

Working group 2:

Political and societal participation in the EU: young people, people with an ethnic minority or migration background, LGBTI people and people with disabilities

Background

Political and social participation as a key enabler for achieving inclusive societies as a theme cuts across FRA's research. However, FRA evidence shows that despite improvements in fostering equal opportunities for political and social participation, significant obstacles remain. These range from legal barriers, to a lack of targeted policies and implementation gaps.

In terms of law and policy measures, FRA's research on societal and political participation of migrants and their descendants indicates that only six EU Member States have ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (1992). However, 20 have adopted similar national provisions allowing non-EU citizens to vote in, at a minimum, local elections. Nevertheless, most national migrant integration policies do not include measures encouraging and promoting participation of migrants and their descendants in social and public life, nor have measures targeting subsequent generations of people of migrant descent.

From an implementation perspective, FRA's research on the political participation of people with disabilities shows that standards to enhance the accessibility of the electoral process are often not reflected in the situation on the ground nor do they reach all people with disabilities. For example, guidelines for making polling stations more accessible often focus on people with physical impairments, and lack initiatives reflecting the accessibility needs of others with sensory, intellectual or psychosocial impairments.

FRA research on the fundamental rights of LGBTI people paints a bleak picture. Almost half of the survey respondents said they had been discriminated against in various areas of life, preventing them from participating meaningfully in society. In their daily lives, many said that they are not open about being LGBT with their family and a majority avoid holding hands with their same sex partner for fear of victimisation. It also revealed how trans people suffer regular victimisation, living difficult lives on the fringes of society.

Objectives

This workshop sought to raise awareness of practical issues, and of existing tools and best practices to foster political and societal participation in the EU. There was a particular focus on younger people, people from an ethnic minority or migration background, LGBTI people

and people with disabilities. Participants discussed drivers and barriers to participation and ways to increase the involvement of EU and non-EU nationals in social and political life, especially at the local level.

Speakers

- József Nagy, Member of the European Parliament
- Amel Yacef, ENAR board member, Chair of migrant women and youth networks, Ireland
- Marie Hélène Boulanger, Head of Unit Citizenship rights and free movement, Directorate General Justice and Consumers, European Commission
- David Friggieri, European Commission Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred

Main messages

1. There is a need to empower all people, irrespective of background and identity, to participate effectively in society:
 - Horizontally: societal participation, beyond the political;
 - Vertically: in the local community, nationally and internationally.
2. Participation is impossible without a sense of belonging, and acknowledgement of people's potential, and their contribution to society and the participatory process.
3. Education to promote diversity and active citizenship which gives people the tools to express and empower themselves is essential for participation; this requires diverse and representative leadership at all levels.

Promising practices

- Erasmus+
- Youth Up campaign, European Youth Forum
- Civic engagement classes in schools, Ireland
- Internal civil society organisation programme - Building capacity to stand criticism against own community, Irish Muslim Youth

Next steps

- Public authorities, in consultation with civil society organisations could involve different societal groups in consultations about legislation and policies that affect them. This consultation, including online tools, should be accessible and user friendly for all groups.
- Public authorities and civil society could have intersectional and mixed quotas for increasing representation of different groups in governance and community organisations at various levels.

- The media and regulators could promote responsible, rights-sensitive media presentation and discussion through more positive narratives reflecting inclusive and diverse societies, including through self-regulation.
- The EU and relevant national bodies could fund strategies that promote participation, including strengthening cross-sectional coordination between different civil society and grassroots organisations.
- National governments could include active citizenship, information on multiple identities and empathy in educational curricula, including informal education. This could include enhancing cross-cultural exchange programmes from primary school onwards.
- Public and private entities could consider anonymous job applications, which remove information which could prompt discriminatory evaluation of applications.
- State and non-state, public and private and civil society organisations could promote activities to combat structural (and hidden) segregation, for example in education and among civil society organisations.