

2023 Human Rights Report of the City of Graz

A summary

The present English 2023 Human Rights Report of the Human Rights Advisory Board (*Menschenrechtsbeirat*) of the City of Graz is a comprised version of the full 2023 Human Rights Report in German, summarizing its main findings.

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

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Contact details:

Geschäftsstelle des Menschenrechtsbeirates der Stadt Graz:

European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (ETC Graz) Elisabethstraße 50B 8010 Graz, Austria menschenrechtsbeirat@etc-graz.at, www.etc-graz.eu

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1. Introduction

Human rights are essential entitlements for all individuals. Embracing and upholding this foundational principle, the Human Rights City of Graz exemplifies a steadfast commitment to its promotion. As a testament to this dedication, the city established the Human Rights Advisory Board (*Menschenrechtsbeirat*) in 2007 with the aim of advising local authorities, namely the mayor and city council, on human rights matters. Annually, the Human Rights Advisory Board publishes a comprehensive Human Rights Report, scrutinising the human rights landscape within the city over a specified period. Typically, these reports fall into two distinct types, each alternating in publication. The first type is the State-of-the-Art Report, which provides a comprehensive overview of pertinent human rights themes and challenges, and precise recommendations to address significant deficiencies. The second type is the Follow-up Report, designed to assess the implementation of recommendations formulated in the preceding year.

The 2023 Human Rights Report represents the sixteenth edition produced by the Human Rights Advisory Board of the city of Graz. Regarded as a State-of-the-Art Report, it commences with a thorough exploration of Graz's current human rights landscape, drawing insights from a diverse cohort of over 200 local stakeholders. This inclusive group comprises various entities such as city administration departments, civil society organisations, NGOs, academic institutions, members of the Human Rights Advisory Board, political parties represented in the local city council, the judiciary, and law enforcement agencies.

Following this comprehensive overview, the report shifts its focus to exploring the egovernment services offered by the city of Graz from a human rights perspective. This specialised analysis examines the accessibility, availability, adaptability, and acceptability of these services, ensuring alignment with fundamental human rights principles.

Concluding its examination, the 2023 Human Rights Report presents a set of carefully crafted recommendations by the members of the Human Rights Advisory Board. These recommendations are specifically directed toward the city government and city council, aiming to address the identified human rights gaps based on the input provided by local actors and promote the realisation of human rights for all residents of Graz.

The Human Rights Advisory Board mourns the passing of its member Wolfgang Pucher

Pastor Wolfgang Pucher, a founding member of the Human Rights Advisory Board, passed away in July 2023. Throughout his life, he devoted himself tirelessly to the cause of alleviating poverty and championing the rights of the marginalised. His unwavering commitment and selfless advocacy left an indelible mark on his community, the Human Rights Advisory Board, and the city of Graz, all of which he held dear. His absence will be keenly felt by those whose lives he touched.

2. The Human Rights Landscape of Graz: An Overview

With the 16th Human Rights Report, the Human Rights Advisory Board of the city of Graz once again presents a comprehensive assessment of the human rights situation in Graz. All city departments, the majority of state and federal authorities operating in Graz as requested by the working group of the Report, and nearly one-fifth of the approximately 200 institutions asked to report, provided data, facts, challenges, good practices, and recommendations. As a result, this Report has not only become the most extensive but also offers highly informative insights into the various topics and areas covered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Furthermore, the available data facilitated the development of recommendations in five areas directed to the city government and council aimed at advancing the improvement of human rights implementation in Graz.

In general, this section seeks to provide an overview of the key aspects pertaining to the human rights landscape in Graz.

2.1. Challenges

First, various challenges faced in upholding human rights in the city are highlighted. It's worth noting that not all problems identified are the responsibility of the city of Graz. Some fall under the authority of the regional government of Styria or even the federal government. Others relate to how people interact with each other. However, most of these challenges affect everyone in Graz and impact their ability to enjoy their human rights fairly and without discrimination. That's why they're all discussed in this Report.

Youth Violence and Racism Trends

Since 2007, data on violence and racism among and between youths have been gathered. For the first time, statistics indicate a rising trend in the number of young people affected by violence and racism. This trend is not limited to Graz but extends to the entire province of Styria.

Shortage of Qualified Personnel in Nursery Schools

There is a significant shortage of qualified personnel with appropriate education for nursery schools in the job market. Consequently, meeting the existing demand for skilled nursery school staff is not feasible, resulting in a strained situation. Specifically, children with disabilities do not receive adequate support in nursery schools. This situation is prevalent in both Graz and Styria.

Insufficient Childcare for Under-Three-Year-Olds and its Gendered Impacts

Additionally, there is insufficient childcare available for children under three years old. This shortage not only negatively impacts the balance between work and family life but also hinders gender equality in the job market. Since childcare responsibilities still often fall predominantly on women, particularly when children are very young, the lack of childcare facilities forces women to either cease working or work part-time, leading to reduced or no income, thereby exacerbating poverty among women in old age.

Rising Housing Costs and Discriminatory Practices

Housing costs have steadily risen over the past few years. The significant price hikes affecting all rent-setting systems have adverse effects on a large portion of the city's population. Even community housing has become more expensive. One-time payments to tenants do not address this ongoing issue. Furthermore, discriminatory practices against the Romani people regarding the allocation, quality, and terms of apartments have been identified.

Challenges Faced by Homeless People

Many homeless people lack social security. In cases of severe illness, they are only briefly hospitalised and often discharged directly to institutions run by the *VinziWerke*, which provide assistance to the homeless and those in need, without proper or any information about their health status.

Underexplored Territory: Women's Health

Women's health remains an underexplored area. There is a severe shortage of data on women's health as well as specific knowledge about gender-specific medical issues.

Only joint efforts by the city of Graz, the province of Styria, the state government, as well as private actors can solve these dramatic conditions for the people affected. The following section highlights some efforts in this direction.

2.2. Best Practice Examples

Over the past 15 years, many measures implemented to improve the human rights landscape in Graz were discussed by the Human Rights Advisory Board before their implementation or were brought to the attention of the city government in its recommendations. The Human Rights Advisory Board welcomes this constructive form of cooperation.

Also in 2023, the Human Rights Report identified numerous positive advancements aimed at improving the city's human rights landscape.

Enhancing Housing Accessibility and Equity

In the realm of housing, the cap on rent increases plays a pivotal role in ensuring the affordability of community housing, complemented by the rental subsidy offered by the city's Office for Housing Affairs. Tenants in the private housing market can, under certain conditions, apply to the Office for Housing Affairs for a refundable contribution towards their deposit.

Additionally, the city's Social Welfare Office has addressed the pressing challenges surrounding housing acquisition and stability within the city by establishing a dedicated Department for Housing, Housing Search, and Mobile Social Work. This department is committed to ensuring housing security, facilitating accommodation acquisition, and offering accessible and prompt housing assistance to all residents in Graz.

Moreover, the city of Graz has signed the "Homeless Bill of Rights," aimed at acknowledging and reinforcing the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness.

Another significant measure enacted by the city was to revise the eligibility criteria for community housing allocation. Previously, residents were required to have maintained their primary residence in Graz for a period of five years to qualify for community housing. This

criterion has now been amended by the local government to just one year. Furthermore, individuals with asylum entitlement in Austria were previously ineligible to apply for community housing, leading to the exclusion of a demographic in dire need of affordable housing. Recognising this disparity, the city government has amended this regulation, allowing individuals with asylum entitlement to now apply for community housing in Graz. By implementing these revised application conditions, the city government has acted upon a prior recommendation put forth by the Human Rights Advisory Board.

Advancing Awareness and Sensitivity via Human Rights Training

The Human Rights Advisory Board notes positively that awareness of discrimination in Graz – within the population and also in the authorities – has increased. Training sessions for the city of Graz's Public Order Guard (*Grazer Ordnungswache*) on interculturality, diversity, integration, and discrimination, as recommended by the Human Rights Advisory Board for a long time, are now regularly held. The Public Order Guard of Graz collaborates with the local police force to enforce municipal ordinances, manage traffic, patrol public areas, and respond to disturbances, ensuring public safety and order in the city. Human rights, diversity, and equal treatment are now part of the administrative training courses in the Human Rights City of Graz. The Human Rights Advisory Board also welcomes the increased sensitivity in the actions of the Public Order Guard, where admonitions have increased with similar case numbers, but fines have decreased by 75%, from 2,000 to about 500 per year in the last five years. Additionally, employees of the city administration undergo training sessions covering topics such as human rights, diversity, and equality, followed by assessments to gauge their understanding and competence in these areas.

Inclusive Initiatives: Empowering Persons with Disabilities and Enhancing Community Participation

The city's Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities reports that work is currently underway on an inclusion strategy for Graz, which shall translate the goals of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into concrete objectives at the local level. This process involves self-advocacy organisations, umbrella organisations, members of the city administration and political level, as well as individual citizens. The brochure "Bus and Tram for EVERYONE" is a further example in the area of disabilities. The tips and information presented in this brochure were gathered by individuals with diverse disabilities to ensure good and trouble-free travel on public transportation for their respective disabilities. The brochure is designed to enhance awareness and promote the accessibility of public transportation for individuals with disabilities.

Special emphasis is placed on the participation of different groups in the planning of children's playgrounds so that the different suggestions can be incorporated into the planning.

Advocating for Social Rights: A Call for Constitutional Anchoring

The city's Social Welfare Office recommends in the Human Rights Report the anchoring of social fundamental rights in the Austrian constitution. The Human Rights Advisory Board supports this recommendation to the federal government, especially regarding the right to adequate housing, which is not a legally recognised human right in Austria.

Inclusive Employment Initiatives

The Employment Dialogue Working Group (*Arbeitsgruppe Dialog Beschäftigung*) of the city's Social Welfare Office together with the Public Employment Service (*AMS*), Austrian Chamber of Labour (*Arbeiterkammer*), Federation of Austrian Industry, Austrian Economic Chamber (*Wirtschaftskammer*), Austrian Federation of Trade Unions (*Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund*), and other stakeholders is also viewed by the Human Rights Advisory Board as an example of good practice because the necessary framework conditions for successful employment and poverty prevention and reduction are discussed and created in the spirit of a social municipal policy.

In this context, reference should also be made to an example of good practice in Styria. The Styrian Business Promotion Agency (*Steirische Wirtschaftsförderung - SFG*) ties its subsidies to compliance with Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It specifically encourages companies to take measures to promote equality. In projects, the parameters of equal opportunities and non-discrimination play a significant role in the granting of funding.

2.3. Conclusion

Regarding the implementation of the Graz Human Rights City Declaration of 2001, the Human Rights Advisory Board of the city of Graz finds:

- that the city government and council, as recommended, are guided by human rights in their programmes and decisions;
- that the city also endeavors to promote awareness of the importance of human rights in urban everyday life through training, project funding, and participation projects;
- that the city respects, protects, and guarantees the realisation of human rights in the development of its services, and in cooperation with institutions, organisations, and companies;
- that the city considers and fosters the topic of human rights in its international cooperation.

3. In Focus: E-Government Services of the City of Graz from a Human Rights Perspective

The municipal administration is the unit closest to the people. Among its primary tasks is the provision of information and public services to its residents. A particular focus is on ensuring that these services are as easily accessible and available to everyone as possible. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the indispensable value and immense importance of digital technologies, which have significantly contributed to maintaining communication between citizens and administration, have become apparent. Particularly, the rights to freedom of information and political participation have become closely linked to digitalization since the pandemic. This has led governments worldwide to focus more on expanding their e-government services. In Graz, too, the pandemic has been a driving force for the development of the city's digital services. However, the foundation for this work was already laid in 2018 with the "Digital Agenda Graz" directive.

Against this background, the Human Rights Advisory Board decided to take a human rights perspective on the e-government services of the city of Graz and to make it the focus for the current year.

In general, e-government entails providing information and services via the Internet. This includes submitting applications online or scheduling appointments through internet platforms. This can either completely bypass real office visits or expedite them. The provision of e-government services aims to facilitate and transparently enhance the efficiency of communication between citizens and the administration through information and communication technologies. E-government services can be viewed as a lever to increase transparency of governmental actions and to strengthen the democratic participation of residents.

The provision of e-government services by the city is primarily associated with Article 41 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union – the right to good administration and Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – the right to an adequate social and international order. Just as with handling administrative matters in person at the City of Graz Magistrate, the administration must ensure for all residents that their concerns are handled fairly, promptly, transparently, and, if necessary, with the exercise of relevant legal remedies when processing digital municipal services.

In addition to the right to good administration, the provision of e-government services has numerous other intersections with human rights. These can be distinguished as:

- a) Human rights in e-government: The principles of these human rights must be upheld in the provision and execution of e-government services, such as the prohibition of discrimination (Art 2 UDHR) or data protection under the right to protection of freedom and privacy (Art 12 UDHR). And
- b) Human rights through e-government: These human rights must not be restricted by e-government services but must be respected and ideally even promoted, such as the right to freedom of opinion and information (Art 19 UDHR), the right to participation (Art 21 UDHR), or the right to social security (Art 22 UDHR).

From civil, political, social, cultural, and economic human rights, obligations always arise for the city to implement, promote, and protect them. The digitalization of municipal services can be understood as a lever to strengthen, on the one hand, the right to good administration for

the residents of Graz, and on the other hand, to ensure and promote the other human rights mentioned above. As such, the city of Graz fulfills its human rights obligations through its offering of digital services. However, the diverse and close intertwining of digitalization with issues such as the prohibition of discrimination and data protection also increases the need for continuous monitoring of e-government services to vigilantly and human rights-compliantly accompany this fast-paced development.

To assess the city's e-government offerings against human rights obligations, four key areas are considered: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. A questionnaire was developed for this purpose and answered by the city's Strategic IT Management and the Innovation and Legal Affairs Department. The results are as follows:

The foundation for all digitalization projects in the city of Graz is the "Digital Agenda Graz" directive adopted in 2018. The particularity of this policy lies in the fact that it not only serves as a guiding document in terms of a strategic framework for implementing digitalization activities but also imposes a commitment on the city itself. This directive comprises twelve principles developed by the city with experts, to which the city is committed to adhere. The principles also reflect a very broadly conceived understanding of inclusion (gender-equitable, barrier-free, and integrative) by the city to ensure that all residents can participate in the digitalization of Graz. Already in Principle 2, human rights are proclaimed as an integral part of this policy. This self-commitment approach greatly promotes the city's accountability, as clear guidelines can be derived from the principles, the implementation (or lack thereof) of which is measurable. In terms of **acceptability**, this policy ensures that services meet human rights standards and take into account the needs of citizens.

The city of Graz does not view digitalization as a development detached from its urban activities but rather as a comprehensive strategic orientation that should be integrated into daily work routines as effectively as possible. The city currently offers 348 e-government services, accessible to residents through the dedicated website "Digital City Graz". A holistic and internally connected approach is pursued in providing digital services. All municipal departments are involved in the digitalization process and are continuously supported by the Presidential Department (*Präsidialabteilung*), serving as the central coordination point for Graz's digital agenda. This means that each department independently determines its digital offerings, with all forms uniformly designed. It's worth noting that the city does not adopt a digital-first approach. Therefore, city services can still be carried out either in person at administrative offices or online. The decision lies with the residents themselves. Thus, the city ensures that all services are available to those target groups who do not want or cannot use digital services. In terms of **availability**, it can be concluded that the City of Graz provides its residents with a comprehensive range of e-government services.

Accessing the city's digital services requires an internet-enabled device with a web browser. Certain services necessitate residency registration in Graz, and proof of identity may sometimes be required. E-government services serve as a tool for the city to simplify access to its offerings, thereby accelerating their utilisation. This efficiency improvement in service delivery theoretically leaves more human resources available for residents who prefer personal contact in handling their administrative matters. In designing digital services, the city of Graz, in line with the broad inclusivity understanding in the "Digital Agenda Graz" directive, ensures **accessibility** for all residents. International and national legal standards regarding website accessibility are adhered to, with the city going a step further by developing its own guidelines for seamless communication between residents and the administration. All digital forms are

designed in clear language and are barrier-free, embedded within websites. Further enhancing accessibility could involve offering services not only in German but also in other languages relevant to the city's population. While legal forms must be in German, authorities could explore alternative methods, such as providing multilingual information and explanatory materials, to overcome existing language barriers, thus expanding access and ensuring barrier-free communication with the city administration for non-German-speaking residents. This is worth noting since the utilisation of Graz's digital services has increased in recent years, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, with digital applications doubling from 2019 to 2022, totalling 186,602 uses.

The city of Graz actively promotes its digital services through various media channels, also targeting specific demographics such as the elderly. The city regularly evaluates its digital services and implements adjustments based on user feedback and evolving needs. Specifics of the evaluation process were not provided. The city is committed to continuously enhancing its offerings to better serve its residents. The form and content of e-government promote inclusion and participation and fulfil important transparency requirements. Data protection and equal treatment are ensured. E-government provided by the city of Graz guarantees and promotes the right to freedom of information and expression, contributing significantly to the rights to education, work, and an adequate standard of living. Accordingly, aspects of **acceptability** and **adaptability** are taken into account.

The Human Rights Council observes that the human rights-based approach in local politics and administration generally also applies to the Digital Agenda, specifically to the city's provision of digital services. In line with the right to good administration, the city demonstrates an awareness of the implications of increasing digitalization and associated challenges from a human rights perspective. It addresses these proactively and through a self-commitment to upholding human rights in the digital world. The city is guided by human rights principles in the process of digitalising municipal services. Regarding availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability, it is evident from the preceding discussions that the right to good administration is currently ensured in a non-discriminatory manner for all residents in the e-government offerings of the city of Graz. The Human Rights Council merely wishes to suggest to the relevant authority to further enhance access to the provided services by considering and implementing measures to support non-German-speaking residents in accessing services exclusively available in German. The provision of e-government services is emblematic of good governance, and as such, it is crucial that the City continually informs all residents about the benefits and easy access to these digital services through various initiatives.

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

1. The Digital City

The directive "Digital Agenda Graz" as a strategic, legal, and technical starting point for advancing digitalization and future projects in the city already meets high human rights standards.

- a) To avoid potential discriminatory effects of digitalization and a lack of access to digital services, the Human Rights Advisory Board of the city of Graz recommends implementing digital educational measures as part of a strategy to promote media and information literacy.
- b) As an additional accompanying measure, the Human Rights Advisory Board of the city of Graz recommends developing and implementing ways to further simplify the use of e-government services for the residents of Graz, such as providing easily understandable and multilingual informational or instructional materials as aids.
- c) The Human Rights Advisory Board acknowledges with approval that the authorities responsible for the "Digital City Graz" expressly refrain from offering city services exclusively digitally. The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz continue to provide existing analog offerings, face-to-face services, and telephone accessibility for city procedures and services.

2. Promotion of Communication and Multilingualism

- a) Arts and Culture: The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz equip Graz's museums with appropriate facilities to accommodate the linguistic diversity prevalent in the city.
- b) Social Services, Healthcare, and Citizen's Office: The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz ensure that the linguistic accessibility and availability of services in the areas of social services, healthcare, and the Citizen's Office are maximised, which means ensuring adequate language-proficient staff or interpreter services.
- c) Education:
 - i. The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz expand native language instruction in Graz's elementary schools.
 - ii. The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz promote more interpretations of Austrian Sign Language throughout the education sector.
 - iii. The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz provide interpretation services in Romani in Graz's elementary schools.
- d) German Courses and German Language Support: The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz expand demand-responsive offerings of German courses or German language support.
- e) Information: The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz expand multilingual informational materials and update them to the most spoken languages or current needs in Graz.
- f) Diversity: The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz promote diversity-sensitive image and media work in Graz.

3. Domestic Violence

The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz join the violence prevention project "StoP - Districts without Partner Violence" in order to pursue the prevention and combating of domestic violence on a smaller scale, thereby more intensively and sustainably.

4. Measures to Promote the Social Participation of Children and Youths

Children and youths have a right to the city. The Human Rights Advisory Board recommends that the city of Graz actively engage with children and young people and open itself to the realization of this right by having the political level sit down with them and negotiate in an unbiased exchange how they can shape their living environment.

5. Measures to Combat Racism

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

- a) evaluate the existing Ten-Point Plan of Action against Racism.
- b) develop, approve, and implement a new Ten-Point Plan of Action for the period 2024-2026 based on the approach proposed by the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR) and taking into account the city's Integration Guideline of 2023.

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

As of October 2023

Mag. Max Aufischer (chairman)	Mag.ª Daniela Grabovac	Mag. ^a Denise Schiffrer-Barac
Kulturvermittlung Steiermark	Antidiskriminierungsstelle Steiermark (Anti-Discrimination Office Styria)	<i>KIJA Steiermark</i> (Ombudsoffice for Children and Youth Styria)
Mag.ª Angelika Vauti (deputy chairwoman)	Brigadier Thomas Heiland, BA MA	Mag. Michael Schwanda
Universalmuseum Joanneum, Stabsstelle für Inklusion und Partizipation (Administrative Department for Inclusion and Participation)	Stadtpolizeikommandant Graz (Commanding officer of the City Graz Police)	<i>Oberlandesgericht Graz</i> (Higher Regional Court Graz)
Tristan Ammerer	Karl Heinz Herper	Dr. Klaus Starl
<i>Grüne GR-Klub</i> (Local Council Club Die Grünen)	SPÖ Stadtrat a.D., Menschenrechtspreisträger 2019/20 (Local Council Club SPÖ ret.; Human Rights Prize 2019/20)	Geschäftsstelle, ETC Graz (Executive Office)
Dr. Wolfgang Benedek	Mag. ^a Dr. ⁱⁿ Elke Lujansky- Lammer	Mag. ^a Ulrike Taberhofer
Universitätsprofessor i.R., Karl- Franzens-Universität Graz (University Professor ret., University of Graz)	Gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft Regionalbüro Steiermark (Ombud for Equal Treatment – Regional Office Styria)	<i>KPÖ-GR Klub</i> (Local Council Club KPÖ)
Sigrid Binder	Mag.ª Gabriele Metz, MA	Dr. ⁱⁿ Claudia Unger
<i>Grüne Gemeinderätin a.D.</i> (Local Councillor ret. – Political Party Die Grünen)	<i>Ombudsstelle für Grazer Mädchen und Frauen</i> (Ombudsoffice for Girls and Women of Graz)	ÖVP GR-Klub (Local Council Club ÖVP)
Dr. ⁱⁿ Jennifer Brunner, MA MA BA	Joe Niedermayer	Dr. Wolfgang Wehap
<i>Interreligiöser Beirat</i> (Interreligious Advisory Board)	RosaLila PantherInnen	Amt der Bürgermeisterin (Mayor's Office)
Günther Ebenschweiger	Sabine Reininghaus	Dr. Josef Wilhelm
Präventionskongress (Austrian Congress on Prevention of Violence)	<i>NEOS Graz</i> (Political Party NEOS)	<i>Vorstand Friedensbüro Graz</i> <i>a.D.</i> (Director Peace Office Graz ret.)
Mag. Christian Ehetreiber	Anna Robosch	Mag.ª Jutta Willfurth
ARGE Jugend gegen Gewalt und Rassismus (ARGE Youth against violence and racism)	<i>SPÖ GR-Klub</i> (Local Council Club SPÖ)	<i>Friedensbüro Graz</i> (Peace Office Graz)
Mag. Godswill Éyawo	Mag. Markus Scheucher	Mag. Michael Winter
<i>MigrantInnenbeirat</i> (Migrants Advisory Board of the city of Graz)	BHS-Lehrer i.R., Lektor WU Wien (Teacher ret.; lecturer at Vienna University of Economics and Business)	(Korruptions-)Freier GR-Klub ((Corruption-)Free Local Council Club FPÖ)

Executive Office

European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy at the University of Graz (ETC Graz) Elisabethstraße 50B, 8010 Graz Tel: 0316 380 1536 https://www.graz.at/cms/beitrag/10153819/7771489/Menschenrechtsbeirat_in_Graz.html