

Civic space in the EU: Mapping of national approaches to civic space monitoring, participation and protection

Austria

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1. MONITORING AND REPORTING ON CIVIC SPACE

1.1. Monitoring initiative from the side of the State

Has there been any initiative from the side of the State (government/parliament) to observe/monitor the restrictions/challenges/threats for civic space actors in your country in the last three years?

No initiative from the side of the state (government / parliament) to observe / monitor the restrictions / challenges / threats for civic space actors in Austria in the last three years.

1.2. Other monitoring initiatives

Has there been any other actor/body/mechanism that has observed/monitored civic space restrictions/challenges/threats in your country in the last three years?

There are no actors, who specifically or explicitly observe or monitor civic space restrictions. There are actors, who generally observe and monitor human rights, democracy and participation (including civic space restrictions). The main monitoring / observing actors / bodies / mechanisms in Austria are:

- The Austrian Ombudsman Board (*Volksanwaltschaft*) is the NHRI with B-Status with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) since 2011. It offers support in case of troubles with public authorities and it carries out preventive human rights monitoring at institutions where the liberty of persons is deprived. Moreover, it observes and monitors police operations during deportations or demonstrations.¹
- The association SOS Mitmensch is independent from public funding (work is financed by private donors). Its main task is observing the human rights situation in Austria, identifying deficits and challenges, raising awareness on these, identifying solutions and – if necessary – putting pressure regarding the implementation of these solutions.²
- The Liga for Human Rights (*Liga für Menschenrechte*) is an NGO, which monitors and observes human rights in general (including civic space restrictions).³ It also operates an UPR Tool.⁴

¹ For more information, see the website of the Austrian Ombudsman Board (*Volksanwaltschaft Österreich*), [Preventive Human Rights Monitoring](#).

² SOS Mitmensch (2024), Activity Report 2023 ([Tätigkeitsbericht 23. Aktivitäten von SOS Mitmensch im Jahre 2023. Zur Vorlage bei der ordentlichen Generalversammlung am 24. Juni 2024](#)), compiled on 13 June 2024.

³ Liga for Human Rights ([Liga für Menschenrechte](#)).

⁴ Liga for Human Rights (*Liga für Menschenrechte*), Universal Periodic Review, [UPR Tool](#).

- An empirical study on the Framework conditions for the civil society in Austria was conducted by researchers at the Business University of Vienna and published in 2021. The study updates the surveys for the Civil Society Index 2019. The findings, which are based on 27 qualitative interviews with representatives of CSOs, focus on the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on civil society.⁵ As the first Civil Society Index was published in 2014 and the second in 2019, a 5 years period of updates, indicating new findings for 2024, could be assumed. However, desk research did not provide any more recent findings.

⁵ Simsa, R., Mayer, F., Muckenhuber, S., & Schweinschwaller, T. (2021). Framework Conditions of Austria's Civil Society (*Rahmenbedingungen für die Zivilgesellschaft in Österreich*). (Opuscula, 152). Berlin: Maecenata Institut für Philanthropie und Zivilgesellschaft, PID <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-73615-2>.

2. PARTICIPATION

2.1. Rules on participation

Are there any binding rules in place in your country for the participation/consultation of civil society organisations for developing/implementing/monitoring laws and policies?

Yes, the opportunity to submit comments on all legislative initiatives (or support other comments) throughout the parliamentary legislative process is available in pre-parliamentary and parliamentary consultation procedures. The Act on the National Council's Rules of Procedure has been amended in 2021 so that each legislative initiative discussed in the National Council *must* undergo an open consultation procedure.⁶ The consultation procedure encompasses legislative proposals by members of Parliament, committees or by the Federal Council (Bundesrat) and finalised Federal Government Draft Bills (*Regierungsvorlagen*) for as long as the parliamentary legislative process has not been completed. In the case of ministerial drafts, the responsible federal ministry sets a review deadline by the end of which participation is possible.⁷

Information on how to participate is easy to access at the Austrian Parliament's website.⁸ The information on how to participate is available in German only, it is available in written gender-sensitive language, as well as in spoken language (by means of a video, explaining the participation procedure). In addition, an information team at the Parliamentary Directorate is available for further questions per phone and per email. However, the website provides no information on whether the rules of participation are non-discriminatory and accessible.

No information is available about an actor who is responsible and oversees the implementation of these rules to the public. The Directorate of the Parliament (*Parlamentsdirektion*)⁹ is in charge of dealing with questions on participation mechanisms.

⁶ Austria, [Amendment to the Act on the National Council's Rules of Procedure](#), Federal Law Gazette I No. 63/2021.

⁷ Austrian Parliament (*Parlament Österreich*), Consultative Procedures ([Das Begutachtungsverfahren | Parlament Österreich](#)).

⁸ Austrian Parliament (*Parlament Österreich*), Consultative Procedures ([Begutachtungsverfahren](#)).

⁹ Austrian Parliament, (*Parlament Österreich*), the Directorate of the Parliament ([Parlamentsdirektion](#)).

2.2.Consultative/participatory bodies

Are there any consultative/participatory bodies in your country that ensure the participation of civil society in developing/implementing/monitoring laws and policies?

These are the most important and nation-wide operating consultative bodies in Austria:

a) Children and young people

The Children's Rights Board (*Kinderrechteboard*) has been a consultative body to the responsible Federal Minister for Family Affairs since 2012. The Children's Rights Board recommends on issues and problems relevant to children's rights, in particular on the implementation of the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The members of the Children's Rights Board are independent and not bound by instructions in their statements, recommendations and reports.¹⁰ Research on the website of the Austrian Parliament regarding number of opinions issued on draft federal laws (as outlined in section 2.1) in 2024 brings no results.

b) Older people

The Senior's Council (*Österreichischer Seniorenrat*) is a social partner and umbrella organisation for the main pensioners' and senior citizens' organisations. It serves as a non-partisan discussion forum for all matters affecting older people and ensures strong representation of all senior citizens. The Austrian Seniors' Council is responsible for legally representing the interests of over 2.5 million senior citizens in Austria (e.g. in the negotiations for the National Council at the end of 2024).¹¹ Research on the website of the Austrian Parliament regarding number of opinions issued on draft federal laws (as outlined in section 2.1) in 2024 brings 4 results.¹²

c) Ethnic and/or religious minorities

At the national level, only related to the Roma and Sinti: the Roma dialogue platform is mandated with monitoring the implementation of the Roma Strategy in Austria. The Roma dialogue platform consists of representatives of government agencies and civil society associations as well as experts from science and research are involved. It meets regularly and exchanges on different topics relating Roma Inclusion.¹³ Further councils on ethnic or

¹⁰ Austria, Federal Chancellery (*Bundeskanzleramt*), Children's Rights Board ([Kinderrechteboard](#)).

¹¹ Austrian Senior's Council ([Österreichischer Seniorenrat](#))

¹² Austrian Parliament (*Österreichisches Parlament*), Opinions ([Alle Stellungnahmen | Parlament Österreich](#)).

¹³ Austria, Federal Chancellery (*Österreichisches Bundeskanzleramt*), The Roma dialogue platform ([die Roma Dialogplattform](#)).

religious minorities are implemented at the regional or local level. Research on the website of the Austrian Parliament regarding number of opinions issued on draft federal laws (as outlined in section 2.1) in 2024 brings no results.

d) Asylum and migration

Asyl coordination Austria (*Asylkoordination Österreich*) is a consultative and participatory body.¹⁴ Research on the website of the Austrian Parliament regarding number of opinions issued on draft federal laws (as outlined in section 2.1) in 2024 brings no results.

e) Persons with disabilities

The Austrian Disability Council (*Österreichischer Behindertenrat*) is an umbrella organisation representing more than 85 member organisations in Austria, who represent the interests of people with disabilities. The Disability Council campaigns nationally and internationally for the rights of people with disabilities and it has issued 4 opinions on draft federal laws (as outlined in section 2.1) in 2024 and additional 16 opinions on various local and regional draft laws or other papers¹⁵

f) Victims of crime, including hate crime

The White Ring (*Weisser Ring*)¹⁶ and the Federal Association of Protection against Violence Centres (*Bundesverband der Gewaltschutzzentren*)¹⁷ ensure the participation of civil society in developing and monitoring laws and policies. Research on the website of the Austrian Parliament regarding number of opinions issues on draft federal laws (as outlined in section 2.1) in 2024 brings 1 result for Protection against Violence Centres and 1 result for White Ring.

2.3. Awareness raising and capacity building on participation

Does your Member State fund or carry out meaningful awareness raising and/or capacity building to support participation in your country?

Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport, Section III - Public Service and Administrative Innovation has published a guide to the design of participation processes.

¹⁴ Asyl Coordination ([asylkoordination Österreich](#)).

¹⁵ Austrian Disability Council, Opinions of the Austrian Disability Council 2024 ([Stellungnahmen des Österreichischen Behindertenrates 2024](#)).

¹⁶ White Ring, objectives, demands, statutes, statements ([Ziele / Forderungen / Statuten - Weisser Ring](#)).

¹⁷ Federal Association of Protection Against Violence Centres ([Über uns - Gewaltschutzzentren Österreichs](#)).

The guide is structured along the political-administrative policy cycle. The guide addresses politics, public administration and civil society in all policy areas (beyond the scope of the Ministry).¹⁸

Capacity building to support participation in Austria, specifically targeting civil society organisations, is done by the Federal Government. The Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology has funded a study on the Status Quo of Youth Participation in Austria in the area of climate protection and environment.¹⁹

¹⁸ Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport (BMKÖS) Section III - Public Service and Administrative Innovation Public Service and Administrative Innovation (2023), Practical guide: Participation in the digital age ([Praxisleitfaden: Partizipation im digitalen Zeitalter](#)), Vienna.

¹⁹ Knoll B., Andreas M., Renkin A. (Institut für Genderforschung in den Ingenieurwissenschaften) (2023), 'Youth participation in Austria. Status quo in the environmental and climate sector and recommendations' ([Jugendpartizipation in Österreich. Status Quo im Umwelt- und Klimabereich sowie Empfehlungen](#)), Wien.

3. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTION

3.1. Civil society strategy

Does your country have a general civil society strategy / civil society development strategy in place?

The research did not reveal any specific civil society strategy being in place in Austria.

3.2. Protecting an enabling environment

Is there a dedicated policy/framework (or support measures) in place in your country to enhance and protect an enabling environment for civil society to work on fundamental rights?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Austrian Federal Government established by law a Non-profit organization support fund (*Non-Profit-Organisation-Unterstützungsfonds*).²⁰ The Austrian federal government is supporting non-profit organisations from all areas of life, from the social sector and culture to sport, voluntary fire brigades and legally recognised religious communities, with grants. However, the fund only existed for the duration of the pandemic. The last disbursements to NGOs were made in 2023.²¹

No more recent protection / support measures for civil society organisations and no dedicated policy / framework could be found in Austria, which are dedicated to enhance and protect an enabling environment for civil society to work on fundamental rights.

3.3. Law on recognition and protection of defenders

Is there a dedicated law (and/or guidelines) in your country dealing specifically with the recognition and/or protection of human rights defenders?

No, there are no specific laws or guidelines, dealing specifically with the recognition or protection of fundamental rights defenders in Austria.

²⁰ Austrian Federal Act on the Establishment of a Support Fund for Non-Profit Organisations – NPO Fund Act ([Bundesgesetz über die Errichtung eines Non-Profit-Organisationen Unterstützungsfonds – NPO-Fonds-Gesetz](#)), Federal Law Gazette I No. 49/2020, last amended by [BGBl. I Nr. 152/2023](#).

²¹ Austrian Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Public Service and Sports (2024), [NPO-Fonds](#).

3.4. Support and funding for protection of defenders

Is there any dedicated support/funding by the State for the protection of (individual) human rights defenders in your country?

The Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs pursues the protection of journalists in international fora. Austria is e.g. an active member of the ‘Coalition for Media Freedom’ and the Group of Friends for the Safety of Journalists at the UN in New York and Geneva, in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in Paris and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna. In this context, Austria supported efforts to protect journalists in Ukraine within the framework of the UNESCO with 100,000. However, these are rather policy measures than guidelines or laws.²²

Support and counselling for human rights activists in case of attacks or discrimination is provided by the NGO Amnesty International Austria, but not by the state.²³ Municipal councils in Vienna and Graz provide funding in the form of housing and monthly grants to “writers in exile”.²⁴

²² Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs (2024), ‘Response to a Parliamentary Inquiry Restrictive visa regulations for cultural professionals’ ([Beantwortung einer Parlamentarischen Anfrage zum Thema: Restriktive Visabestimmungen für Kulturschaffende](#)), 15 March 2024 Vienna.

²³ Amnesty International, Counselling centre against violence and discrimination. Counselling services for Amnesty activists and employees ([Beratungsstelle gegen Gewalt und Diskriminierung | Amnesty International Österreich](#)).

²⁴ Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (Österreichischer Rundfunk, ORF) (2023), ‘Flat and scholarship for authors in exile’ ([Wohnung und Stipendium für Exilautoren](#)), 26 October 2023.

4. PROMISING PRACTICE (OPTIONAL)

Please highlight one specific practice that you consider a promising practice on civic space in your country in the area of civic space - including monitoring, participation, enabling environment, and protection.

No specific practice identified that could be considered a promising practice on civic space in Austria.