



Der Menschenrechtsbeirat
der Stadt Graz

2025 Human Rights Report of the City of Graz

A summary

The present English 2025 Human Rights Report of the Human Rights Advisory Board (*Menschenrechtsbeirat*) of the City of Graz is a comprised version of the full 2025 Human Rights Report in German, summarizing its main findings and recommendations.

English version by: Executive Office of the Human Rights Advisory Board of the City of Graz

Introduction

Human rights are fundamental rights for all people. This also applies in the city of Graz. That is why the city of Graz has established a Human Rights Advisory Board. Its purpose is to advise politicians. The Advisory Board publishes an annual human rights report. The report highlights current issues and problems relating to human rights in Graz. It addresses the following questions: What is working well in the area of human rights? Where are there difficulties? What could the city of Graz improve?

The 2025 Human Rights Report is the 18th human rights report published by the Human Rights Advisory Board of the City of Graz. Important institutions in the city of Graz have issued statements on current issues and problems relating to human rights. The municipal council, city senate and magistrate were also involved.

The Human Rights Report 2025 focuses on diversity management in the city of Graz from a human rights perspective.

The Human Rights Report 2025 also includes a number of recommendations. These are divided into six areas of action. The recommendations are addressed to the government of the city of Graz. They are intended to help politicians better implement human rights in Graz. This will enable the needs of all people in Graz to be taken into account even more.

The Human Rights Advisory Board mourns the loss of Alfred Stingl

Former mayor Alfred Stingl passed away in 2025. Alfred Stingl always stood up for the people of Graz. He wanted to make the city a better place to live for everyone.

Europe was also very important to Alfred Stingl. He believed in peaceful coexistence for all people in Europe.

Alfred Stingl established the Peace Office of the City of Graz back in 1988. It still exists today. In 1995, he founded the Foreigners' Advisory Council, now known as the Migrants' Advisory Council. Both institutions are concerned with peaceful coexistence in the city of Graz. They also want to strengthen the participation of people who do not have an easy time having a say.

Human rights were very important to Alfred Stingl. He had the synagogue, which was destroyed in 1938, rebuilt. In 2001, Alfred Stingl achieved a unanimous decision in the Graz City Council. This declared Graz the first human rights city in Europe. The European Capital of Culture project in 2003 was also initiated by Alfred Stingl.

Alfred Stingl was mayor of Graz for 18 years. Even after leaving city politics, he remained very active. Alfred Stingl was appointed to the newly founded Graz Human Rights Advisory Council by the subsequent mayor, Siegfried Nagl. He remained an active member of this council until 2013.

We mourn the loss of a man who always based his actions on human dignity.

We mourn the loss of Alfred Stingl!

The members of the Human Rights Advisory Board of the City of Graz

Overview of the human rights situation in the city of Graz

The City of Graz Human Rights Report 2025 is the 18th human rights report. It provides a comprehensive overview of the human rights situation in Graz. The report also contains recommendations in six areas. These are addressed to the city government and the city council.

The Human Rights Report 2025 highlights a number of problem areas for the city of Graz. The city of Graz is not responsible for all of these areas. Some aspects concern the relationship between people. Some are the responsibility of the province of Styria or the federal government. However, many points are nevertheless important for the people of Graz. They are therefore included in this report.

Our society is deeply divided. There is more hatred and extremism. Wars, displacement, environmental problems and climate change affect us all and our city. At the same time, there are economic problems and rising prices.

Human rights help us to deal with these challenges. They also help us to promote a fair society.

The declaration on Graz as a human rights city sets out five key objectives:

- (1) The city of Graz bases its actions on human rights.
- (2) Those in positions of responsibility in the city and the population are aware of the human rights situation.
- (3) Organisations, institutions and companies should be guided by human rights.
- (4) The people of Graz are aware of their own human rights.
- (5) The city cooperates with other countries to protect human rights.

The human rights situation in Graz is assessed according to these objectives.

The city of Graz bases its actions on human rights

The city of Graz is guided by fundamental and human rights within the framework of the rule of law. These are regulated in the constitution. The aim is to respect human rights and also to actively protect them.

The city's human rights declaration also refers to the culture of human rights. This means that decisions in the city of Graz are guided by human rights. The decisions of the city of Graz should also be implemented professionally. This was confirmed by Mayor Elke Kahr in a meeting with representatives of the UN. Politics should be guided by the legitimate needs of the people.

Such an approach is referred to as a human rights-based approach. Its central principles are: co-determination, participation, equality, responsibility and the rule of law.

The city of Graz bases its actions on such a human rights-based approach. Urban planning, green space design and the environmental office weigh up fundamental rights. This is done in all their planning and decisions.

The participation procedures of the city of Graz have also been further developed. The aim is to involve as many people as possible. This allows the people of Graz to contribute their concerns and legitimate interests.

The issue of heat affects many people in Graz. The health authority and health hub are implementing a human rights-oriented approach in this area. The aim is to avoid heat and take the necessary measures.

A particular challenge for Graz is to maintain and further expand its important infrastructure. The human rights report specifically mentions three areas: childcare, social facilities and language support. These areas are important. They concern fundamental human rights such as equality, education and health. These human rights must be truly protected. Therefore, services must be available that are easily accessible and of high quality.

There is little resistance to these issues in the city of Graz. However, there are major financial problems. These make implementation difficult. According to human rights, all available public funds should be used to protect and secure these rights. This will enable minimum standards to be implemented. If more money is available, it must be invested in expanding these areas. There must be no restrictions on the protection of human rights without objective justification.

The Human Rights Advisory Council recommends the establishment of an easily accessible contact point for discrimination.

Childcare should also be further expanded. This will strengthen equality and self-determination. More childcare means more opportunities to work, especially for women. This will further combat poverty.

The city of Graz attaches great importance to good diversity management. Graz was the first city to base its diversity concept on human rights. There are three pillars here: Diversity in the workforce. Diversity in the provision of services. Diversity in the work of the City of Graz and its companies.

The accessibility of public authorities and services without any form of discrimination is central to the City of Graz. This is also part of the diversity concept.

People from many different countries live in the City of Graz. They also speak different languages. Numerous measures have been put in place to make it easier for them to access the services of the City of Graz. These include: measures in the digital sphere to make access easier for people with disabilities. Appropriate symbol languages have been developed and implemented. Communication in the services provided by the city of Graz takes into account the diversity of people. Professional interpreting is also used in the authorities of the city of Graz.

All this shows that linguistic accessibility for all people in Graz is very important to the Graz authorities.

City officials and the population are aware of the human rights situation

Article 28 of the Declaration of Human Rights states that there is a right to good administration. Good administration also means that decisions are based on facts.

That is why the municipal council and the city senate must be well informed about human rights in Graz. This report fulfils this task in particular. The human rights report collects data

from politics, administration, the police, the judiciary, academia and civil society. Unfortunately, not all agencies share their knowledge. Therefore, although the report is very comprehensive, it is not complete. Nevertheless, it provides sufficient information to decision-makers and the population.

Further important information comes from health studies and studies on the needs of the people of Graz. Data from the environmental agency and urban planning are also used, as is data on the quality of life of the people of Graz. This data is also included in the report.

Despite positive developments, there are problems that need to be solved and where the city must work together with many other agencies. These include problems such as violence, hatred, racism and xenophobia. These have a major impact. For example, there are too few German courses in the city of Graz. The number of exceptional pupils has also been rising since compulsory entrance tests were introduced in schools. The situation of people from Ukraine is difficult.

Another major problem is housing. There are too few flats in Graz. In addition, many are too expensive. Many people can no longer easily afford heating.

The situation is particularly difficult for people who have no flat at all. They are affected by many problems, not just a lack of housing.

Child poverty is also a major problem in the city of Graz. Child poverty is often linked to other factors such as origin, gender, illness or disability of the parents. Reducing child poverty requires the whole of society to take responsibility.

Another problem is the limited opportunity for people in Graz to have a say in decisions. Almost a quarter of Graz's residents are not allowed to vote. They therefore have no say in decisions. This also affects people born in Austria and EU citizens. It also affects people without secure residence status or without citizenship, who have few rights.

Organisations, institutions and companies should be guided by human rights

This goal is very important, but difficult to achieve. From a human rights perspective, it is the responsibility of state institutions to protect human rights. The city administration has several options for doing so. However, these are limited.

In some cases, the city acts like a private organisation and is therefore also bound by fundamental rights. This applies, for example, to municipal enterprises such as transport companies or security services. These must observe diversity management.

Subsidies are also an important means of strengthening human rights. The city supports projects run by suitable organisations. Examples include programmes for training and placing workers. The promotion of new forms of housing is also part of this. The same applies to the promotion of the Housing First approach.

Another example is the cooperation with teacher training colleges. These advise kindergartens and schools on the development of protection concepts for children.

In addition, the city can ensure compliance with human rights through contracts with private providers. This applies, for example, to the area of housing. Or the rental of event venues. However, this instrument was not discussed further in the report.

The people of Graz know their own human rights

The human rights report has two purposes: on the one hand, it informs the population about human rights in Graz. On the other hand, the advisory board, administration and institutions learn together about the human rights situation in Graz.

Training courses are available for city employees at the Administration Academy. These courses often deal with legal topics or social skills. Only rarely are they directly related to human rights. Interculturalism is sometimes mistakenly equated with human rights.

The city promotes human rights education, particularly in the field of education. The focus is on kindergartens and primary schools. The topic of children's rights is addressed in particular. Human rights posters created by schoolchildren will be displayed in classrooms in future to strengthen knowledge about human rights. With the support of the city, associations and organisations also offer human rights education in schools and other institutions.

The cultural sector plays a very important role in human rights education in the city of Graz. Culture conveys human rights through content. It should offer open access for all. The city protects cultural institutions. It also supports cultural workers in order to avoid precarious working conditions. This is particularly important so that culture can continue to contribute to human rights education.

Access to culture should be possible for all people, physically, mentally and financially. The city of Graz has already implemented many measures to this end.

Museums, theatres and galleries deal intensively with human rights. The cultural sector is therefore one of the most important places for human rights education in Graz.

The city cooperates with cities in other countries to protect human rights

The international cooperation of the city of Graz has developed significantly. One reason for this is its high international profile thanks to the UNESCO Centre for Human Rights. Another reason is the UNESCO Chair at the University of Graz. And the international winter school 'Human Rights Find a City'.

Another reason is the growing interest in human rights cities worldwide. In July 2025, new guidelines for human rights cities were adopted by the United Nations in Geneva. Graz and Vienna were recommended as role models for other cities.

Graz was elected to the steering committee of the European Coalition of Cities against Racism for another four years. There, the city of Graz works together with almost 200 other European cities.

Many international delegations came to Graz in 2025. They wanted to exchange experiences and learn from the city of Graz. Visitors included the Council of Europe, the South Korean human rights city of Gwangju, and the Ukrainian Human Rights Commission.

Finally, the mayor of Zurich announced that Zurich would follow Graz's example and declare itself Switzerland's first human rights city in 2026.

Recommendations of the Human Rights Advisory Board of the City of Graz

Six recommendations were formulated for the 2025 Human Rights Report. They are addressed to the government of the city of Graz.

The topics of childcare, diversity management, participation, hygiene in public spaces, protection against discrimination and climate protection were selected by the working group of the Human Rights Advisory Council. Suggestions from municipal authorities, politicians, administrators, the Ombudsman's Office and civil society were taken into account. The city of Graz's responsibility and ability to implement the recommendations were important factors.

The six topics were chosen because they are particularly important for the future of the city and its population. Measures that have already been implemented are viewed positively from a human rights perspective. The recommendations are intended to encourage further improvements.

In its next reports, the Human Rights Advisory Board will examine how well the recommendations are being implemented by the city of Graz.

1. Expansion of childcare

Good, affordable, full-day public childcare is very important for gender equality.

The Human Rights Advisory Board of the City of Graz recommends:

Expanding childcare to meet demand. This will enable all parents – especially single parents and women – to work independently and without disadvantage. Flexible childcare hours are particularly important in this regard. More services for children under the age of three are also needed.

2. Diversity management

Diversity management means that diversity in organisations is consciously recognised, valued and promoted. Differences between people should be used as a strength. For example, for better decisions, new ideas, inclusion and respectful coexistence.

This makes a human rights-oriented administration more attractive as an employer. The quality of its services also improves for the population.

The Human Rights Advisory Board of the City of Graz recommends:

Reviewing structures and processes in the municipal administration for diversity and non-discrimination. This applies in particular to human resources, work culture, communication and public relations. This includes:

- a) Developing and implementing a clear diversity strategy.
- b) Developing new selection procedures for personnel. In this way, the diversity of the city's population can also be reflected in the administrative teams, especially in the education sector.
- c) Offering more training and further education on the topic of non-discrimination.

d) Conducting training courses on communication and public relations work relating to diversity, anti-discrimination and inclusive language. This will help to avoid representations that reinforce stereotypes.

e) Raising awareness of gender equality and diversity among managers through workshops and training courses.

f) Financing and expanding interpreting and translation services. This will ensure that these services are easily accessible to everyone in Graz.

3. Political, cultural and social participation

Democracy, the rule of law and human rights are the foundations of our society. Participation means that all people can take part in social life and have a say in decisions. People in Graz should also have a say in all matters that affect them. This right is protected by human rights.

However, people in Graz have very different conditions for how much they can participate in decision-making. The culture of human rights in Graz means that good conditions are created for the participation of people in Graz.

The Human Rights Advisory Board of the City of Graz recommends:

a) Strengthening political participation.

The City Council of Graz should work to ensure that all population groups can exercise their right to vote without obstacles as far as possible. This also applies to the right to freedom of assembly.

b) Further expand citizen participation.

The city should develop participation opportunities that reach all groups. Information on these opportunities should be multilingual and easy to understand. These participation processes should be reviewed to ensure that they are accessible to all people in Graz.

c) Enable cultural participation for all people in Graz.

Art and culture should be accessible to all. Creative artists should receive fair support. Cultural funding should be open to all people who create culture. Municipal awards should also take into account commitment to human rights. Information about municipal services should be written in easily understandable language. It should also use appropriate images. It should also be disseminated through various media.

d) Improve social participation for the people of Graz.

Authorities should continue to be easily accessible. In person, by telephone and digitally. Digital services should be designed to be inclusive. The city of Graz should provide information about its services in an easily understandable way and in many media. Notices, information and applications should be available in simple language. If possible, also in several languages.

The city should provide understandable information about healthcare. The city of Graz should train employees to write clear and simple texts.

4. Hygienic and sanitary infrastructure in public spaces

Access to clean, safe and easily accessible toilets and washing facilities is a human right. Access is also important so that public spaces can be used with dignity.

The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the City of Graz:

Clearly visible, accessible, safe and regularly maintained toilets should be installed in public spaces. The toilets should be in working order. There should also be menstrual product dispensers. As well as nappy-changing areas for babies and small children.

Public toilets must be safe. Good lighting is essential for this. As are clearly marked entrances.

Existing public toilet facilities should be checked for functionality, safety and accessibility. If necessary, they should be improved or expanded.

5. Establishment of a contact point for victims of discrimination

Protection against discrimination is a fundamental human right. In Austria, the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, discrimination on the following grounds is prohibited: origin, religion, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation or genetic characteristics.

New EU directives from 2026 emphasise that there should be independent, well-equipped and easily accessible centres. These centres should support people who have experienced discrimination. The disadvantages faced by people should also be made visible.

Styria has an anti-discrimination office. However, its funding has not been permanently secured since spring 2025.

Discrimination in the city of Graz occurs mainly in public authorities. It also occurs in housing and public spaces. Discrimination on the basis of age is common here. This form of discrimination is not protected outside the workplace. This means that individuals cannot defend themselves against it. Often, these individuals do not even report the discrimination.

The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends:

A low-threshold and easily accessible contact point for all forms of discrimination should be established. This can be done by setting up a new office. Or by the city of Graz taking over the existing Anti-Discrimination Office Styria.

6. Greater emphasis on the human rights dimension of climate protection

Global warming is affecting the health of people in Graz, especially during hot spells in summer. Older people, families with small children and people with health problems are particularly affected. Urban heat, lack of shade and concrete surfaces exacerbate these problems.

As a first step, the city of Graz has developed a heat action plan. Climate-resilient urban planning is becoming increasingly important.

Courts do not consider climate protection to be a fundamental right in its own right. However, they derive it from other rights such as the right to life, health and privacy. States must therefore implement effective and forward-looking climate protection measures. Particularly disadvantaged groups of people must be taken into account in this process.

The Human Rights Advisory Council recommends:

Climate protection in Graz should be treated as a human rights issue. To this end, an overall concept for a 'fundamental right to climate protection' should be developed. All municipal departments should be obliged to assess the impact on the climate and health. Groups that are particularly affected should be protected. Decisions and planning in the city of Graz should be aligned with human rights requirements.

Climate protection measures should not only have an ecological impact. They should also strengthen the human rights of the people of Graz. In addition, they should be reviewed regularly.

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https://www.graz.at/cms/beitrag/10153819/7771489/menschenrechtsbeirat_in_graz.html

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