

Results from the Fundamental Rights Forum 2018 consultation process

The process



Fundamental Rights
Forum



This summary contains the findings of a broad consultation process on the Fundamental Rights Forum 2018 (FRF) that the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) conducted from March to July 2017. The input was collected during external meetings and conference calls with key stakeholders, meetings at FRA, consultations with FRA bodies, an online survey and additional phone/email consultations. The consultations focused on the scope of 'belonging', the format and structure of the FRF and identifying partners for the event. The results have been analysed and now guide the planning. We are very thankful for the interesting ideas on the theme of belonging, expertise and the views on the structure, formats, participants, partners and possible outputs, from all stakeholders.

The results

1. *The concept of belonging*

It was acknowledged that 'belonging' is a complex and relative term with different connotations in different languages. It carries with it a positive meaning of inclusion but also a negative connotation of exclusion, non-acceptance and the element of 'who belongs', 'them and us', polarisation and othering. However, overall respondents valued the theme as it is an opportunity to show that we all belong, and that the universality of human rights can be a powerful response to today's challenges of growing polarization and populism. A rights-based approach, rooted in human rights legal texts and frameworks, that identifies drivers and barriers for belonging, need to underpin such a positive narrative.

The analysis showed that 'belonging' is a multi-dimensional concept and should be considered from different perspectives: from the very individual and emotional need to feel safe and secure at home and in public spaces to the feeling of belonging to families, peers, communities, your country of residence as well as all of us being part of the EU. Indeed, respondents mentioned that the Forum should acknowledge the role of the EU in the global human rights architecture, the commitment to the UN's 2030 Agenda, etc. In this regard the 2018 celebration of the 70th year of the existence of the UDHR and the 25 years anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals were mentioned.

The sense of 'belonging' was also seen as being crucial for cohesive and pluralist societies. In this context respondents stressed the need to address the structural determinants of

inequality and discontent, and enforce social and economic rights more prominently, notably access to (meaningful) employment (with equal pay) and education, but also access to housing and health - rights that are important to everybody. Employment and education empower people and help them to develop their full potential in society. The opportunity to take part in social and political life, to be included, enjoy equal treatment and equal access to goods and services, access to justice and have strong rights awareness were mentioned as other key elements of belonging.

2. Topical issues

There were many suggestions for topics in relation to 'belonging'. They included: citizenship, youth, education, promoting common European values through education, equality, non-discrimination, freedom of religion; preventing radicalization, socio-economic rights in the EU's Fundamental Rights Charter, citizenship and integration, the importance of cities linking to individuals, digital age, media pluralism, civil society space, and digital security.

It was also noted that 'belonging' is central to the Agency's work: FRA's upcoming Fundamental Rights Survey will enable us to understand the general population's experiences of their everyday human rights. Previous FRA work has already outlined how experiences of (ethnic) profiling have far reaching implications on ethnic minority groups; for example, when they are disproportionately often 'stopped and searched' by police, possibly leading to feelings of alienation. Extreme forms of labour exploitation lead to the social exclusion of non-EU nationals when they are employed illegally. And FRA evidence on the impact on local communities of the arrival of asylum seekers showed the need for their long term integration, so that asylum seekers and members of the local community feel a sense of belonging. The participation of immigrants in community and at work enhances their sense of belonging. People with mental health problems and people with intellectual disabilities have more choice and control over their lives when they are full and effective participants in society on an equal basis with others, as part of and belonging to the community. In conclusion: belonging as an overarching chapeau provides a unique opportunity to *connect, reflect* and *act* (as the Forum motto) on some of the EU's pressing issues.

3. Structure, formats and outputs

Respondents strongly recommended that the Forum use many participatory methods and the potential of arts to bring the realities of human rights crises to the forefront. The Forum should communicate in an understandable, open and attractive manner. Respondents stressed that they would like to see concrete commitments and political leadership on human rights coming from the Forum and the outputs need to be tangible.

4. Partnerships

Partnerships of different kinds were suggested for the Forum:

- Knowledge and skills: partners with specific sets of skills or knowledge that can inform the different Forum activities
- Communication: innovative approaches to communicating rights

- Institutional (international / EU / national / local): bring different perspectives of the human rights architecture and help connections at different levels
- Funders, support: support the Forum financially
- Patronage and "in the framework of...": gives weight and/or political impact