

Working group

Meeting of Human Rights Cities

Background

The City of Vienna declared itself as a Human Rights City in December 2014 and has adopted the declaration 'Vienna- City of Human Rights', proclaiming that it will be ensured that the human rights of all of the inhabitants are respected and promoted as well as taking human rights as a cross cutting issue for the all political and administrative fields.

The Human Rights Office of the City of Vienna organised this meeting for selected European cities in advance of the official opening of the Forum at Vienna's City Hall.

Objectives

This meeting sought to create an "informal" discussion among Human Rights Cities, taking stock of current human rights challenges and initiatives at the local level and exchanging best practices on how to address them. The participants were also encouraged to explore the development of a networking platform for exchange between the human rights cities.

Participants

- Representatives from Utrecht, Brno, Graz, Nuremberg, Riga, Berlin and the Västra Götaland region
- Association of Cypriot Municipalities
- The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)
- FRA

Main messages

1. There is no one-size-fits-all way to develop as a human rights city but rather there is a diversity of approaches.
2. There is a strong need to develop a model of cooperation between cities that support the cross-national exchange of practices.
3. "Smart cities" activities provides good opportunities for action locally in the area of human rights.
4. Many participants call for continuing similar meetings between human rights cities, with:
 - a. a strong focus on the European context;
 - b. Keeping a group of cities who regularly attend and invite new ones.

5. Relevant experiences from outside Europe (USA, Asia) is needed to learn about good practices on specific issues elsewhere.

Promising practices

- Utrecht started using human rights in their legislation in 2009 for the [improvement at the local level](#). To empower the civil society they formed a strong coalition of civil groups, NGOs and businesses. They offer shelter for human rights activists and want to become a children rights city.
- Riga adopted an Integration Program in 2012 in which Human Rights and Inclusion.
- [Graz](#) has been a human rights city since 2001 and with a special focus on racism & non-discrimination.
- Nurnberg started in 1995 with human rights related activities and is a "[City of Peace and Human Rights](#)". Their focus lies in the protection of vulnerable groups. Since 1995 Nuremberg awards the International Nuremberg Human Rights Award to honour the achievements of its awardees and to contribute to the protection of endangered human rights defenders and to encourage others to commit themselves to human rights.
- Berlin is focusing on the refugee challenge at the moment and the district of [Steglitz-Zehlendorf](#) is working on a masterplan for integration and security.
- Brno has a focus on social inclusion with 1 billion euros invested in this area (especially in housing and education).
- The Human Rights Office in Vienna works closely with NGOs and the community to further the establishment of a human rights culture.

Next steps

- Interested cities should make use of ODHIR human rights education and training activities.
- FRA, Vienna and other interested cities should continue organising a meeting of human rights cities once a year with a permanent agenda item on the cross-national exchange of good practices.
- FRA should explore the development of an information hub for human rights cities and other local actors on information such as EU funding, good practices, useful tools etc.