



Der Menschenrechtsbeirat  
der Stadt Graz

# 2022 Human Rights Report of the City of Graz

## A summary

The present English version of the comprised 2022 Human Rights Report of the *Menschenrechtsbeirat* (en. Human Rights Council) of the City of Graz is based on the easy-to-read German 2021 Report version, but has been slightly adapted in register to fit the broader target group of English-speaking readers with English as mother tongue and working language.

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## 1. Introduction

Human rights are fundamental rights for every human being. The Human Rights City of Graz respects and promotes this principle. Consequently, the City founded a Human Rights Council (*Menschenrechtsbeirat der Stadt Graz*) in 2007. Its core aim is to advise the local governance level, namely the Mayor and City Council, on human rights issues. Every year, the Human Rights Council publishes a Human Rights Report, monitoring the City's human rights situation in a given year. It either focuses on providing a general overview on relevant human rights-related topics and challenges, elaborates concrete recommendations for the most significant deficits or evaluates the implementation of these recommendations.

The 2022 Human Rights Report is the 15<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Report of the Human Rights Council of the City of Graz. The 2022 Report builds on the 2021 Report, namely on the ten recommendations addressed to the City Government and Council and elaborated by the members of the Human Rights Council. The recommendations' aim was to support the local policy level in fostering the implementation of the right to adequate housing in an equal and non-discriminatory manner for all citizens. The realisation of these recommendations would lead to a major improvement of the housing situation for a significant number of citizens in Graz. The major focus of the 2022 Human Rights Report is to evaluate the current status of implementation of these recommendations by the City Government.

Further, the focus chapter of the 2022 Report informs on the Year of Culture 2020/21 and the Year of Sports 2021 of the City of Graz. The Human Rights Council conducted an interview with the head organiser of the Year of Culture, Christian Mayer, and the head of the Sports Department of the City of Graz, Thomas Rajakovics. In a convivial atmosphere, the human rights aspects of the Year of Culture and Year of Sports were discussed.

## **2. Implementation of the 2021 Human Rights Report's Recommendations**

The 2021 Human Rights Report summarised the major problems related to the right of adequate housing in the City of Graz in four areas, which correspond with the four dimensions of urban resilience, namely:

1. The economic dimension: It refers to problems related to economic factors, like the affordability of housing.
2. The social dimension: It refers to problems related to societal issues and the daily life of citizens.
3. The ecological dimension: It refers to environmental problems.
4. The institutional dimension: It refers to problems related to City laws and regulations.

By examining the most pertinent issues in all four dimensions, members of the Human Rights Council elaborated a total of ten recommendations for the mitigation of these problems. Each recommendation was subsumed under one dimension of urban resilience.

The 2022 Human Rights Report focuses on observing and identifying the current state of implementation of these recommendations by the City Government. The following sections provide a brief overview of the identified problems, the concrete recommendations, and the current implementation process. Information was gathered by sending inquires to relevant City Administration Departments and respective political representatives responsible for the identified areas.

### **2.1. The right to adequate housing in the City of Graz**

The first recommendation is the most general recommendation referring to all four dimensions stated above. It was not explicitly subsumed under one urban resilience dimension, but rather provides a concrete suggestion for local political action. It explains that all four urban resilience dimensions are equally important to create a good life for citizens and to ensure the city's proper functions. Consequently, the local policy level needs to always consider the economic, social, ecological, and institutional aspects when employing new measures aiming at the mitigation of identified problems.

The 2021 Human Rights Report offers a concrete example of how this can be implemented by using the right to adequate housing. First, the Report establishes that the right to adequate housing touches upon several vital areas of life as well as other human rights. Due to this interconnectedness, the right to adequate housing is a core right for citizens. Consequently, its implementation in a non-discriminatory and equal manner is of utmost importance to ensure that citizens can develop their fullest potential in various areas. The following example portrays this interrelatedness: All citizens need to be able to access a housing space to live their life in a good way. Therefore, city laws regulating the access to housing must be non-discriminatory

(institutional dimension). Once all citizens have a proper housing space, they are able to exercise a profession providing them with a stable income (economic dimension). Further, a housing space must protect inhabitants of natural disasters, diseases, and ensure their good health (ecological dimension). Finally, having an adequate housing space enables human beings to fully enjoy their right to a family life, to invite friends or to spend their time on their favourite leisure time activities (social dimension).

To sum up, the right to adequate housing is closely linked with several areas of life, which, in turn, are directly related to all four dimensions of urban resilience. The full implementation of the right to adequate housing for all citizens in a non-discriminatory and equal manner depends on all four dimensions. Therefore, the City Government must consider measures on all four dimensions when trying to improve the implementation of this particular right. In doing so, the enjoyment of this right by all citizens can be significantly improved, and it becomes one of the most significant areas of concern at the local policy level. This is also indispensable for improving the resilience of the City of Graz.

Mayor Elke Kahr and Vice-mayor Judith Schwentner stated that the right to adequate housing is of particular importance for leading a good life in the City of Graz. They both take the implementation of the right to adequate housing in a non-discriminatory and equal manner for all citizens as measure for their further political decisions.

## **2.2. Economic dimension**

### **Problems:**

In the City of Graz, not all citizens can afford an adequate housing space. In particular, flats offered at the private housing market are too expensive and linked to several high costs, e.g. deposits or realtor's commissions.

There are often long waiting periods for community housing allocated by the City of Graz. Further, some population groups are legally excluded from the application process for these types of flats.

In some City Districts, a considerably high number of people in precarious living situations is identified.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The City of Graz shall support people in search of a housing space by granting financial aids. These financial aids must be adapted to the needs of the citizens and allocated in a non-discriminatory manner.
2. There shall be no delays in the claim and time for these financial aids.

### **Implementation by the City Government:**

The City of Graz has the right to allocate 11,200 community housing spaces. This way, the City provides housing space to citizens who are not able to afford flats on the

private housing market. The rents for community housing are less expensive. Further, the City has not increased rents and additional housing costs for community housing since 2019.

The City of Graz offers several financial aids for citizens who are economically disadvantaged.

Waiting periods for persons applying for financial aid have decreased.

However, persons applying for asylum in Austria and people entitled to subsidiary protection are still excluded from social assistance.

### **2.3. Social dimension**

#### **Problems:**

Many people are discriminated against when searching for adequate housing. The most affected groups are multi-child families, refugees, people who are unemployed or people suffering from a mental disorder. Many landlords/landladies do not rent out their flats to these groups due to prevailing stereotypes and prejudices. Consequently, affected groups need to seek refuge in emergency shelters. However, these shelters are not always well-equipped or prepared to adequately fulfil the various needs of these people.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. The City of Graz shall implement the housing first approach, which means that all people in precarious living situations shall be able to live in an appropriate flat.
2. The City of Graz shall refrain from evicting residents within the City's jurisdiction.
3. The City of Graz shall initiate measures to de-stigmatise homelessness within the administrative, political, and public spheres.

#### **Implementation by the City Government:**

The City Administration and Government are aware that homelessness does not only affect people without a housing space, which is the most visible form of homelessness. There exist also various types of "hidden homelessness", e.g. people who have to sleep on the couch of a friend. Since cases of hidden homelessness are less visible, the City tries to gather more data on homelessness.

The installation of a new department on housing and housing aid affiliated with the Social Welfare Office of the City is planned for 2023. The new department shall work in cooperation with many other institutions in areas like social work or housing management. Further, this department will gather data on homelessness. Consequently, the City of Graz will be able to provide better support to people affected by homelessness.

In Graz, a housing first team has been employed for ten years. The housing first approach aims at providing all persons with an appropriate housing space first, because this is the precondition for living a good life. It claims that everyone shall have a housing space without needing to fulfil any (pre)conditions. The housing first team in Graz supports women and women with children, since these groups are often affected by homelessness. The team provides these groups with housing space, and cooperates closely with other institutions of the social sector.

Persons living in temporary housing facilities are not driven out of their housing space by the City of Graz.

The City Government plans on signing the “Homeless Bill of Rights”. This strengthens the rights of people affected by homelessness.

Staff of the City Administration can participate in trainings dealing with the topic of homelessness aimed at reducing stereotypes on this matter.

## **2.4. Ecological dimension**

### **Problems:**

In the City of Graz, the number of flats being constructed is steadily rising, even in green areas like parks or forests. Consequently, the number of free spaces which can be used by citizens in their spare time is drastically limited which, in turn, leads to conflicts of interest between various population groups with regard to the usage of these free spaces.

Moreover, there are certain very densely populated areas where many people must live closely to each other. This leads to an increase in neighbourhood conflicts.

Finally, traffic levels are continuously increasing in Graz which significantly impacts the environment as well as health of citizens.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The City of Graz shall provide more green areas for citizens.
2. The City of Graz shall install a “Representative for Pedestrians”. This person shall advise the City.
3. The City of Graz shall provide mediation mechanisms for conflicts in the public space.

### **Implementation by the City Government:**

The City of Graz has taken an offensive on providing more green areas for its citizens. Further, existing green spaces like parks etc. shall be protected against building development.

The City has installed a “Pedestrian Commissioner” ensuring the safeguarding of pedestrians’ rights in the City.

The City offers many possibilities for active citizen participation, also via Internet.

When faced with neighbourhood conflicts, citizens can seek help from specialised institutions. They provide professional help via mediation.

## **2.5. Institutional dimension**

### **Problems:**

The application for community housing of the City of Graz is regulated by law, which excludes some population groups.

*Beherbergungsbetriebe* as specific types of accommodation facilities are not regulated by tenancy law which means that people staying in the provided flats are not legally protected against discriminatory measures taken by the landlords/landladies.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The City of Graz shall ensure that community housing flats are accessible for all citizens in an equal and non-discriminatory manner. People who have been granted asylum in Austria shall be able to access community housing flats.

### **Implementation by the City Government:**

The City of Graz made two substantial changes in its access criteria for community housing.

1. From now on, it is required to have one's primary residence in Graz for one year before applying for community housing.
2. Persons who have been granted asylum in Austria, namely refugees according to the Geneva Convention, are allowed to apply for community housing in the City.

### **3. The Year of Culture 2020/21 and the Year of Sports 2021**

Culture and sports are two important areas for all human beings. However, some people are not able to view exhibitions, see a play in theatre or attend concerts. Further, not everyone is capable of exercising their favourite sports activity due to various reasons, like a lack of financial resources. The City of Graz is aware of this problem and decided on organising two consecutive thematic years, one on culture and one on sports. This way, the City ensures that all citizens can benefit of cultural and sportive offers. The year 2020 was dedicated to Culture. The Year of Culture was even extended to 2021. The year 2021 was further dedicated to the Year of Sports.

Culture and sports are closely tied with human rights. The 2022 Human Rights Report puts a focus on this important connection. Consequently, the focus chapter was dedicated to both thematic years by conducting an interview with the organiser of the Year of Culture, Christian Mayer, and the head of the Sports Department of the City, Thomas Rajakovics.

During the Year of Culture, participants tried to answer the question “How do we want to live?”. All citizens were addressed and encouraged to participate in this endeavour. In total, 8,000 cultural actions took place. Almost all events and projects were planned and conducted by inhabitants of the City. This means that the Year of Culture was a thematic year from and for the citizens of Graz.

Events and projects were aimed at everyone, which means that they targeted also people who normally are not able to access cultural activities. For this, the majority of events and projects were displayed in the open space to ensure easy access, for example in parks or on squares. People could participate in and experience cultural activities in their daily life without major effort, like while on their way to work. A survey showed that the local population enjoyed the Year of Culture and all related offers very much.

The Year of Sports encouraged all citizens in Graz to get moving. The slogan “Let’s Go” was the vital call to action promoted by all events and activities related to the Year of Sports. The Sports Department of the City was able to fund 250 projects. The aim was to include all citizens. A particular focus was put on people with disabilities as well as women and girls. These are population groups who are often excluded from sporting activities. Further, sports among the elderly was promoted. The majority of projects and events were also organised in the public space to guarantee easy participation for everyone.

The local population enjoyed all projects of the Year of Sports. Consequently, some projects are even prolonged and continued after the official end of the thematic year. Further, the City of Graz remains active and plans, for example, a special sports field only for girls in one district to encourage their sports motivation and preferences.

The right to culture and the right to sports belong to the fundamental human rights. It is of utmost importance that all citizens can participate in the cultural and sports sphere of their City. Nobody shall be excluded. Culture and sports also ensure that all citizens participate in the daily life of a city. This shows the major significance of both areas. The City of Graz was able to improve the quality of life for its citizens by placing a particular focus on these two topics. It was possible to encourage more citizens for cultural and sportive activities.

Both thematic years clearly showed that the City of Graz attaches great importance to the consideration and implementation of human rights.

## Members of the Human Rights Council of the City of Graz

As of October 2022

<p><b>Mag.<sup>a</sup> Angelika Vauti</b>  <b>(chairwoman)</b>  <i>Universalmuseum Joanneum, Stabsstelle für Inklusion und Partizipation</i>          (Administrative Department for Inclusion and Participation)</p>	<p><b>Mag.<sup>a</sup> Daniela Grabovac</b>  <i>Antidiskriminierungsstelle Steiermark</i>          (Anti-Discrimination Office Styria)</p>	<p><b>Mag.<sup>a</sup> Denise Schiffrer-Barac</b>  <i>kija Steiermark</i>          (Ombudsoffice for Children and Youth Styria)</p>
<p><b>Mag. Max Aufischer</b>  <b>(deputy chairman)</b>  <i>Kulturvermittlung Steiermark</i></p>	<p><b>Karl Heinz Herper</b>  <i>SPÖ GR-Klub</i>          (Local Council Club SPÖ)</p>	<p><b>Mag. Michael Schwanda</b>  <i>Oberlandesgericht Graz</i>          (Higher Regional Court Graz)</p>
<p><b>Tristan Ammerer</b>  <i>Grüne GR-Klub</i>          (Local Council Club Die Grünen)</p>	<p><b>Mag.<sup>a</sup> Dr.<sup>in</sup> Elke Lujansky-Lammer</b>  <i>Gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft Regionalbüro Steiermark</i>          (Ombud for Equal Treatment – Regional Office Styria)</p>	<p><b>Dr. Klaus Starl</b>  <i>Geschäftsstelle, ETC Graz</i>          (Executive Office)</p>
<p><b>Dr. Wolfgang Benedek</b>  <i>Universitätsprofessor i.R. Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz</i>          (retired University Professor, University of Graz)</p>	<p><b>Mag.<sup>a</sup> Gabriele Metz, MA</b>  <i>Ombudsstelle für Grazer Mädchen und Frauen</i>          (Ombudsoffice for Girls and Women of Graz)</p>	<p><b>Mag.<sup>a</sup> Ulrike Taberhofer</b>  <i>KPÖ-GR Klub</i>          (Local Council Club KPÖ)</p>
<p><b>Sigrid Binder</b>  <i>Grüne Gemeinderätin a.D.</i>          (Local Councillor off-duty – Political Party Die Grünen)</p>	<p><b>Joe Niedermayer</b>  <i>RosaLila PantherInnen</i></p>	<p><b>Dr.<sup>in</sup> Claudia Unger</b>  <i>ÖVP GR-Klub</i>          (Local Council Club ÖVP)</p>
<p><b>Mag.<sup>a</sup> Jutta Dier</b>  <i>Friedensbüro Graz</i>          (Peace Office Graz)</p>	<p><b>Wolfgang Pucher</b>  <i>Pfarrer Vinzenzgemeinschaft Eggenberg</i>          (Pastor Vinzensgemeinschaft Eggenberg)</p>	<p><b>Lisa Weichsler, BA MA</b>  <i>Interreligiöser Beirat der Stadt Graz</i>          (Interreligious Advisory Board of the City of Graz)</p>
<p><b>Günther Ebenschweiger</b>  <i>Präventionskongress</i>          (Austrian Congress on Prevention of Violence)</p>	<p><b>Sabine Reininghaus</b>  <i>NEOS</i>          (Political Party NEOS)</p>	<p><b>Dr. Wolfgang Wehapp</b>  <i>Amt der Bürgermeisterin</i>          (Office of the Mayor)</p>
<p><b>Mag. Christian Ehetreiber</b></p>	<p><b>Anna Robosch</b>  <i>SPÖ GR-Klub</i></p>	<p><b>Dr. Josef Wilhelm</b>  <i>Vorstand Friedensbüro Graz</i>          (Director Peace Office Graz)</p>

<i>ARGE Jugend gegen Gewalt und Rassismus</i> (ARGE Youth against violence and racism)	(Local Council Club SPÖ)	
<b>Mag. Godswill Eyawo</b>  <i>MigrantInnenbeirat der Stadt Graz</i> (Migrants Advisory Board of the City of Graz)	<b>Mag. Markus Scheucher</b>  <i>BHS-Lehrer i.R., Lektor WU Wien</i> (retired teacher; Lector at WU Vienna – University for business and economics)	<b>Mag. Michael Winter</b>  <i>FPÖ GR-Klub</i> (Local Council Club FPÖ)

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