

Early career researcher (predoc or postdoc) (30 h/week) in Political Science — *Valuing Waste: the Politics of Knowledge in Wastewater Monitoring*

predoc and early postdoctoral applications are welcome

Host: Department of Political Science, University of Vienna

Supervisor/PI: Assoc Prof Katharina T. Paul

Funding: FWF (Austrian Science Fund)

Start date: June 2026 (or as soon as possible thereafter)

Duration: (fixed term 24 months for postdoc, ca 30 months for predoc)

Employment scope: 30 hours/week (predoc or postdoc)

Project summary

Wastewater monitoring has recently moved from a niche public health tool to a high-visibility technology used for pandemic surveillance, drug use estimation, environmental monitoring, and a source for a host of potential other health data. This project investigates the (re)emergence and repurposing of wastewater monitoring: how did wastewater monitoring become the “right tool for the job”? How and where have recent (EU) governance frameworks emerged and with what implications? How is value extracted from waste when it comes to the production of health data, and how is this data interpreted and used? How do questions of privacy, consent, inequality, and public trust shape monitoring policy across different jurisdictions? The project will examine the political dynamics at multiple levels (local, national, EU/international) and contribute to theoretical and empirical understandings of science–policy interfaces, data governance, and the political nature of health-related data across countries. This project forms part of a larger, FWF (Austrian Science Fund)-funded project at the Department of Political Science, led by Katharina Paul (FWF START Prize, 2022-2029).

Your responsibilities

- Conduct original research on wastewater monitoring from a social science perspective, using qualitative methods. This includes designing and carrying out empirical studies (e.g., policy and document analysis; stakeholder interviews; comparative case studies; observations).

- Contribute to a conceptual understanding of wastewater monitoring by placing it in theoretical debates on datafication, (digital) health governance, critical public health, and evidence-based policymaking.
- Organize conference panels and present results at international conferences
- Engage with practitioner/stakeholder audiences (e.g., public health agencies, municipal actors, scientists).
- Organize project meetings; assist with organizing events, such as invited lectures or fellowships.
- Carry out project administration.

Required qualifications

- For **predoc** applicants: Master’s degree (or equivalent) in Political Science, Public Policy, Sociology, Science and Technology Studies (STS) or a closely related field, to be awarded by the start date.
- For **postdoc** applicants: PhD (doctoral degree) from a relevant discipline, to be awarded by the start date.
- For **predoc** applicants: research experience in one or more of the following areas: public (health) policy and regulation; data governance; science–policy studies; health/environmental politics in the European Union (EU) and beyond.
- For **postdoc** applicants: as for predoc applicants, plus publication experience.
- Solid empirical research skills in qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, document analysis).
- Excellent academic writing and communication skills in English.
- Familiarity with ethics/privacy frameworks (e.g., GDPR) and research ethics procedures.

Desirable qualifications

- Experience with acquiring and/or administering third-party funded research.
- Knowledge of public health governance in the EU.
- proficiency in German is an asset.

What we offer

- A vibrant interdisciplinary environment with strong networks in political science, STS, and public health.
- Close supervision and opportunities for tailored (doctoral) training; opportunities for fieldwork and international conference travel.
- Employment under the Austrian university collective agreement at 30 h/week.
 - o For predoc applicants: salary in accordance with [university salary rates](#) (30 h/week).
 - o For postdoc applicants: salary in accordance with [university salary rates](#) for postdoc positions (30 h/week).
- Inclusive, family-friendly workplace with flexible working arrangements.

How to apply

Please submit a single PDF by email to value-vacc.powi@univie.ac.at with:

- 1) Cover letter (max 2 pages) outlining your motivation and relevant experience.
- 2) CV (including publications, if any).
- 3) Brief research sketch (1–2 pages) proposing how you would approach the politics of wastewater monitoring within this project (e.g. choice of cases, research design and methods, theoretical sources you deem useful).
- 4) One writing sample (e.g., MA thesis chapter, article, or seminar paper).
- 5) Degree certificates and transcripts.
- 6) Contact details for two referees (we may request letters at a later stage).

Timeline

- Application deadline: 31 May 2026
- Interviews: June 2026
- Start date: asap/negotiable