

FROM THE VIENNA CHARTER FOR NEIGHBOURLY RELATIONS TO VIENNA AS A CITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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I. Introduction

As one of the fastest growing metropolitan cities in Europe, Vienna is – and has historically been – characterised by migration. The economic growth in the 1950s and labour migration in the 1960s, the establishment of United Nations (UN) headquarters in the 1970s, the establishment of a common European market, the freedom of movement and the opening of Europe to the east have particularly influenced the diversity of Vienna's population and its international status. Since the early 1990s, Vienna has pursued proactive and sustainable integration policies, but in 2004, a change of paradigm took place and since then Vienna has perceived itself as a city of immigration. This led to the further development of integration policies directed towards diversity and diversity management in a city characterised by migration.

Integration is regarded as a process that concerns not just migrants and people with a migration background, but in a context of diversity, the host society and its institutions are also included in this process. The City of Vienna has focused on developing its diversity competence, which is the awareness of the diversity and similarities of people and the ability to make use of this awareness when designing and delivering services to socio-culturally diverse users. Creating equal rights and opportunities in all areas of life is essential and forms the basis of social cohesion. Hence, the City of Vienna established Municipal Department 17 - Integration and Diversity in 2004, thereby creating the organisational framework for the implementation of diversity policies. This department forms part of the Vienna city administration and initiates measures and projects to promote equal opportunities and empowers the Viennese to get along well with each other in daily life.

For an intensive exchange of experiences and peer learning on measures and policies promoting equal opportunities and non-discrimination, Vienna joined the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR). ECCAR is an initiative launched by UNESCO in 2004; its leading actors are municipal administrations working to ensure a dignified, safe and just coexistence for all in 138 member cities with the aim of implementing policies combating discrimination and xenophobia.

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Vienna has also adopted the New Urban Agenda as a guideline. This political declaration, signed by all UN member states, sets out a human rights-based approach to policymaking and service delivery as a path towards inclusive and sustainable urban development and embraces the principle of the “right to the city”, which is based on the freedom to (re)make our cities and ourselves. As host of one of the four UN headquarters, Vienna is in close and constant cooperation and exchange with the Vienna-based UN organisations; the municipality is also represented by a liaison office in the United Nation’s premises in Vienna.

II. The Vienna Charter: Shaping the Future Together

In an international city, people with diverse lifestyles and convictions, ages, genders, sexual orientations, natives and immigrants, those with and without disabilities, all live together and should be able to cope with that diversity. The Vienna Charter process was about working out basic principles and rules for living together in a diverse society. The special feature of this project was that it was developed by the people of Vienna. They identified the issues at stake themselves, and took an active part in shaping the charter by participating in debates taking place in all parts of the city. The city was merely the initiator and facilitator of the process.

Starting point: Direct democracy for more solidarity in the city

The Vienna Charter was a strategic project for the first coalition government formed of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party in 2010. It is a project with strong links to direct democracy which was launched by the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and the Executive City Councillor in charge of integration and diversity, who welcomed citizens’ demands for public participation beyond elections. This was a sign of powerful political support and commitment as well as a new understanding of politics. It was clear that living together as a community cannot and should not be regulated by law alone. The city officially began the charter project in March 2012, though the first preparatory steps, which included the drafting of a core document, had already been initiated between May and September of the previous year.

The core document

A group consisting of legal experts and “experts from everyday life” – people from different professions and students – developed a document based on a number of fundamental and inalienable core elements of international legal norms and treaties as well as the Austrian constitution. Democracy and the rule of law, human and fundamental rights and women’s and children’s rights were the pillars.

Advisory committee and partner organisations

An independent advisory committee was established to safeguard the principles of transparency, openness and credibility. This committee represented all dimensions of diversity¹ and had the task of defending the core document and acting as an arbitration panel to resolve disputes. A broad

1. The dimensions of diversity include gender, religious beliefs, origin, marital status, ethnicity, parental status, age, education, physical and mental ability, income, sexual orientation, occupation, language, geographical location, and many more components.

process with the aim of involving a broad spectrum of Viennese society cannot and should not be organised by political decision-makers and the city administration alone. Businesses, clubs and associations, employer associations, trade unions, religious and ethnic communities, political parties and so on were invited to become partners in the Vienna Charter; 325 partner organisations from an impressively diverse range of fields declared their intention to hold charter talks or used their information channels to promote awareness of the project.

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Timeline and implementation phase

- March 2012 – Gathering the relevant topics. In the first two weeks the Viennese were invited to identify the topics they considered crucial for good neighbourly relations online or over the phone.
- April 2012 – Clustering the topics. Members of the advisory board worked through the topics and developed topic clusters to facilitate the following discussions: What is important for good neighbourly relations in Vienna? What do the participants expect from each other? What are they prepared to do? What should the Vienna Charter include?
- April to October 2012 – Conducting offline and online charter talks on the topic clusters. The charter talks were the project's centrepiece. During the last 17 days of the project phase all Vienna's inhabitants had the opportunity to join the discussion online and comment on the results.
- November 2012 – Presentation of the results. The "Vienna Charter. Shaping the Future Together" was presented to the public at a press conference and online.

Content and main topics

Based on the inputs provided by the Viennese population, the Vienna Charter advisory committee identified three key aspects to be addressed:

1. Living together

- Behaviour in traffic and on public transport;
- Manners and consideration.

2. Not the same all the time

- Young and old;
- Speaking German/speaking other languages;
- Me and those who are different to me.

3. Feeling healthy and tidy

- Clean city;
- Public space – room for everyone to live.

The Vienna Charter in figures

325 partner organisations;

651 charter talks in all districts;

8,500 face-to-face participants invested over 12,500 hours in good neighbourly relations;

The main challenge was to encourage and persuade people from diverse political, ideological, religious and social backgrounds to jointly participate in charter talks.

Over 47,000 online contributions and likes were submitted.

The City of Vienna provided moderators for all charter talks free of charge. They accompanied the discussion process, summed up the results and put them on the online platform. Over 30% of the participants in charter talks had migrant origins (mostly labour migrants who had resided in Vienna for a long time). Providing multilingual moderators encouraged the participation of speakers of languages other than German. The gender ratio was well-balanced in general and throughout the whole process.

The project ran for several months and resulted in a collection of basic principles for living together respectfully and with good neighbourly relations compiled by the inhabitants of Vienna. The charter may be considered an instrument for direct democracy in Vienna and the main aim was to develop more solidarity in the city. The text of the charter was made public in November 2012,² and the discussions and contributions are also available online.³

Main obstacles to the charter project

The main challenge was to encourage and persuade people from diverse political, ideological, religious and social backgrounds to jointly participate in charter talks. The discussion was most engaging when the participants were highly diverse, although it was demanding for the moderators to facilitate and to achieve common results. The engagement of multilingual moderators eased the participation of migrants during the whole process. It should also be noted that, like in other participatory processes, it was mostly people with similar opinions or from similar milieus or “lifestyles” who came together in the charter talks.

Lessons learned from the charter project

Throughout the process, the time schedule was very tight. The time span between the public announcement, the mayor’s press conference on March 13th 2012 and the start of the process only a month later on April 13th was too short. A longer period of time should have been planned for this phase. The same also applies to the communication with partner organisations. Most of these organisations became partners after the mayor’s press conference and his invitation for cooperation on a voluntary basis. The first phase of the project should have been started after wider communication and a clear kick-off phase. Considering the number of partners, the different means of participation – from online and offline to personal contacts – and the need to assemble different charter discussion groups in all parts of society, more time resources should have been allocated for such a broad participatory project.

A general evaluation of the Vienna Charter was not foreseen in its planning process. Nevertheless, it can be considered to have been a successful practice in bringing people together especially at neighbourhood level. This is the main reason the charter talks are still implemented as an instrument for integrating refugees and asylum seekers. The Vienna Charter talks for refugees aim to help newcomers understand what the Viennese consider essential for good neighbourly relations and which rules are particularly important.

2. <https://www.wien.gv.at/menschen/integration/pdf/charta-englisch.pdf>

3. <https://www.partizipation.at/vienna-charta.html>.

III. Vienna - City of Human Rights

The City of Vienna pledges to act as a guardian and defender of human rights by striving to respect, protect, fulfil and be accountable for human rights in all its areas of competence. Based on this approach, the City of Vienna actively supports its population in asserting and upholding their human rights by providing adequate framework conditions and using them as a basis for its activity. As a city that is experienced in matters of migration, integration and diversity management and strongly committed to principles of non-discrimination and equality, Vienna is all the more determined to further advance its cross-cutting human rights approach through additional inclusionary measures.

After two years of a broad, participatory process in collaboration with civil society, NGOs, academia and the national government, the city council approved the declaration “Vienna – City of Human Rights” in December 2014 and with this official act, Vienna became a Human Rights City. An important step in this process was the establishment of the Human Rights Office in 2015. The basis of the work of the Human Rights Office is defined in the declaration as well as in the government coalition agreement between the Social Democratic and Green parties that formed the Vienna city government from 2015.

The Human Rights Office works with political and governmental entities, as well as non-governmental organisations and civil society both on a local and an international level, to implement the city council's declaration and to guide the further development of the human rights culture in Vienna. The main goal of the Human Rights City is to ensure inclusion in an equitable society. This approach is firmly anchored in the Declaration “Vienna – City of Human Rights”, which reiterates that “every person living in the city has the same human rights – regardless of their nationality or residency status”⁴.

Five strategic areas of the declaration

1. Establishing the human rights approach as a cross-cutting principle in politics and administration

Human rights form the City of Vienna's guidelines for its decisions and actions in legislation, executive authority and administrative jurisdiction, when acting as a local authority or as a private entity, in its own sphere of competence and in matters of delegated federal competence. The Vienna city administration has adapted its structure since the 1990s to the new strategies and measures on equality and human rights. In other words, the basis and foundation of all policies in Vienna is equal rights and access to services provided by the public administration. Establishing the Department for Women's Affairs in 1991 was the first step towards implementing gender equality in all fields of life. The foundation of the departments for diversity management and integration and for equal rights for the LGTBIQ population as well as the unit for the promotion of gender mainstreaming, including gender budgeting, followed in the late 1990s. The City of Vienna develops continuously adequate measures to promote openness, diversity, political participation, a barrier-free environment and equal opportunities in all spheres of life, guaranteeing universal access to rights as a consequence.

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4. <https://www.wien.gv.at/english/social/integration/pdf/human-rights-declaration.pdf>.

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The Human Rights Office acts as a connecting link between departments of the city administration, the various human rights organisations located in Vienna and in general all governance levels. Since 2016, the office encourages dialogue between these institutions on human rights and regularly invites different target groups (children, youths, seniors, newcomers and women and men of all ages) to discussions and seminars on various subjects related to human rights.

Security policy and human rights as a holistic concept, which includes social security and access to education for all, children's rights (combating child poverty, homelessness among families with minors, unaccompanied minor refugees, violence against children and child trafficking) and combating human trafficking especially at the local level, have been the main topics until now.

2. International cooperation and networking

Due to its federal status and the distribution of competences, the City of Vienna (it is also a federal province) forms part of national and international networks. The office provides support to delegations coming to Vienna from all over the world and cooperates globally with human rights cities to exchange experiences in order to provide mutual support. Office staff participate in regional, European and global networks. In May 2018, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the UN's World Conference on Human Rights, the Vienna+25 international expert conference took place on the premises of the Viennese municipality. The Human Rights Office had a key role and contributed to defining the contents and the concept of the conference.

3. Human rights learning and the promotion of human rights education in the city and in all parts of society

Education of pupils and students

The Human Rights Office has held many seminars and panel discussions to raise awareness about human and children's rights in schools. In the past years over 1,000 pupils and students have taken part in different relevant activities. Since its establishment in 2015, the Human Rights Office has established strategic cooperation with the Vienna School Board. The school authority is an important partner facilitating access to teachers, pupils and their parents. Moreover, it serves as a platform for disseminating the outcomes of cooperation with schools.

Human rights learning in the city

This was a project implemented in cooperation with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Students were invited to participate in a competition to create videos, advertisements, animated films, photos or drawings on human rights in the city under the motto "connect.reflect.act". The competition was led by the Human Rights Office, the FRA and the Vienna School Board. The winners of this contest were announced at the first "Fundamental Rights Forum" held in Vienna in 2016. Workshops with professional film producers and directors were organised during this conference.

“Youth make cinema”

With the support of the Austrian Film Institute, the agency “EINBLICK unfiltered” and the Human Rights Office carried out the “Youth make cinema” project. The project aimed to attract young people, especially potential female filmmakers with a migration background to be participants and to promote human rights as the content of their films. The films were produced by young people under professional guidance. They received inputs and workshops on human rights before the process of film-making began. More than 3,000 youths and young adults have watched the films at schools and the films were broadcast on the Austrian TV channel OKTO.

Events on International Human Rights Day (10th December)

On International Human Rights Day in 2015, just after the establishment of the office, the Human Rights Office organised an open door day. The Human Rights Office team, alongside representatives of the international organisations UNHCR, the Austrian Commission for UNESCO, the United Nations Information Services in Vienna (UNIS Vienna), the FRA and the Information Office of the European Parliament, answered questions from participants from all walks of life.

On International Human Rights Day in 2016, Vienna House in Brussels invited members of the EU’s Commission and Parliament, as well representatives of different member states, to a lunch debate. The role of cities and regions in raising awareness and promoting human rights and the presentation of Vienna – City of Human Rights were the focus of this debate.

The Human Rights Office organised a human rights walk for students on this day in 2017. The aim was to give them an interactive introduction to human and children’s rights and insights into the human rights activities in Vienna. At City Hall the participants had the chance to talk to “living books” – experts from politics, international organisations and NGOs.

On International Human Rights Day 2018 the Human Rights Office, in cooperation with representatives of the European Union in Vienna and the Vienna School Board, organised a panel discussion with young members of the European Parliament on “Freedom of Expression” as a fundamental right underpinning the protection of all other civil rights. Civil society was invited to this discussion.

Examples of diverse awareness-raising and human rights-learning measures

- Speed dating for Human Rights: The Human Rights Office has been organising speed dating for human rights on its premises on the last Friday in April since its establishment. The diversity (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.) of the participants is the significant feature of this event.
- Educational programmes targeting city administration employees: In order to establish a culture of human rights in the city administration, the Human Rights Office integrates human rights into the educational programmes of the city officials provided by the city’s administrative academy. The following examples can provide a panoramic view of these programmes.

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Developing an urban human rights culture is of major importance for a Human Rights City.

In 2015, a training course under the title "The Human Rights City of Vienna Presents Itself" was offered to interested employees of the City of Vienna. Since 2017, human rights have been included as a cross-cutting subject in the "Administrative Procedures" seminar, and special courses on human rights have been established aimed at law enforcement officials. Online education on human rights is to be offered soon.

4. Civil Society Participation

Developing an urban human rights culture is of major importance for a Human Rights City. The Human Rights Office actively contacts initiatives and prepares and opens up new forms of participation that promote the advancement of human rights. Members of civil society are considered to be experts and the members of different initiatives are encouraged to take part in the thematic discussions and round tables organised by the Human Rights Office.

A group of inhabitants of the neighbourhood where the Human Rights Office is located have formed the "Citizens Council", which is active under the umbrella of the Local Agenda 21 and uses the premises of the Human Rights Office for their activities. The staff of the office takes part regularly in panels and discussions on human rights and they are also (co) organisers of seminars and workshops.

5. Institutionalisation, action plan and reporting, independent monitoring

A steering group was established at the very beginning of the process of making Vienna a Human Rights City. Representatives of the city government, an independent research institute on human rights and the city administration are members of this group. Strengthening the collaboration between administration, politics and academia on human rights and observing implementation steps based on the declaration "Vienna - City of Human Rights" are this steering group's defined areas of action.

The outcomes of round tables and panel discussions organised by the Human Rights Office and the recommendations of NGOs and civil society have been documented and will be collected in an action plan (still in the drafting process). This action plan should be a guideline for the activities of the Human Rights City at both strategic and operative levels. Setting up an independent monitoring structure for evaluating and ensuring the achievement of proposed goals is planned for 2019.

"Added value" of human rights in Vienna

As an inclusive city, Vienna is experienced in implementing equality measures in all fields of life and can build its human rights approach on the milestones achieved over past decades. The path to social inclusion and an equitable society had already been defined prior to Vienna becoming a Human Rights City. The human rights approach adds the aspect of the city as a defender of human rights.

The role of the city in upholding, promoting and protecting human rights has become clearer and more pronounced in challenging times. In 2015 Vienna adopted a welcoming attitude towards asylum seekers arriving in the city.

Each winter, Vienna implements its “winter package” and provides homeless people with a place to stay in dignity from November to April.

By way of organising round tables on different subjects like housing as a human right, security policies and human rights and children’s rights, the Human Rights Office makes the city’s commitment to human rights visible and gives relevant stakeholders the opportunity to learn from each other and to coordinate their measures in the respective fields.

Social cohesion cannot solely be “prescribed” from the top: it must be articulated, demanded and lived by the city’s inhabitants.

IV. Challenges and helpful steps

Visible establishment of the Human Rights Office within the city’s administrative structures;

Strengthening the Human Rights City through a visible network of Human Rights Cities, especially in Europe;

Using the same language globally for addressing the human rights approach at local or regional level. Using three different titles – Human Rights Cities, Human Rights in the City and the Right to the City – in this context is confusing.

Establishing human rights as guiding principles for as many public and private institutions as possible, as a basis for decision-making, a directional indicator for institutional measures, and a key topic in education and training.

Cooperation and networking with other human rights cities to exchange experiences and provide mutual support. Unfortunately the need for cities to have an official platform for networking has not yet been met.

Strengthening the World Human Rights Forum (WHRCF) as the only existing global conference on human rights at local level, which has taken place annually in Gwangju, South Korea, since 2010. The City of Vienna is a member of the advisory board.

Lessons learned

Social cohesion cannot solely be “prescribed” from the top: it must be articulated, demanded and lived by the city’s inhabitants. A city can declare itself a Human Rights City by means of official acts (laws, legislations or declarations), but to protect human rights at the local level it is important to increasingly remind everybody of those rights and to continuously work on the fundamental social consensus about their unconditional validity.

