



Who we are.  
What we do.  
How we do it.



**FRA**

EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS





“The [European] Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”

Article 2, the Treaty on European Union



# Foreword

Fundamental rights set out minimum standards to ensure that a person is treated with dignity. Whether this is the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of your age, disability or ethnic background, the right to the protection of your personal data, or the right to get access to justice, these rights should all be promoted and protected.

The European Union (EU) Member States have a long tradition of promoting fundamental rights. The EU itself is built on these values and is committed to guaranteeing the rights proclaimed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) was set up as an independent body to support this endeavour.

Despite this heritage, many challenges prevent the delivery in practice of fundamental rights. Through the collection and analysis of data in the EU, the FRA assists EU institutions and EU Member States in understanding and tackling these challenges. Working in partnership with the EU institutions, the EU Member States and other organisations at the international, European and national levels, the FRA plays an important role in helping to make fundamental rights a reality for everyone living in the EU.



Morten Kjærum  
Director



Ilze Brands Kehris  
Chairperson of the  
Management Board





## Who we are

In 2007, the EU established the FRA with the specific task of providing independent, evidence-based advice on fundamental rights. The FRA is one of the EU's specialised agencies, which are funded by the EU budget. These agencies are set up to provide expert advice to the institutions of the EU and the Member States on a range of issues.

The agency's 90 staff members include legal experts, political and social scientists, statisticians, and communication and networking experts.

Their work is guided by the FRA Management Board. The board is responsible for defining the agency's work priorities, approving its budget and monitoring its work. Independent experts, one appointed by each Member State, two European Commission representatives and one independent expert appointed by the Council of Europe sit on the board.



## Fundamental rights

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is the EU's legally binding bill of rights. It lists the rights that the EU institutions and Member States must respect when they develop and implement EU law and policy. It is the first point of reference for the FRA when offering its evidence-based advice on how to ensure respect for fundamental rights.

The rights outlined in the Charter are divided into six groups:

### DIGNITY



such as the right not to suffer degrading treatment

### SOLIDARITY



such as the right to access healthcare and benefit from medical treatment

### FREEDOMS



such as the protection of personal data

### CITIZENS' RIGHTS



such as the right to vote in municipal elections where you reside

### EQUALITY



such as the right to be free from discrimination

### JUSTICE



such as the right to a fair trial



# What we do

The FRA provides the EU institutions and Member States with independent, evidence-based advice on fundamental rights. The aim is to contribute towards ensuring full respect for fundamental rights across the EU.

To do this, the FRA performs the following main tasks:

- collecting and analysing information and data;
- providing assistance and expertise;
- communicating and raising rights awareness.

*FRA's tasks are described in the legislation establishing the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights: Council Regulation (EC) No. 168/2007.*



FRA's tasks are carried out in consultation and cooperation with its partners.

This allows the agency to:

- define its areas of work to ensure that its research responds to specific gaps and needs in the fundamental rights field;
- share expertise, coordinate research on different areas and work together to communicate its advice to the EU and its Member States. In this way, the FRA can create synergies, make the most of its resources, and support other bodies by delivering clear opinions on how to improve fundamental rights protection;
- ensure that its advice and research reaches policy makers at the right levels of government and EU institutions.

The FRA maintains particularly close links with:

- the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union;
- other international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE);
- governments, civil society organisations, academic institutions, equality bodies and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs).

*Equality bodies and NHRIs are national bodies which promote fundamental rights protection in their countries. This may include carrying out research, awareness-raising, or advising victims on their rights.*





To guarantee a close working relationship with EU Member States, each Member State appoints a National Liaison Officer. Continuous exchange and regular meetings help to create a strong working partnership, which guarantees that information is shared and national needs are known and addressed.

*The Council of Europe has 47 member states. Its bodies include the European Court of Human Rights which hears cases on the European Convention on Human Rights.*

*The Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) brings together over 300 civil society organisations from across the EU involved in specific fundamental rights issues. They offer suggestions on FRA's annual work programme and its annual report.*



The FRA has a special relationship with the Council of Europe, based in Strasbourg. To ensure complementarity, the agency coordinates its activities with those of the Council of Europe, particularly as regards its annual work programme and cooperation with civil society.

Through its Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP), the FRA consults regularly with a great number of civil society organisations. These organisations are able to support FRA's experts in identifying which problems people across the EU face in their everyday life.

## Scope of work

EU institutions propose and adopt the thematic areas for the agency's work over a five-year period.

The main areas that the FRA covers include discrimination, access to justice, racism and xenophobia, data protection, the rights of victims of crime and the rights of the child.

As the FRA was established to provide advice to the EU and the Member States when they are implementing EU law and policy, the agency may only work on issues that fall within areas where the EU has competence.

Although the FRA offers information to individuals about how and where to enforce their rights, it cannot examine or issue a decision on individual complaints. According to its mandate, the agency can only point individuals to the appropriate channels where they can seek assistance, at the national, European and international levels.

*'Competence' refers to the question of whether the EU has the legal authority to take action in a particular policy area.*





# How we do it

## Research and data collection

The FRA has the task of collecting “objective, reliable and comparable” information and data. It carries out its research on particular themes across the EU rather than monitoring or assessing individual Member States.

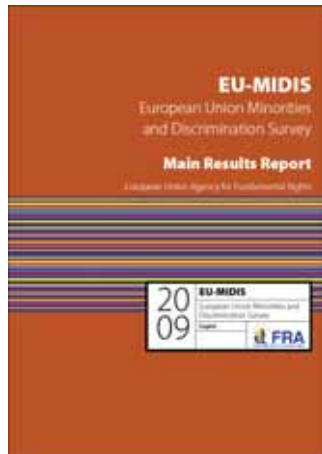
Covering all or several EU Member States provides a comparative perspective that identifies existing challenges and promising practices on specific fundamental rights themes across the EU.

FRA research usually covers a specific fundamental rights topic across the EU – one example of which is its report on *Homophobia, transphobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in the EU Member States* (2010).

The agency often collects information about the **protection of fundamental rights in the legal framework** of the Member States and provides legal analysis. Sources of information include legislative instruments, court judgments and academic commentary. For example, see the FRA report on *Access to justice in Europe: an overview of challenges and opportunities* (2011).



*A research methodology refers to the way that information and data are collected and analysed. The methodologies used by the FRA are designed to ensure that the data collected are as accurate and reliable as possible.*



To provide a comprehensive overview of the situation on the ground, the FRA uses a combination of legal analysis and data on the day-to-day experiences of individuals on the ground. Desk research is complemented with social research fieldwork, using surveys or interviews, or through analysing existing data.

For example, the European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS) interviewed 23,500 people from selected immigrant and ethnic minority groups in all 27 EU Member States. The results allowed the agency to provide useful and relevant indicators of discrimination, such as the proportion of victims who had experienced discrimination or a racially-motivated crime. This, in turn, revealed the levels of discrimination in different states felt by different ethnic minorities.

In some cases, the agency may **report on an urgent fundamental rights situation** in one Member State, where this falls within its mandate and where the situation has an impact on the EU. For example: *Coping with a fundamental rights emergency – The situation of persons crossing the Greek land border in an irregular manner. Thematic Situation Report (2011).*





While the agency's experts select the appropriate methodology for a particular project, the actual collection of data and information at the country level is mostly performed by experts outside the FRA who gather specific information. External research contractors are selected on the basis of an objective and thorough selection procedure.

*The Scientific Committee is composed of 11 highly qualified, independent fundamental rights experts from across the EU. The FRA Management Board selects these experts, based on the opinion of the European Parliament.*

A large proportion of FRA's research is based on data and information collected by its network of national focal points, FRANET, which is made up of teams of fundamental rights experts in each EU Member State. FRA staff draws on and analyses the data and information collected.

The agency also has a Scientific Committee composed of independent external members, which guarantees the quality of its work.



More information on FRA's research methodologies can be found in its related factsheet on *FRA research: providing robust, comparable data and analysis*.

## Assistance and expertise

The FRA provides “assistance and expertise” to EU institutions and Member States to support them “to fully respect fundamental rights” when developing and implementing EU law.

The agency structures its research questions around the needs identified by its stakeholders. The data that it collects are targeted at those areas where decision makers need evidence to shape their policies and legislation. It also allows the agency to focus its research on real-life problems experienced by people on a day-to-day basis.

Based on the evidence collected through its research as well as its expertise on fundamental rights, the FRA issues opinions and conclusions to EU institutions and Member States on how to ensure that fundamental rights are respected in practice when they develop and implement legislation and policy.

The FRA consults its stakeholders on an on-going basis within all its projects to identify how best it can offer advice and to assist them in improving respect for fundamental rights. Based on the types of problems identified by the agency and the needs expressed by stakeholders, the advice and assistance may be communicated through a variety of forms.



- **Reports** – The FRA delivers the data and evidence that it has collected through its socio-legal research and analysis to the EU institutions and Member States, together with opinions and conclusions on how to ensure greater respect for fundamental rights.
- **Request by an EU institution** – The FRA may be formally requested by EU institutions to formulate opinions on specific thematic topics, or to deliver a legal analysis of legislation or of legislative proposal from a fundamental rights perspective. For example, in 2011 the European Parliament requested the FRA for its opinion on the proposed Directive on the use of Passenger Name Record (PNR) data.
- **Request from an EU Member State** – A Member State may ask the FRA to supply information or data that would assist it to improve the respect of fundamental rights in areas falling within EU competence.
- **Training material and training programmes** – For example, the *Handbook on European non-discrimination law* (2011), which was produced together with the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg, guides legal practitioners through discrimination law.
- **Promising practices** – The FRA also collects and shares ‘promising practices’, which have a particularly beneficial effect on fundamental rights, among the EU Member States. This gives Member States the opportunity to learn about successful models and solutions to common problems from each other.



## Communication and rights awareness

The FRA is striving to improve the situation on the ground. As well as the forms of assistance already mentioned, it also does this by raising awareness about fundamental rights among the general public and particular professions that play an important role in delivering or have an impact on our rights, such as teachers, media professionals, the police and legal practitioners.

### Information about FRA and its work

In addition to **printed publications and information stands** at key events, the FRA makes full use of the wide range of **online communication** channels. This includes its website and social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

FRA publishes a monthly **e-Newsletter** to which one can subscribe at: [information@fra.europa.eu](mailto:information@fra.europa.eu).

FRA also offers the possibility for visitor groups to come to the agency and hear about fundamental rights in the EU and about its work. For further information, contact [visit@fra.europa.eu](mailto:visit@fra.europa.eu).

### Materials to promote rights awareness

The FRA produces **materials** that can guide professionals when they are working on fundamental rights issues. Examples include *Excursion to the past – teaching for the future: Handbook for teachers* (2011), which supports teachers providing Holocaust and Human Rights education, and the Media Diversity Toolkit developed together with the European Broadcasting Union, which serves to inform public sector broadcasters how to better reflect Europe's diverse society when reporting on minority issues.







The FRA publishes a **S’Cool Agenda** for teenagers. It teaches basic facts about fundamental rights while also serving as a school calendar.

Policy makers, researchers, legal experts and the public can access the FRA **Case law database**, which contains a collection of national and European cases on fundamental rights questions.



## Information about the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

The agency publishes material about the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, such as the **Charterpedia** – an easy-to-use tool allowing users to find out more about the rights guaranteed in the Charter. The Charterpedia is a comprehensive collection of international, EU and national constitutional fundamental rights law, linked to the topics, titles and articles of the Charter, all readily accessible from the FRA website.



The FRA also developed a **Fundamental Rights Charter app for mobile devices**, such as smartphones and tablets. The Charter app will be available on the FRA website in March 2012.

## Contact us

To find out more about the FRA, visit our website. Here, you can keep up to date with FRA activities, including our projects, events and publications:

- <http://fra.europa.eu>
- [twitter.com/EURightsAgency](https://twitter.com/EURightsAgency)
- [www.facebook.com/fundamentalrights](https://www.facebook.com/fundamentalrights)
- [www.linkedin.com/company/eu-fundamental-rights-agency](https://www.linkedin.com/company/eu-fundamental-rights-agency)
- [www.youtube.com/user/EUAgencyFRA](https://www.youtube.com/user/EUAgencyFRA)

To contact us, subscribe to our monthly e-Newsletter, or arrange a group visit to the FRA, you can email:

- [information@fra.europa.eu](mailto:information@fra.europa.eu)

Alternatively, you can contact us by post, telephone or fax:

**FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights**  
Schwarzenbergplatz 11  
1040 Vienna  
Austria

Tel: +43 (1) 580 30 0  
Fax: +43 (1) 580 30 699





## HELPING TO MAKE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS A REALITY FOR EVERYONE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Fundamental rights are minimum standards of treatment that guarantee respect for each person's dignity. They are set out in the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**, which is legally binding for the EU Institutions and for all 27 EU Member States when they implement EU legislation. Its Chapters – Dignity, Freedoms, Equality, Solidarity, Citizens' Rights, Justice and General Provisions – list the rights, freedoms and principles recognised by the EU.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), established in 2007, provides the EU and its Member States with assistance and expertise on fundamental rights.



FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights  
Schwarzenbergplatz 11  
1040 Vienna  
Austria



Tel: +43 (1) 580 30 - 0  
Fax: +43 (1) 580 30 - 699



[information@fra.europa.eu](mailto:information@fra.europa.eu)  
<http://fra.europa.eu>  
[twitter.com/EURightsAgency](https://twitter.com/EURightsAgency)  
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