays a marginal role compared to the scale of assets held (see Fessler and Schürz, 2022; Fessler and Schürz, 2023).

Chart 6 shows how wealth in Austria fulfills very different roles depending on households' position in the distribution: from providing a minimal safety net at the bottom, to securing housing (non-cash income from imputed rent), to enabling accumulation and (cash) capital income at the very top.

While debt only plays a limited role in aggregate, its distribution across households is highly uneven – a pattern that will be analyzed in more detail in section 2.

Chart 6

Mean components of wealth across net wealth deciles



Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

1.2 Inequality

Table 3 presents key measures of wealth inequality across all five Austrian HFCS waves (2010–2023). Relative inequality in net wealth has remained remarkably stable over time. The Gini coefficient has hovered consistently around 0.7, and percentile ratios such as P75/P25 and P90/P10 show only minor fluctuations. Top wealth shares likewise exhibit strong persistence: The top 10% of households continue to hold just above 50% of total net wealth, while the bottom 50% hold about 4%. In other words, the overall structure of the wealth distribution in Austria has not undergone major shifts over the past decade.

However, such stability in relative measures should not be interpreted as implying unchanged economic distances. While percentile ratios remain stable, absolute gaps have widened, as reflected in the growing mean-to-median differences (see chart 7). Moreover, survey data such as the HFCS face inherent limitations in capturing the very top of the wealth distribution, since the wealthiest households are typically underrepresented and no oversampling of high-wealth individuals is applied in Austria. To address this gap and improve the measurement of top-end concentration, the Eurosystem has developed the Distri-

Table 3

Inequality measures 2010-2023

| | | 2010 | | 2014 | | 2017 | | 2021 | | 2023 | |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| | | Gross wealth | Net wealth |
| Inequality measures | Gini coefficient | 0.73 | 0.76 | 0.71 | 0.73 | 0.71 | 0.73 | 0.68 | 0.69 | 0.69 | 0.70 |
| | P75/P25 | 22.4 | 24.3 | 27.0 | 28.6 | 21.7 | 21.6 | 20.9 | 21.7 | 25.2 | 25.9 |
| | P90/median | 6.2 | 7.1 | 5.4 | 6.0 | 5.7 | 6.3 | 5.2 | 5.5 | 6.0 | 6.4 |
| | P90/P10 | 233.7 | 581.1 | 251.8 | 521.2 | 171.9 | 262.0 | 222.4 | 297.8 | 188.3 | 276.7 |
| % | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Top shares | Top 1% | 21.7 | 22.9 | 23.9 | 25.4 | 21.4 | 22.6 | 15.3 | 16.3 | 16.2 | 16.8 |
| | Top 5% | 45.5 | 47.6 | 41.6 | 43.4 | 41.2 | 43.1 | 36.0 | 37.1 | 36.4 | 37.2 |
| | Top 10% | 58.8 | 61.1 | 53.5 | 55.5 | 54.2 | 56.4 | 50.3 | 51.5 | 50.5 | 51.4 |
| | Top 20% | 74.4 | 76.6 | 70.0 | 72.1 | 70.9 | 72.8 | 68.6 | 69.7 | 69.1 | 70.1 |
| | Bottom 50% | 3.9 | 2.8 | 4.0 | 3.2 | 4.3 | 3.6 | 4.9 | 4.6 | 4.1 | 3.8 |

Note: The Gini coefficient may take a value greater than 1 if the data contain negative values.

Source: HFCS Austria 2010, HFCS Austria 2014, HFCS Austria 2017, HFCS Austria 2021, HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

butional Wealth Accounts (DWA), which integrate HFCS microdata with macroeconomic aggregates from the national accounts.

The DWA provide additional evidence on the evolution of absolute differences (see also Kennickell et al., 2021; Andreasch and Lindner, 2016; ECB, 2023c). Chart 7 (left panel) shows that in Austria, mean net wealth has increased more strongly than the median over the past decade, indicating a widening in absolute wealth gaps even as relative measures have remained unchanged. This divergence reflects the different accumulation of wealth at the upper end of the distribution, where gains in asset values, particularly real estate and business wealth, have been concentrated. As these absolute gaps widen, households' perceptions of their own economic position increasingly depend not only on income flows but also on their relative standing in the wealth distribution. Perceptions of one's relative position in the wealth distribution also shape preferences and attitudes toward redistribution, with individuals who see themselves as wealthier showing systematically lower support for redistributive policies (Albacete et al., 2025a).

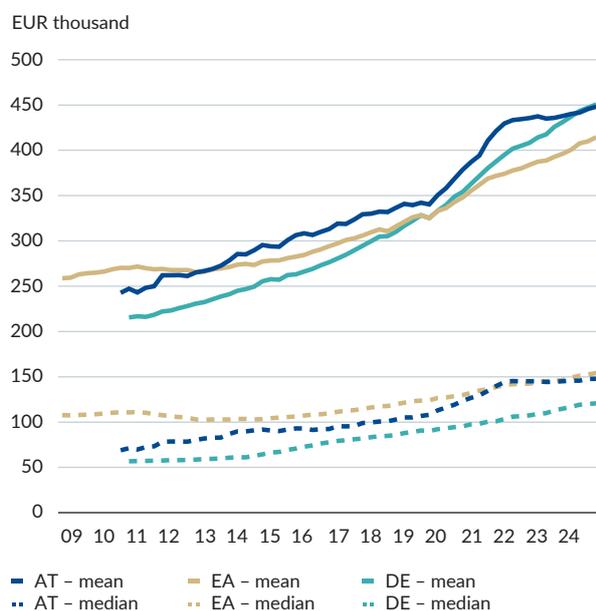
The right panel of chart 7 confirms that traditional inequality indicators such as the Gini coefficient and top wealth shares have remained remarkably stable not only in Austria but also in Germany and the euro area. This apparent stability should not be interpreted as an absence of change, but rather as a feature of ratio-based measures, which mask shifts in absolute levels. Across all countries, the DWA show that while relative inequality is structurally persistent, the absolute distance between high-wealth and middle-wealth households has continued to grow.

Measured wealth inequality in Austria appears high by international comparison, but this must be interpreted within the broader institutional framework. Also, there are many other reasons why international comparisons are problematic (Fessler and Schürz, 2013). Private net wealth captures only part of households' total economic resources and excludes the extensive public provisions of the welfare state, such as pension entitlements, healthcare and unemployment protection. In Austria, the social security system substitutes private precaution in the lower half of the distribution, while housing and ownership policies reinforce the role of real estate for middle-wealth households. At the top, tax rules, subsidies and crisis interventions tend to maintain or even increase existing wealth levels. As a result, cross-country rankings based solely on private wealth can be misleading: they reflect differences in institutional design rather than pure disparities in economic well-being (Fessler and Schürz, 2018).

Chart 7

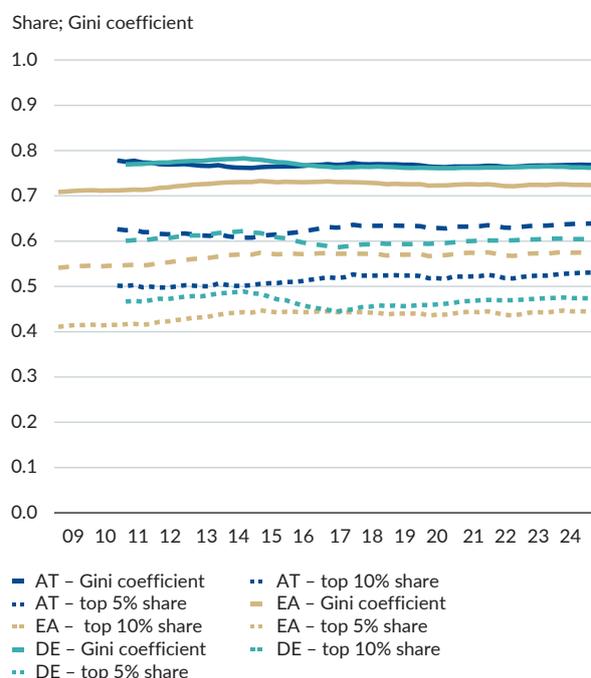
Distributional wealth accounts

Mean and median net wealth



Source: DWA 2025, ECB.

Inequality indicators



Source: DWA 2025, ECB.

2 Household indebtedness

We organize the analysis of household indebtedness by collateralized and uncollateralized debt. Subsection 2.1 explores the socioeconomic and institutional factors showing how differences in wealth, income and homeownership status shape the prevalence of different forms of debt among different households. Subsection 2.2 assesses the implications for financial stability, focusing on the vulnerability of mortgage holders; to this end, we use established risk indicators such as debt service-to-income and loan-to-value ratios.

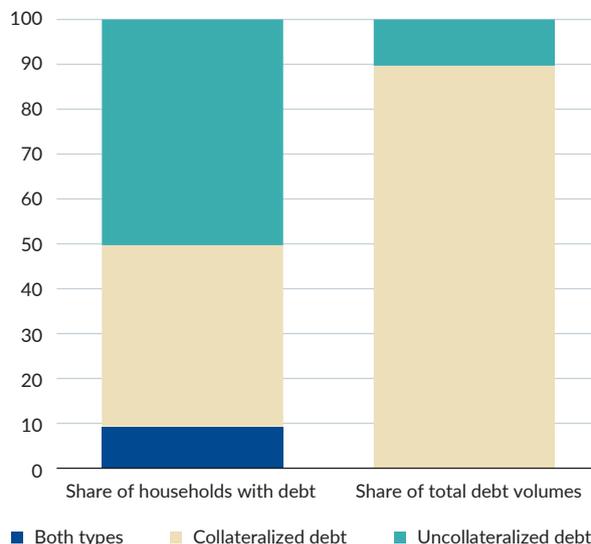
2.1 Socioeconomic and institutional factors

In Austria, comparatively few households hold debt (30%). Debt holders can be split into two almost equally sized groups: those holding collateralized loans (i.e. loans that are secured by real estate property) and those holding uncollateralized (unsecured) loans, with very few households holding both types of debt (see chart 8, left bar). As the two types of loans differ substantially in usual loan sizes – with collateralized debt being far larger than uncollateralized debt (see table 1) – collateralized debt accounts for nearly 90% of the total household debt volume (see chart 8, right bar).

Chart 8

The dual structure of household lending in Austria: segmentation by debt collateralization and volume concentration

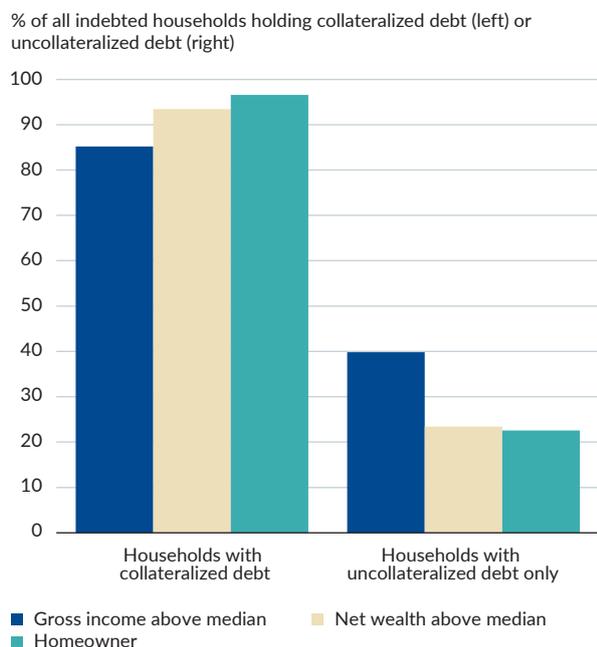
% of all households with debt (left) and % of total debt volumes (right)



Source: OeNB, HFCS 2023.

Chart 9

Characteristics of indebted households by debt collateralization



Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

When comparing households with collateralized debt (who make up about half of all indebted households) with those holding only unsecured debt (the remaining half), it becomes clear that these groups differ most in terms of net wealth, and also substantially in income. Collateralized debt is concentrated among households in the upper part of the income and wealth distribution, while uncollateralized debt is more common among those in the lower half (see chart 9).

Owing to their position in the income and wealth distribution, these groups also differ in terms of portfolio structure. Households with collateralized debt primarily use loans to finance real estate purchases, typically to live in owner-occupied housing or to invest in property. They use debt as a tool for wealth accumulation. Their comparatively strong wealth position means that they generally can provide collateral, which facilitates access to secured credit. The high homeownership rate also reflects all this: 97% of all households with collateralized debt are homeowners, as shown by the turquoise

bar in chart 9. The remaining households in this group hold collateralized debt to purchase or renovate other real estate properties, such as second homes or rental apartments.

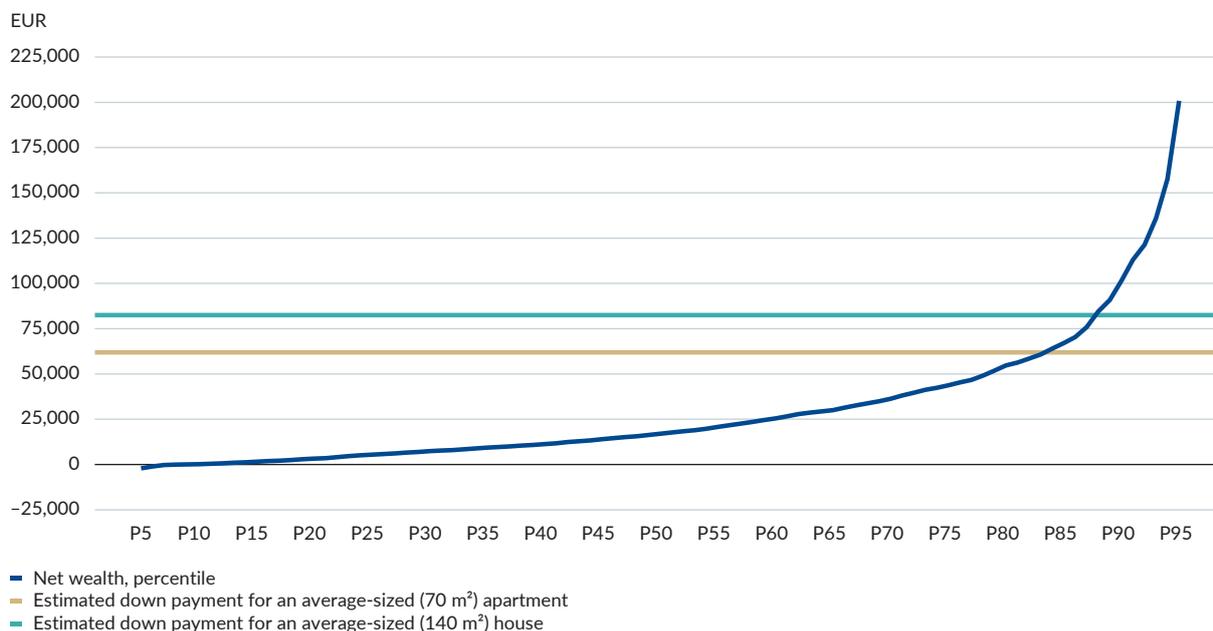
In contrast, households with only uncollateralized debt primarily use loans to cover consumption expenses, including both everyday goods and longer-lasting items such as cars. A small share of households report using such debt for home renovations, cooperative housing contributions or even education. Reflecting their limited financial means, only 23% of these households are homeowners; most are renters (71%), while a minority reside in dwellings without paying rent (6%).

The sharp divide between households holding collateralized and those with uncollateralized debt in terms of both net wealth and housing status is rooted in the strong interlinkage between wealth and housing in Austria (Fessler et al., 2023). Homeownership is the primary channel of asset accumulation for households in the upper part of the wealth distribution. Among the wealthiest half of Austrian households, 92% are homeowners; in the bottom half, the figure is just 4%. This pattern is persistent and has become more pronounced over time: In 2010, these shares were 87% and 9%, respectively.

Transitioning from renting to owning with the help of collateralized debt is far from straightforward. In addition to a sufficiently high and stable income, households must also possess a minimum level of wealth to afford the necessary down payment. In Austria, only around 12% of renters could afford the minimum capital required for purchasing an average-sized house, and approximately 16% for a standard-sized apartment (see chart 10).

In many cases, intergenerational transfers help bridge this financing gap by supplementing a household's own resources. In fact, households with collateralized loans are significantly more likely to have received an inheritance or gift (51% versus 33%), and among those who have, the amounts (median value) tend to be substantially higher compared to households who only have unsecured debt (EUR 79,900 versus EUR 34,200). This suggests that intergenerational transfers, when combined with collateralized debt,

Net wealth of renters and estimated down payment for a home, 2023



Note: The estimated down payment is 20% of the property purchase price, including 10% for additional transaction costs. The average purchase price for houses and apartments for 2023 is based on data from Statistics Austria (2024), while the average square meter size is derived from the HFCS (median values). The group of renters includes rent-free occupants.

Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB, Statistics Austria.

Table 4

Borrowing conditions and financial characteristics of households by debt collateralization

| | Households with collateralized debt | Households with uncollateralized debt only |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| | % | |
| Current interest rate, cond. median | 2.8 | 4.8 |
| Share of households | | |
| with repayment difficulties | 2.0 | 19.1 |
| with negative net wealth | 0.7 | 25.1 |
| with overdraft and/or credit card debt | 12.5 | 56.6 |
| that are credit constrained | 1.8 | 15.5 |

Note: Interest rates are (loan-volume) weighted interest rates in case of more than one loan. A household has repayment difficulties if it missed one or more loan payments due to financial difficulties in the 12 months preceding the interview. A household is credit constrained if it applied for a loan and did not receive the loan (or not the full required amount) or did not apply for a loan due to perceived credit constraints (within the last three years).

Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

usually facilitate homeownership. However, since transfers are unequally distributed and more commonly received by wealthier households (Fessler and Schürz, 2018), this mechanism seldom reaches households with constrained prospects for upward mobility.

As a result, the fact that households get access to collateralized debt because they have received an inheritance or gift that makes it possible for them to provide a down payment may reinforce existing inequalities: It offers access to owner-occupied housing – and thus opportunities for increased savings and wealth building – primarily to already wealthier households. Also, borrowing conditions are less favorable for households that have to rely on uncollateralized debt. On average, households with uncollateralized debt pay interest rates of 4.8%, compared to 2.8% for those with collateralized debt (see table 4). However, these figures likely

understate the true cost of borrowing in the uncollateralized segment, as the survey does not collect interest rate data for overdrafts – a form of short-term debt that typically carries substantially higher rates.³ Notably, for nearly 57% of households only holding uncollateralized debt, overdraft facilities are the only type of debt.

These financial constraints are further reflected in the overall profile of this borrower group. A quarter of them have negative net wealth (compared to less than 1% among those with collateralized loans), suggesting an absence of financial buffers and limited means to improve their economic position. Nearly one in five report having missed one or more loan payments in the past 12 months due to financial difficulties, while close to 16% are credit constrained – either because they were denied credit or chose not to apply due to anticipated rejection. These factors not only signal that households have faced financial stress but also restricted access to future borrowing, which further limits their economic mobility.

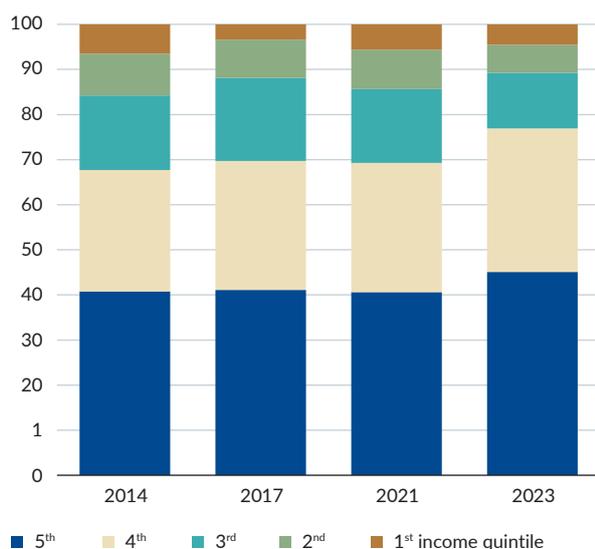
2.2 Collateralized debt and financial stability

From a financial stability perspective, the structural segmentation of household debt into collateralized and uncollateralized forms has two main implications. First, in Austria, households' uncollateralized debt is a limited direct risk to lenders because it accounts for less than 10% of total household debt and is fragmented into small loan amounts (see table 1). Macroprudential surveillance can therefore focus on just one-half of all borrowing households – those with collateralized loans – since these loans account for the vast majority of credit exposures. Second, as shown in subsection 2.1, these borrowers are concentrated in the upper parts of the income and wealth distribution, implying a relatively resilient risk profile that is unlikely to shift significantly given the persistent differences between households holding collateralized debt and those with uncollateralized debt.

Chart 11

Position of mortgage holders in the income distribution

Percentage share of mortgage holders in the respective income quintile



Note: Quintiles are based on households' total yearly gross income.

Source: HFCS Austria (several waves), OeNB.

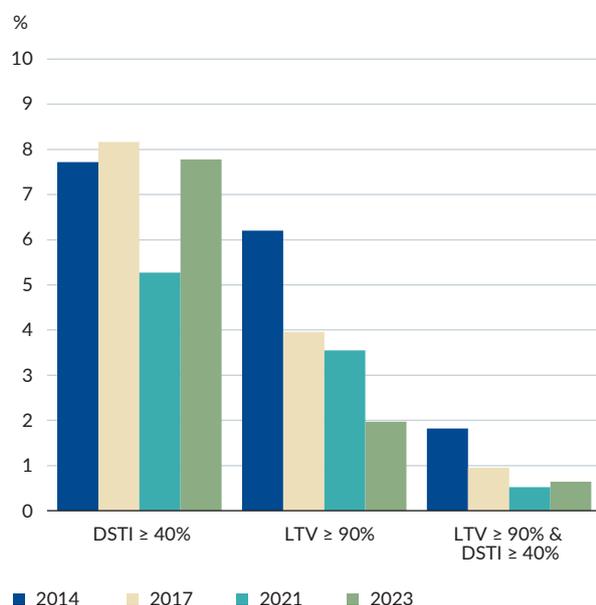
Still, high income alone does not guarantee low credit risk. Even among relatively affluent borrowers, excessive leverage or rising repayment burdens can give rise to vulnerabilities – especially in periods of rapid interest rate increases. Against this backdrop, this subsection examines the vulnerability of mortgage holders over a ten-year horizon, drawing on the last four waves of the HFCS and applying established indicators from the financial stability literature. Although the focus is exclusively on households with collateralized loans, the analysis includes any additional uncollateralized debt they may hold, as borrower vulnerability depends on a household's full debt portfolio.

When analyzing credit risk, two dimensions are critical: debt service to income and loan to value (see also Albacete et al., 2016). The first one is borrowers' repayment capacity, i.e. their ability to service monthly loan payments. While subsection 2.1 has shown that mortgage holders are largely part of the upper half of the income distribution, chart 11

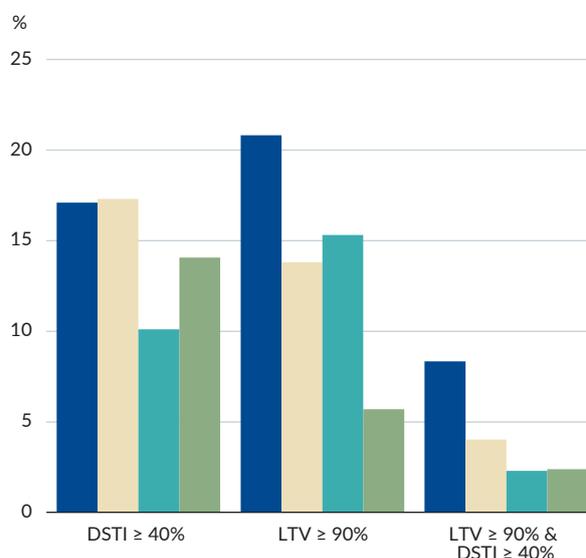
³ The HFCS likely underreports high-cost credit, as it does not explicitly ask about borrowing through retailers or online providers (e.g. point-of-sale installment plans), leading to a further underestimation of the true cost of uncollateralized debt.

Vulnerable mortgage holders and their debt

Share of vulnerable mortgage holders



Share of total mortgage debt held by vulnerable mortgage holders



Note: DSTI (debt service to income) is defined as the monthly debt service payments of a household with mortgage debt (including payments for non-mortgage debt and payments into a repayment vehicle in bullet loans) as a percentage of a household's monthly net income; LTV (loan to value) is defined as the current outstanding amount of mortgages on a household's main residence (HMR) as a percentage of the current value of the HMR.

Source: HFCS Austria (several waves), OeNB.

illustrates that this concentration has increased moderately over time. In 2023, 45% of mortgage holders belonged to the top income quintile, up from 40% in 2014. A complementary indicator is the debt service-to-income ratio (DSTI), which indicates what proportion of a household's net income is used to cover all scheduled loan repayments. As to the threshold above which households are considered financially stretched, a common value in the literature is 40%. In 2023, slightly less than 8% of mortgage holders exceeded this threshold – an increase of 2.5 percentage points compared to 2021 (see chart 12, left). This rise likely reflects the sharp increase in interest rates during that period, particularly for borrowers with variable rate loans, who made up 38% of all mortgage holders in 2023. Despite the uptick in high DSTI cases, there are still only limited signs of repayment stress. Only 2% of mortgage holders reported having missed one or more payments in the previous 12 months due to financial difficulties, down from 4.7% in 2021. This suggests that, overall, repayment capacity has remained robust despite tighter credit conditions.

The second dimension is the loan-to-value (LTV) ratio, which measures the size of the mortgage relative to the value of the underlying collateral. In the event of default, the LTV is a key determinant of credit risk, as losses for the lender arise only if the outstanding debt exceeds the collateral's market value. If, by contrast, the property is worth more than the remaining loan, it can typically be sold – either by the borrower or the bank – to fully cover the outstanding balance. Against this background, policymakers are particularly concerned by high LTV ratios. In Austria, however, the share of mortgage holders with an LTV of 90% or above is low – around 2% – and has declined over time (chart 12).

While the LTV ratio is critical for loss severity, it is not the sole driver of credit risk. Particularly relevant is the group of mortgage holders who simultaneously exceed both the 90% LTV and 40% DSTI thresholds. In Austria's full recourse system, borrowers remain liable for their entire loan, even if the collateral value falls short. This legal framework allows lenders to claim not only the pledged collateral but also other

assets and future income, making it unlikely that households would default solely due to negative equity. Instead, significant credit risk arises when high leverage is paired with limited repayment capacity. Accordingly, elevated default risk tends to arise when households exceed both the LTV and DSTI thresholds. In Austria, however, the share of households exceeding both limits has remained below 1% in 2023 and has followed a declining trend over the past decade, indicating a relatively low risk from this borrower segment.

To complement this assessment, the right panel in chart 12 also reports the share of total outstanding mortgage debt held by borrowers in each of the three vulnerable groups. While both high-DSTI and high-LTV borrowers have seen a decline in their debt shares over time, the primary focus lies on those who meet both risk criteria. In 2023, this group accounted for only 2.5% of total outstanding mortgage debt. Even under the extreme and unlikely assumption that none of this debt would be recoverable, potential losses would remain contained. Once adjusted for the total asset holdings of these borrowers, the residual debt at risk falls below 0.2% of the total mortgage portfolio.

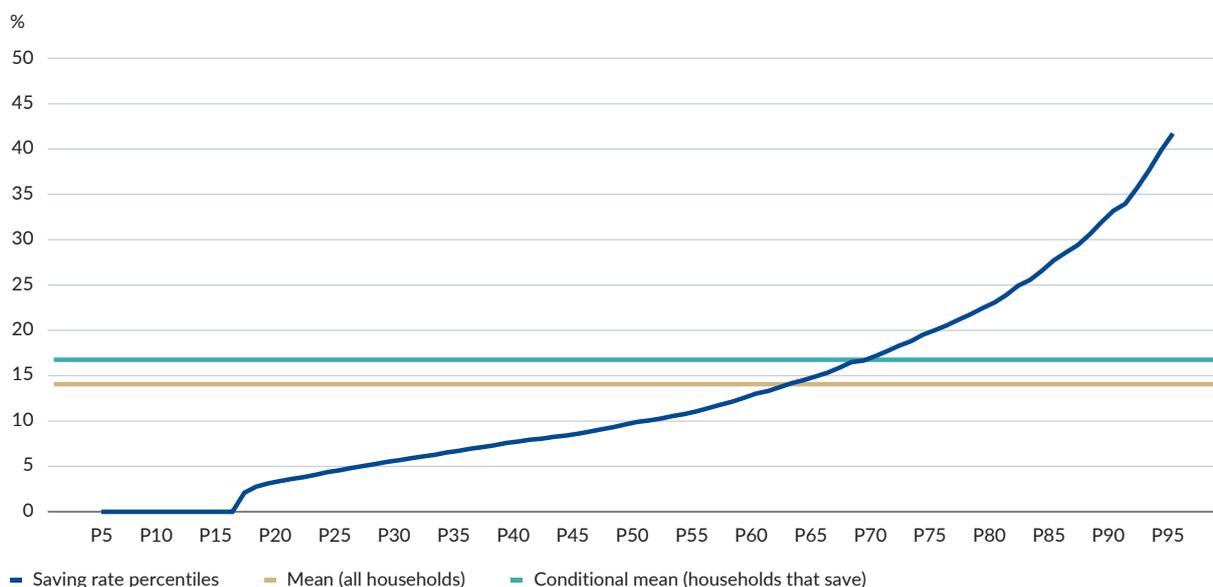
Taken together, Austria's mortgage market – i.e. collateralized debt – has exhibited notable stability over the past decade. While some indicators have shown temporary fluctuations in individual years, all key metrics have either remained stable compared to a decade ago or have declined. In parallel, mortgage holders continue to be concentrated in the upper income brackets – a pattern that has become slightly more pronounced in recent years. This borrower composition, together with relatively conservative lending practices, helps explain the resilience of the mortgage segment even in the face of rising interest rates.

3 Saving behavior

In section 3, we turn to households' saving behavior. In line with the uneven balance sheet structures documented above, saving amounts also display strong dispersion. The median household reports monthly savings of around EUR 300, while the mean is considerably higher at almost EUR 490, pointing to a skewed distribution, with a small group of households setting aside much larger sums. Saving capacity is closely linked to housing status: Households living in their own home often have more capacity to save, since they do not pay rent and effectively receive a flow of non-cash income from imputed rent, i.e. the estimated

Chart 13

Distribution of the net saving rate with credit repayment

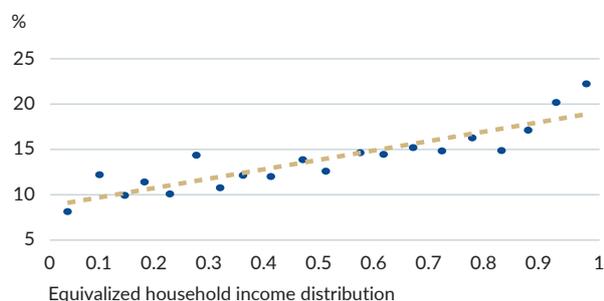


Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

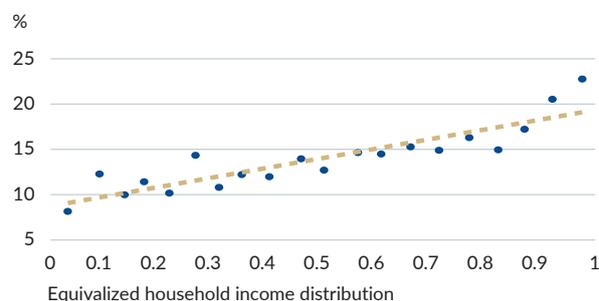
Chart 14

Saving rate

Saving rate by equivalized household income



Saving rate by equivalized household income filtered by education and age



• Saving rate

Note: For this scatter plot, the saving rate is calculated as the mean across 20 bins, each including the same share of weighted households.

Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

rent homeowners would have to pay if they did not own their home. In Austria, this imputed rent is not taxed, whereas many other forms of capital income are, which reinforces the relative advantage of owner-occupiers in building up savings.

Charts 13 and 14 illustrate the heterogeneity of saving rates (from zero to above 40% at the top of the saving rate distribution) and how they increase steadily along the distribution of equivalized household income, from below 10% in the lower part to more than 20% at the very top. This pattern holds even when controlling for education and age, confirming that saving capacity rises systematically with income.

Wealth can in principle be accumulated from three main sources: savings from labor income, returns on existing capital, wealth transfers and, increasingly, intergenerational wealth transfers such as inheritances and gifts. In connection with the portfolio evidence discussed earlier, these charts relate to the fact that for most households, especially those without access to significant inheritances, labor income remains the primary channel through which wealth is built up. Only once savings out of income have been accumulated and passed on over generations do they transform into inherited wealth, complementing or even replacing labor income as the dominant source of accumulation.

In this sense, the observed gradient of saving rates underlines the central role of income from work in initiating wealth accumulation for most households, while at the same time pointing to the mechanisms by which differences in saving capacity reinforce inequality over time, as accumulated savings can be transferred and multiplied across generations.

Table 5 sheds light on households' motives for saving. Provisioning for emergencies dominates clearly: More than half of all savers report that building a buffer for unforeseen events is their main reason for putting money aside. This finding is remarkably stable across the wealth distribution (not shown). Even among the wealthiest households,

Table 5

Distribution of the reasons for saving

| | Share |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| | % |
| Provision for unexpected events | 55.7 |
| Education/support of children or grandchildren or other relatives | 7.0 |
| Old-age provision | 6.9 |
| Major purchases (excluding vehicles) | 6.7 |
| Travel/holidays | 6.5 |
| Purchase of own home | 5.0 |
| Paying off debts | 3.3 |
| Purchase of vehicles | 3.0 |
| Other | 2.7 |
| Bequests | 1.2 |
| Purchase of secondary property | 0.6 |
| Set up a private business or finance investments in an existing business | 0.6 |
| Invest in financial assets | 0.4 |
| Taking advantage of state subsidies (e.g. a subsidy for savings with a building and loan association) | 0.3 |

Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

precautionary saving remains the most frequently cited main motive, although retirement provision or financing future consumption gain some importance.

When saving motives are examined across the income distribution, only slight shifts are visible. Higher-income households more often mention retirement or investment-related motives, while lower-income households emphasize precautionary reasons. In line with the evidence shown in chart 14, this underlines that wages mostly shape the capacity to save, which is also true for the reasons households report for saving (not shown).

In sum, saving behavior in Austria reflects the same distributional patterns observed in household portfolios: While a minority of households can save substantial amounts, the majority report only modest or no savings. Across all groups, the precautionary motive dominates, underlining the central role of income flows in both the ability and the reasons to save. These findings link directly to the next section, which turns to households' income and consumption patterns.

4 Income and consumption

Households' saving behavior and their propensity to consume are key to many macroeconomic questions, such as the transmission of monetary and fiscal policy, the dynamics of aggregate demand, the buildup of financial vulnerabilities, the role of differences in marginal propensities to consume across the wealth distribution and many more. The HFCS is also used to feed into such macroeconomic models (see e.g. Albacete et al., 2025b).

Table 6 breaks down gross household income by source across the net wealth distribution. Labor income rises steadily with wealth, increasing from around EUR 26,800 in the lowest decile to nearly EUR 95,000 in the top decile. Capital income, by contrast, is negligible for the bottom half of the distribution, amounting to not more than EUR 100 per year for 40% of households, and becomes economically meaningful only in the top decile, where it reaches almost EUR 6,000. State transfers exhibit a U-shaped pattern: they are relatively high in the lowest decile due to social benefits, but also increase again in the top decile, reflecting pension payments to wealthier retirees. This illustrates that the welfare state in Austria benefits not only low-income or low-wealth households but the entire distribution, albeit in different ways.

Chart 15 shows the share of food expenditure across the distribution of equalized household income. The share of income spent on food declines steadily with rising income, from over 40% at the bottom to below 20% at the top, reflecting the well-established empirical regularity that the proportion of income devoted to necessities falls as income rises. Even after controlling for education and age, this gradient remains almost unchanged, confirming that it is primarily income, rather than demographic or educational differences, that shapes consumption structures. This pattern underlines that lower-income households allocate a much larger share of their budget to essential goods, which leaves less scope for discretionary spending or savings. For more information on the joint distribution of income, wealth and consumption, see Lindner and Schürz (2020).

Table 6

Components of gross income across net wealth deciles

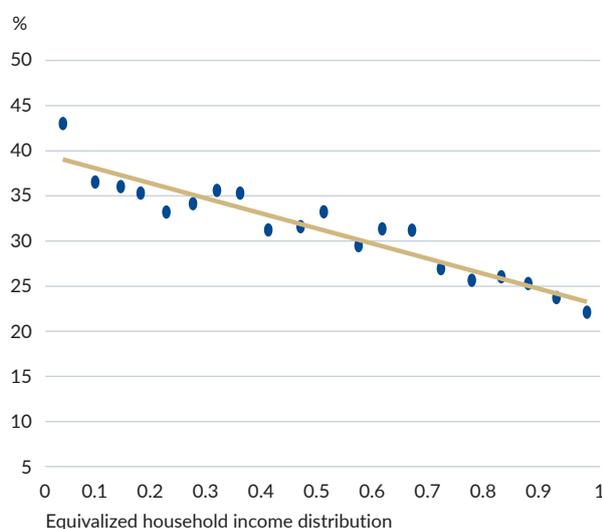
| | Labor income | + State transfers | + Capital income | = Gross income |
|------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| EUR thousand | | | | |
| 1 st net wealth decile | 26.8 | 2.3 | 0.0 | 29.1 |
| 2 nd net wealth decile | 32.9 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 34.3 |
| 3 rd net wealth decile | 38.0 | 1.0 | 0.1 | 39.1 |
| 4 th net wealth decile | 51.5 | 0.5 | 0.1 | 52.0 |
| 5 th net wealth decile | 54.4 | 0.8 | 0.3 | 55.6 |
| 6 th net wealth decile | 47.1 | 0.9 | 0.2 | 48.3 |
| 7 th net wealth decile | 58.9 | 1.0 | 0.7 | 60.6 |
| 8 th net wealth decile | 66.3 | 1.0 | 0.9 | 68.1 |
| 9 th net wealth decile | 70.1 | 1.5 | 1.6 | 73.2 |
| 10 th net wealth decile | 94.8 | 2.0 | 5.9 | 102.7 |

Note: Gross income is the sum of labor income (employed, self-employed, state and private pensions, unemployment insurance and private transfers), state transfers (child benefit, student allowance, parental leave allowance, sickness benefit, care allowance, family allowance, social welfare, emergency assistance, housing allowance), and capital income (from renting out real estate, from financial assets and from business participations).

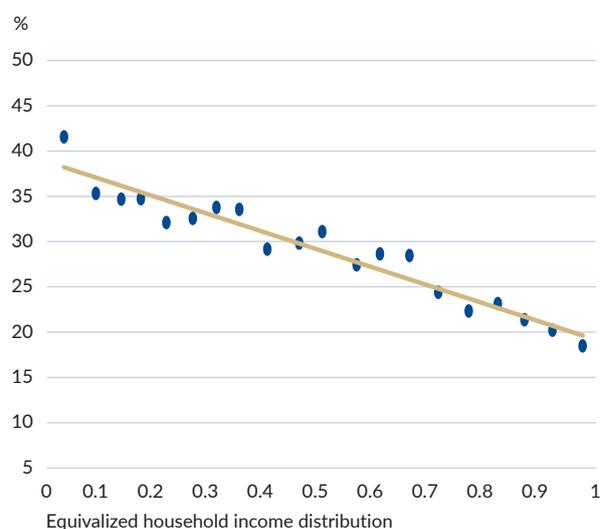
Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

Share of food expenditure in total household expenditure

Share of food expenditure in total expenditure by equivalized household income



Share of food expenditure in total expenditure by equivalized household income filtered by education and age



● Share of food expenditure in total expenditure

Note: For this scatter plot, the food share is calculated as the mean across 20 bins, each including the same share of weighted households.

Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

5 Inheritances

Table 7 highlights the growing importance of intergenerational transfers within the Austrian wealth distribution. Almost 41% of households report having received an inheritance or gift, and this share has increased across survey waves (in 2010, the respective share was 35%). The conditional mean transfer, adjusted for appreciation, reaches around EUR 315,000, nearly four times the median, illustrating the concentration of inherited wealth. Farmers show both the highest participation and the largest transfer values, while blue-collar workers and unemployed households receive inheritances far less frequently and in substantially lower amounts.

Over time, inheritances have become a decisive pathway to asset ownership and financial security, as the wealth-to-income ratio has risen over recent decades, driven by asset price growth, high saving rates and (more recently) modest GDP growth. For many households, especially in the upper-middle and upper parts of the distribution, inherited wealth increasingly complements or even replaces savings out of labor income as a source of capital accumulation. This trend reinforces the role of family in shaping economic opportunities and raises the intergenerational persistence of wealth positions.

Chart 16 shows that inheritances play a critical role in determining access to homeownership across the life cycle. At every age, heirs are far more likely to own their main residence than non-heirs, with the widest gaps observed during the prime working years between 35 and 60. Since becoming a homeowner typically requires substantial upfront capital for the down payment, inherited wealth often provides the decisive step onto the property ladder. Once households become owners, their advantage extends beyond rising house prices: In Austria, imputed rent is not taxed, property taxes are low, and land values tend to increase through public investment in infrastructure such as transport, schools or healthcare facilities. Moreover, many forms of state support, such as subsidies for energy renovation (e.g. thermal insulation or solar panels), are available only to property owners but are financed by all taxpayers. These institutional features allow homeowners to retain more disposable income and accumulate additional wealth over time, reinforcing the long-term effects of intergenerational transfers on wealth inequality (Fessler and Schürz, 2018; Fessler and Schürz, 2020).

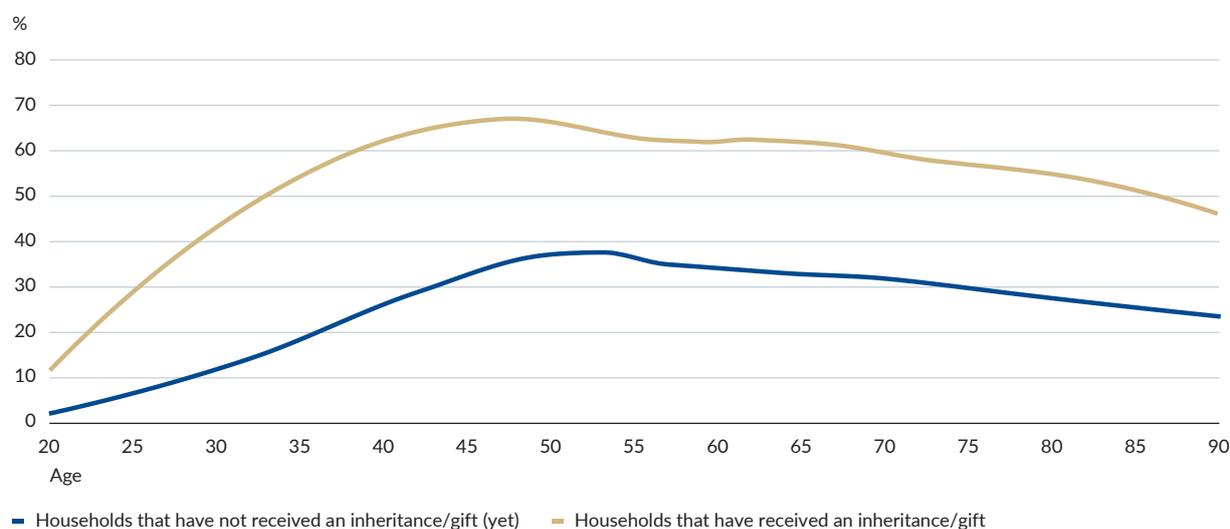
Table 7

Wealth transfers (value of all inheritances/gifts) by occupation and across the net wealth distribution

| | Share of households who have inherited/received a gift | Conditional mean (value as observed) | Conditional median (value as observed) | Conditional mean (appreciation assumption: 3%/year nominal) | Conditional median (appreciation assumption: 3%/year nominal) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| | % | EUR thousand | | | |
| Total | 40.7 | 221.9 | 48.0 | 314.9 | 79.0 |
| Occupation | | | | | |
| Self-employed | 54.7 | 334.9 | 143.1 | 397.6 | 193.9 |
| (Skilled) blue-collar worker | 33.9 | 201.5 | 14.9 | 164.9 | 23.3 |
| White-collar worker | 35.8 | 277.0 | 63.1 | 335.7 | 82.8 |
| Civil servant | 42.7 | 310.5 | 91.8 | 383.8 | 142.7 |
| Farmer | 84.2 | 939.5 | 871.0 | 1823.6 | 1099.0 |
| Pensioner | 44.7 | 145.5 | 41.1 | 268.6 | 78.8 |
| Unemployed | 30.3 | 125.3 | 16.0 | 110.5 | 21.5 |
| Other | 40.3 | 279.2 | 36.8 | 304.6 | 68.2 |
| Distribution | | | | | |
| 1 st net wealth quintile | 18.8 | 33.3 | 5.0 | 71.6 | 8.6 |
| 2 nd net wealth quintile | 22.2 | 29.9 | 11.2 | 67.2 | 20.4 |
| 3 rd net wealth quintile | 42.6 | 105.6 | 28.0 | 125.1 | 45.4 |
| 4 th net wealth quintile | 49.4 | 175.9 | 66.1 | 226.0 | 102.4 |
| 5 th net wealth quintile | 70.2 | 435.6 | 151.8 | 635.5 | 226.1 |

Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

Chart 16

Main residence ownership across age of the financially knowledgeable person

Source: HFCS Austria 2023, OeNB.

6 Final remarks

When looking at HFCS data, it is important to bear in mind that they are not suited to deliver precise information on wealth concentration at the very top of the Austrian distribution. Unlike several other HFCS countries, Austria still lacks an oversampling strategy for high-wealth households. Despite five survey waves, this methodological gap has not yet been closed. We hope that the sixth wave, to be conducted by Statistics Austria, will introduce targeted sampling improvements that allow for more accurate estimates of top wealth shares and concentration measures. This is also key to improve the Austrian contribution to the ECB's Distributional Wealth Accounts (DWA).

In Austria, the share of indebted households is markedly low by international comparison: Less than one-third hold any form of debt. More than 90% of this debt is collateralized, consisting predominantly of mortgage loans among higher-income households. As a result, household indebtedness does not represent a systemic risk to financial stability, a finding confirmed by the persistently low share of borrowers that exceed critical risk thresholds such as high loan-to-value or high debt service-to-income ratios.

Saving behavior and wealth accumulation show a strong divergence across the income distribution. Saving rates differ substantially between high-income and low-income households: Higher-income groups are able to convert income flows into financial and real asset accumulation, while many lower-income households report small regular savings. Over time, inheritances become increasingly important as a source of wealth, particularly for access to homeownership. This trend is reinforced by rising wealth-to-income ratios, which amplify the role of intergenerational transfers relative to self-financed accumulation.

Mean net wealth increased by more than EUR 100,000 over the past five years, whereas gains in the lower half of the distribution (below P50) were modest (< EUR 50,000) (see DWA chart 7). Although relative inequality measures such as the Gini coefficient have remained broadly stable, absolute differences in wealth levels are widening. Taken together, the evidence from the fifth HFCS wave in Austria reveals a wealth structure that is institutionally stable, financially resilient and increasingly shaped by inheritance and property-based accumulation.

International comparisons of wealth inequality must be interpreted with caution, as differences in institutional settings fundamentally shape household balance sheets. In countries with extensive welfare states, such as Austria and Germany, public pension systems, universal healthcare and unemployment insurance reduce the need for private precautionary wealth, particularly in the lower half of the distribution. This means that lower private net wealth does not necessarily imply less economic security. In the upper middle of the distribution, where owner-occupied housing dominates portfolios, state interventions such as housing subsidies, investment in infrastructure and the absence of taxation on imputed rent reinforce property-based wealth accumulation. At the top of the distribution, favorable tax treatment of capital, asset-based subsidies and crisis interventions tend to stabilize and capitalize existing wealth. As a consequence, measured wealth inequality in such countries reflects not only market outcomes, but also the way the state substitutes, enables or reinforces wealth accumulation at different levels of the distribution. Cross-country rankings of net wealth, if detached from these institutional contexts, risk misrepresenting both economic well-being and underlying inequality dynamics.

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