



Fundamental Rights
Forum
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FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS FORUM: HIGHLIGHTS FOR JOURNALISTS

1. What is the Fundamental Rights Forum?

More than 400 experts will gather in Vienna for three days to talk about the most pressing issues facing Europe at the moment. The Forum has three themes: refugee protection, the digital age and inclusion. Participants include activists and academics, business leaders and creative thinkers, cabinet ministers and diplomats. The Vienna Forum is the Davos of human rights.

2. Why do we need a Fundamental Rights Forum?

Europe urgently requires responses to the continuing refugee crisis, persistent discrimination and exclusion, and massive intrusion into privacy and personal data. Although awareness of human rights is growing, thanks in part to the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, more needs to be done. For example, policy makers should reinforce the implementation of our human rights framework, businesses should stimulate the growing interest in corporate social responsibility and inclusive sustainable growth, and rights holders should be empowered to participate fully in life. This is where the Forum comes in.

3. What will participants do?

The Forum will bring together people who don't usually get the chance to talk to each other. While some will present their ideas in short talks on stage, others will take part in panel debates and working groups. During the course of the Forum, new partnerships will be forged between decision makers, experts and practitioners. They will gain access to support networks and knowledge hubs, and make new commitments to fundamental rights in their sectors.

4. What is the desired outcome of the Forum?

At the end of the process, participants will have committed to an idea and, crucially, to practical measures to ensure these ideas are transformed into action. The milestones of the Forum and the key findings of the discussions will be summarised in the Chair's Statement at the end of the three days. This will be accompanied by action points addressed to international organisations, EU institutions, national governments, regional authorities, business leaders and civil society. These actions need to be taken before the next Forum. The FRA is committed to following up the themes to ensure the Forum has a lasting impact.

5. Who are the policy makers?

Politicians from most European Union Member States are taking part. All of them have status and expertise, but many also have personal stories linked to the Forum's themes. For example, MEP **Helga Stevens** is one of a small number of deaf politicians and a trailblazer for the rights of disabled people. **Cécile Kyenge**, now an MEP, endured racist abuse from fellow politicians when she served as integration minister in Italy. European

Parliament Vice-President **Ulrike Lunacek** made her name campaigning for LGBT rights in Austria, and now has a wide brief that covers equality for women and serving as rapporteur for Kosovo.

At the start of the Forum, we will hear from FRA patron **Heinz Fischer**, who is stepping down as Austrian president in July after 12 years. He will be joined by **Michael Häupl**, whose 22 years as Vienna mayor make him the longest-serving incumbent in Europe. The European Commission's First Vice President **Frans Timmermans** will join the two Austrian politicians and FRA Director **Michael O'Flaherty** on stage to formally open the Forum. The Commission will be strongly represented elsewhere at the Forum, not least by **Dimitris Avramopoulos**, the Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, who will be involved in a panel debate that will also feature Maltese civil liberties minister **Helena Dalli**. She has spearheaded legislation that has helped her country become a world leader in LGBT rights.

Other national policy makers include Luxembourg's justice minister **Felix Braz**, who led negotiations on the EU's overhaul of data privacy rules last year. He will be joined in a panel debate on rights-based governance by **Alexander Stępkowski**, Deputy Minister at Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His country is currently embroiled in a major international dispute over democracy and the rule of law.

At the same debate will be **Valeriu Nicolae**, Secretary of State at Romania's Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, whose CV includes film production, writing and working with children from impoverished areas of Bucharest. Nicolae is from the Roma community. Two more prominent Roma, each with unique perspectives on inclusion, will also be taking part in the Forum. **Soraya Post**, who has long campaigned for the rights of minorities and is currently one of only two Roma MEPs, will be involved in a working group exploring gaps in equality law. Hungarian anthropology expert and former MEP **Lívía Járóka** will be looking at social inclusion in another working group. She was the first Roma woman to be elected to the European Parliament in 2004.

6. Who is representing business?

As IKEA's chief sustainability officer, **Steve Howard** is well known for his unique take on the biggest issues. His idea that Western consumers have probably bought as much furniture as they would ever need generated global headlines earlier this year. He is one of the Forum's main speakers, and will be talking about the role of business in promoting equality.

Other big firms at the Forum include Facebook, whose head of security policy **Gail Kent** also has background in law enforcement in the UK. She will be exploring how businesses can respect privacy at the same time as increasing security. Staying with American tech giants, Google's EU public policy chief **Marc van der Ham** will be involved in working groups looking into "e-health" initiatives and the ways privacy can be respected in data-driven societies.

A host of smaller businesses and social enterprises were chosen because they think big. For example, **Christine Souffrant** took her personal fascination with street vendors and made a global social enterprise out of it. She connects sellers with buyers, massively expanding the market for their products. As a by-product, she has fostered a uniquely inclusive business community.

7. Who are the creative thinkers?

Artists are getting involved in the Forum, not least Italian film-maker **Gianfranco Rosi**. His 2016 documentary on the lives of migrants on Lampedusa won the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival. Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi reportedly gave a copy to all 27 of his EU counterparts. Rosi will be discussing how to empower rights holders. His film will receive its Austrian première at a side event of the Forum. Meanwhile, documentary maker **Nathalie Borger** will be discussing the role of human rights in film

in a working group. Her 2015 exploration of the life of Jörg Haider, the leader of Austria's far-right FPÖ who died in 2008, has added resonance now that the FPÖ is once again enjoying an unprecedented surge in popularity.

Several North-American academics whose ideas are pertinent to Europe's current challenges are giving speeches at the Forum. **James C Hathaway**, an international law lecturer who has also founded NGOs to help refugees, will be arguing for changes in the way refugee law is conceived around the world, not least in Europe. He is a supporter of the 1951 Refugee Convention, but argues that its implementation has created dysfunction. Meanwhile, **Benjamin R Barber** will outline his view of a world run by mayors – an idea with plenty of currency in Europe, where cities and municipalities are leading a campaign against the US-EU TTIP trade deal. The EU has recently acknowledged the central role played by local authorities, signing the Pact of Amsterdam cooperation agreement. In a related speech, Italian-born US-based legal scholar **Alberto Alemanno** will be tackling the ways in which citizens can connect to power.

Others with revolutionary ideas include Polish activist **Katarzyna Szymielewicz**, who will explore how users of digital technologies perceive their rights and freedoms. Szymielewicz, whose NGO combats digital surveillance in both public and private sectors, says she hopes the Forum will help translate abstract rights and freedoms into values and emotions that people can really care about. Also on digital rights, Austrian activist **Max Schrems** will be involved in a panel debate. After taking on Facebook in a court case that invalidated an EU-US data deal, he has recently talked about establishing his own NGO to use the law to protect people's digital rights.

An activist who knows all about using the law to protect the vulnerable is **Hauwa Ibrahim**, who has successfully defended dozens of women in Nigeria's Islamic Sharia courts. Her pioneering work, particularly in saving women from punishments including death by stoning, has been recognised around the world. **Beth Greenhill**, a British clinical psychologist, is another inspirational figure who has fought for the rights of the most marginalised. She believes the main consideration when dealing with some patients, particularly those with mental health issues, has been the potential risk they pose to others. To combat this and ensure the patient's needs are put first, she has instigated a rights-based approach for healthcare professionals in the UK.

Faith communities are often at the heart of many issues of inclusion – whether as victims of intolerance, or campaigning for protection of their rights. Two participants with diverse experiences and backgrounds will be addressing this topic. **Robin Sclafani**'s NGO, A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe, has long campaigned for dialogue and understanding between different communities. She will be exploring the overlapping issues of freedom of expression, hate speech and online anonymity. British campaigner **Fiyaz Mughal** has also worked on building understanding and reducing conflict between different faith groups. Among the projects he has established is Tell MAMA, which encourages people to report anti-Muslim hate incidents. He will be involved in a panel debate at the end of the Forum.

Belgian author **Stefan Hermans** is another whose work appeals for mutual understanding among faiths and cultures. Shortly after the terrorist attacks in Brussels in January, he wrote a plea not to consign Muslims to a “spiritual ghetto”. He will be speaking about the need for empathy in an inclusive society.

8. Who are the public officials?

Ombudsmen are vital actors in the battle to ensure rule of law and give citizens redress on rights issues – as such, they are among the most relevant officials for the Forum. The European ombudsman **Emily O'Reilly** will be giving a keynote address. Her contribution will be complimented by Croatian ombudsman **Lora Vidovic**, who will be discussing how to empower rights holders in a separate panel debate. The Croatian parliament recently

rejected her official report – the first time this has happened since the 1990s. But she has promised to continue her critical role. Her Dutch counterpart **Reiner van Zutphen**, a senior lawyer who took up his post last year, will be discussing “e-government” elsewhere at the Forum.

Two other officials whose positions have put them at the heart of the refugee crisis will also be taking part – Vienna's Human Rights Commissioner **Shams Asadi** and **Marina Roncoroni**, Commissioner for Integration and Migration in the Berlin District Administration of Steglitz-Zehlendorf. It is a unique chance to glean insights from the local officials who deal with the everyday reality of the refugee crisis.

9. What initiatives will be showcased?

The Forum's three themes have already sparked an incredible amount of creative thinking. Each day, activist groups, academic institutions and businesses will lay on artworks, installations, presentations and multimedia interaction. Among them will be a group of refugee children who will be showing films that they have made documenting their lives at Austria's Traiskirchen camp. Separately, schoolchildren around Vienna have been taking part in a competition to make films that reflect the title: Vienna – A City of Human Rights. The winning teams will be showing their films at the Forum.

Still on the subject of refugee protection, the brains behind the School Bus Project will explain why they took it on themselves to convert old buses into mobile schools to help educate refugees. And the creator of a guide for refugees that has advice on everything from urinating in public to smiling at strangers will share his work.

On the wider theme of inclusion, artist Robert Gabris will be asking Forum participants to think about the concept of “luck”. Each person will write down their ideas on a wall that will form a mural of wishes. Close up, each wish is intelligible. Move away, and they become indistinct. Another branch of the arts is represented by the Spanish group Movement Against Intolerance. Among their pioneering programmes is a musical collaboration of hip-hop artists whose lyrics reflect the movement's anti-xenophobia ethos.

The Network of European Roma Grassroots Organisations intersects all three of the Forum's themes. They will be presenting their platform for combating what they call anti-gypsyism. Like many of the best ideas, theirs is a simple one: encourage their community to use the web to share their culture and stories about their lives. Their portal, Romareact.org, serves as a virtual meeting place.

Sticking with the Forum's desire to ensure practical outcomes, 25 techies have been asked to take part in a Hackathon. They will be listening to the participants' ideas, and will develop applications to help promote and implement fundamental rights. The techies will be split into groups and they will compete against each other to come up with the best idea.

At the Forum, participants will be invited to a reception at the Magdas Hotel, an operation run mostly by refugees. They established the hotel in 2015, taking over a former retirement home and raising the money partly through a crowdfunding campaign. The result is the most practical expression of the Forum's ethos – connect, reflect, act.

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