

# Strategic framework for FRA - civil society cooperation

December 2014

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## 1. Introduction

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) is an independent advisory body of the European Union. It provides expertise and evidence to help in the formulation of policy and legislation at both EU and national (when and where Member States are acting within the scope of EU law) levels.<sup>1</sup>

The Agency's mandate is laid down in the Founding Regulation adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2007.<sup>2</sup>

The regulation also defines the Agency's cooperation with civil society. The Agency is tasked to *'closely cooperate with non-governmental organisations and with institutions of civil society, active in the field of fundamental rights (...) at national, European or international level.'*<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, FRA is asked to *'develop a communication strategy and promote dialogue with civil society, in order to raise public awareness of fundamental rights ...'*<sup>4</sup>

This strategic framework aims to define cooperation between FRA and civil society organisations for the coming years. It takes into account cooperation within the FRA's Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP), and engagement with civil society more broadly.<sup>5</sup>

This document was developed in partnership between the FRA and the Advisory Panel (AP)<sup>6</sup> of the FRP. The organisations participating in the FRP were consulted on this document.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Art. 2 of the Founding Regulation: "The objective of the Agency shall be to provide the relevant institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Community and its Member States when implementing Community law with assistance and expertise relating to fundamental rights in order to support them when they take measures or formulate courses of action within their respective spheres of competence to fully respect fundamental rights."

<sup>2</sup> See [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/351-reg\\_168-2007\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/351-reg_168-2007_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Art. 10 of the Founding Regulation

<sup>4</sup> Art. 4(h) of the Founding Regulation

<sup>5</sup> See also the FRA Strategic Plan 2013-2017 on

[http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_strategic\\_plan\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_strategic_plan_en.pdf) and the FRA Communication and Cooperation Framework.

<sup>6</sup> The FRP's Advisory Panel consists of nine members from FRP participant organisations. Six were elected by participants of the FRP, and the other three were appointed by the agency's director. Advisory Panel members serve a two-year term that can be renewed once. For more information see <http://fra.europa.eu/en/cooperation/civil-society/advisory-panel>

<sup>7</sup> The FRA Management Board welcomed the cooperation framework in its meeting of 11-12 December 2014.

The document is largely based on the outcome of a joint workshop in October 2014<sup>8</sup>. During the workshop, the cornerstones of the envisaged enhanced cooperation between FRA and civil society organisations were identified, and steps for enhanced cooperation identified.

Implementation and timelines will be subject to available resources allocated according to FRA's Annual Work Programmes (or additional external resources being made available). This framework document will be updated every second year, to be able to reflect the evolving fundamental rights landscape, and the subsequent needs towards FRA-civil society cooperation

## **2. Strategic purpose and principles of cooperation between FRA and civil society organisations**

The strategic purpose of cooperation between FRA and civil society organisations is to make fundamental rights a reality for everyone in the EU by ensuring that fundamental rights are at all stages and in all areas respected, protected and fulfilled. To this end, cooperation between FRA and civil society aims at:<sup>9</sup>

- 1) Raising public awareness of fundamental rights;<sup>10</sup>**
- 2) Enhancing the impact of FRA output at EU, national and local levels;**
- 3) Connecting civil society organisations and enabling dialogue and exchange of good practices;**
- 4) Breaking the silos between different fundamental rights stakeholders and actors;**
- 5) Understanding the capacities and constraints of civil society organisations;**
- 6) Explaining the capacities and constraints of FRA in relation with its mandate and resources.**

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<sup>8</sup> Workshop on 02/10/2014, involving FRA Director, FRA Heads of department, experts, Advisory Panel, 4 members of the former Advisory Panel, one member of the FRA's Management Board working group on impact at national level, and the chair and one member of the FRA Scientific Committee.

Meeting report on [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-cso\\_workshop-report-october-2014.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-cso_workshop-report-october-2014.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>.outcome from joint workshop

<sup>10</sup> Art 4 (h) Founding Regulation

In enhancing strategic cooperation, the following key areas are to be considered:

**1) Civil society organisations feeding into FRA's work**

How can civil society organisations' knowledge better feed into FRA's work?

**2) FRA work feeding into the work of civil society organisations**

How can FRA work be made more useful for civil society organisations? How can FRA support civil society organisations in their work?

**3) FRA promoting exchange among civil society organisations**

How can FRA facilitate dialogue among civil society organisations, both among organisations working on similar themes and horizontally on cross-cutting issues?

**4) FRA promoting exchange between civil society organisations and other fundamental rights actors<sup>11</sup>**

How can FRA facilitate dialogue among different stakeholders? This also extends to dialogue between civil society organisations and decision makers/authorities.

**5) FRA and CSOs contributing to a closer relationship between EU institutions and civil society**

How can FRA share its growing knowledge on cooperating with civil society among other EU institutions? How can FRA and civil society organisations contribute to strengthening cooperation and engagement between EU institutions and civil society? <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> To be undertaken in close synergy with the European Commission. Other fundamental rights actors include in particular relevant parts of EU institutions and national and local administrations; decision-makers; national human rights bodies including Ombuds institutions; relevant international organisations in particular the Council of Europe.

<sup>12</sup> For a proposal in this regard see for instance the European Parliament's call "*on the EU decision-making institutions to use the data and facts provided by the FRA during the preparatory stage of legislative activity, in decision-making and/or monitoring processes and to be in constant and close cooperation with the FRA, while involving its NGO Platform*". See European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2010 on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2009) on the effective implementation after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon (2009/2161(INI)), available online at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P7-TA-2010-0483>

See also in this regard the obligation under Art. 32 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, the first human rights treaty ratified by the EU) to "*undertake appropriate and effective measures ... in partnership with relevant international and regional organizations and civil society, in particular organizations of persons with disabilities.*"

The core principles of how to work together in partnership in implementing this strategy include:<sup>13</sup>

- Having clear objectives and realistic expectations;
- Understanding and respecting each other's role and responsibilities as well as corresponding possibilities;
- Working in partnership, respect and trust;
- Sharing knowledge and good practice;
- Focusing on a range of thematic areas;
- Understanding the capacities and constraints of civil society organisations (working locally, nationally and at the EU level) and FRA respectively.

### **3. Taking cooperation forward**

As outlined in the strategic purpose above,<sup>14</sup> this chapter suggests concrete steps that could be taken in order to further enhance cooperation between FRA and civil society organisations. The responsibility for implementation lies with FRA, with strong input and support by the FRP Advisory Panel. Implementation and timelines will be subject to available resources allocated according to FRA's Annual Work Programmes (or additional external resources being made available).

#### **3.1. Raising public awareness of fundamental rights**

- FRA findings and "opinions" (recommendations) can serve as a basis for raising public awareness on fundamental rights, both by FRA and civil society organisations.
- In order for this to happen, civil society organisations should be involved early on in FRA projects, to develop ownership and receive all necessary information. In particular, joint communication and dissemination strategies could be developed.
- This should include exploring whether expanding the number of available translations of FRA publications would be feasible, and how.

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13 Outcome from the joint FRA-AP workshop, October 2014. For the FRP, key principles of cooperation are also laid down in its [Code of Conduct](#).

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 2. Strategic purpose and principles of cooperation between FRA and civil society organisations.

### Steps for enhanced cooperation

What	Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRA to inform FRP participants by end November each year about key publications and events for the following year.</li> </ul>	FRA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRP participants to integrate key FRA launches and events relevant to their work in their planning.</li> </ul>	FRP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National civil society organisations to develop relevant media activities to raise awareness of the results of FRA work at national and local levels. (FRA to share information, where possible, in advance).</li> </ul>	CSOs (FRA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRA to provide civil society organisations with research results in a format that can be used directly (i.e. news items, factsheets, data visualisation).</li> </ul>	FRA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRA to invite civil society organisations for an exchange of knowledge and ideas on effective ways of raising awareness in the area of fundamental rights.</li> </ul>	FRA and CSOs

### 3.2. Enhancing the impact of FRA output at EU, national and local levels

- Civil society is one of the key multipliers for FRA work. In turn, FRA evidence and data can be useful for civil society organisations' own work.
- In order for civil society organisations to be able to use FRA results effectively, they must be informed in a timely and useful manner.

### Steps for enhanced cooperation

What	Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRA to use thematic mapping<sup>15</sup> to send detailed information per thematic area to FRP participants, starting in 2015.</li> </ul>	FRA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRA and CSOs to joint develop complementary communication and dissemination strategies for selected FRA projects, starting with a pilot in 2015.</li> </ul>	FRA and CSOs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRP participants to support FRA in establishing a contact list of relevant media contacts, by end 2015.</li> </ul>	FRP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRA and AP to develop new, more targeted ways of consulting FRP participants on upcoming FRA Annual Work Programmes and the FRA Annual Report, beyond written consultations.</li> </ul>	FRA and AP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRA to invite stakeholders earlier in the process of projects (project definition phase).</li> </ul>	FRA

<sup>15</sup> In order to be able to cooperate in a more targeted way between FRA and FRP participants, and to be able to connect FRP participants working on similar issues, there is a need for a thematic mapping of the areas of work and activities of FRP participant organisations.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRA to tailor its products better to stakeholder needs as per its new publication policy (2014). FRP participants to use FRA results and products more.</li> </ul>	FRA and FRP
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### 3.3. Connecting civil society organisations and enabling dialogue and exchange of good practices

- FRA enables knowledge sharing among FRP participants through the FRP, its “*mechanism for the exchange of information and pooling of knowledge*”.<sup>16</sup>
- It does this by connecting FRP participants, and by creating spaces/meetings for FRP participants to interact and exchange practices among themselves. Where useful or needed, this could be extended to non-FRP civil society organisations.
- Knowledge sharing and exchange of practices not only takes place among organisations working in the same thematic area, but also among organisations working on different issues.

#### Steps for enhanced cooperation

What	Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on thematic mapping of FRP participants, FRA will connect organisations working on similar issues, and those that face similar (structural) challenges. Development of a database of FRP participants per geographic and thematic criteria.</li> </ul>	FRA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRA and AP to develop a concept for useful ways for the exchange of practices among FRP participants.</li> </ul>	FRA and AP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invite dialogue and connection among FRP participants in a given Member State (online or physical meeting). Try a pilot in up to 3 countries.</li> </ul>	FRA and AP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FRA and AP to invite volunteers from among FRP participants (in pilot Member States) to be the FRA contact point for their country.</li> </ul>	FRA and FRP

<sup>16</sup> Art. 10 (2) of the Founding Regulation

### 3.4. Breaking the silos between different fundamental rights stakeholders and actors through dialogue

- The EU faces many fundamental rights challenges. It will only be possible to address these if all relevant actors within the EU work together to make fundamental rights a reality for everyone in the EU. Some proposals on this regard were presented in the FRA's Annual Report 2013 in the section entitled "*An EU internal strategic framework for fundamental rights: joining forces to achieve better results*".
- To do this, there is a need to foster trust among the different fundamental rights actors. This includes connecting civil society, decision makers, administrations from local to EU levels, National Human Rights Bodies, etc.
- For this a means for different fundamental rights stakeholders to interact and exchange practices needs to be enabled.
- Stakeholders working on similar (thematic or structural) issues should also be connected.

#### Steps for enhanced cooperation

What	Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to invite stakeholders including the AP to a "Meeting of FRA Networks" in November 2015, with AP and other stakeholders being involved in the planning and follow-up.</li> </ul>	FRA and AP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to invite stakeholders including civil society to a "Fundamental Rights Forum" for the exchange of knowledge and for a dialogue among all different stakeholders biannually, starting in 2016, with AP and other stakeholders being involved in planning and follow-up. (This shall be undertaken in close collaboration with the European Commission's annual colloquium on fundamental rights to promote exchange and dialogue among different stakeholders.)</li> </ul>	FRA and AP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to support the connection of all its key partners within a given Member State. Pilot in up to 3 countries, possibly in the form of physical meetings to take place.</li> </ul>	FRA with key partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to organise targeted (thematic) workshops/working groups among different stakeholders. AP to be involved in planning and follow-up.</li> </ul>	FRA and AP

### 3.5. Understanding the capacities and constraints of civil society organisations

- In order to be able to cooperate in a more targeted way between FRA and FRP participants, and to connect FRP participants working on similar issues, there is a need for a thematic mapping of the areas of work and activities of FRP participant organisations.
- There is also a need to get an overview of key civil society organisations working (locally, nationally and at EU level) on fundamental rights in the EU beyond FRP participants. This will help clarify:
  - o the national political contexts civil society organisations work in (e.g., learn more about what it means to work in challenging environments)
  - o how civil society organisations are governed, i.e., if they are supported by funding and if so, what type (e.g., EU-projects, private donors or dependent on volunteers).
- Such an overview would enable FRA to build up FRP participation strategically, by identifying existing geographical or thematic gaps in FRP participation, and inviting organisations who are still missing in this respect to become FRP participants.
- Exchange of good practices among CSOs in order to find ways to tackle structural constraints and enhance the capacities of CSOs; which would also enhance the ability to support and cooperate with FRA.
- Assist CSOs, particularly smaller ones, to gain a better understanding and overview of the project funding opportunities at various levels, including EU and other.

#### Steps for enhanced cooperation

What	Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to undertake a thematic mapping of FRP participants; report on results by February 2015.</li> </ul>	FRA and AP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of all civil key society organisations (beyond FRP) working on fundamental rights in the EU; report on results. (subject to available resources)</li> </ul>	FRA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to undertake strategic expansion of FRP, based on the thematic mapping and the overview.</li> </ul>	FRA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to organise at least one meeting per year in which civil society organisations can exchange good practices.</li> </ul>	FRA and AP

### 3.6. Explaining the capacities and constraints of FRA in relation with its mandate and resources

- To ensure there is a shared understanding of what FRA can and cannot do, FRA needs to explain better its mandate, remit and limitations.
- FRA to inform and discuss with civil society impact and relevance of FRA's work on the ground and avenues for improvement.
- In the event of a revision of the FRA mandate, civil society should be kept adequately informed.

#### Steps for enhanced cooperation

What	Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to develop clear Q&amp;A about FRA and its mandate in all EU languages for its website by mid-2015.</li> </ul>	FRA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to update FRA brochure and factsheet every second year.</li> </ul>	FRA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to be represented at key CSO events across the EU to present its work.</li> </ul>	FRA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSOs to invite FRA to key events for presenting its work and findings.</li> </ul>	CSOs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA to inform CSOs about its mandate, i.e. information session around each FRP meeting.</li> </ul>	FRA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSOs to give feedback on the impact and relevance of FRA's work on the ground.</li> </ul>	CSOs

## 4. Channels of cooperation

There are two main channels for cooperation between FRA and civil society:

- **The FRA's Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP)**
- **FRA-civil society cooperation more broadly**

### 4.1. The Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP)

The Founding Regulation tasks the FRA with establishing and maintaining a cooperation network with civil society – the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP).

The FRP was established in 2007; in 2014, there are over 400 civil society organisations participating in the FRP, working on a wide variety of fundamental rights issues at different geographical levels, representing *"non-governmental organisations dealing with human rights, trade unions*

*and employer's organisations, relevant social and professional organisations, churches, religious, philosophical and non-confessional organisations, universities and other qualified experts of European and international bodies and organisations".<sup>17</sup>*

The FRP is "a mechanism for the exchange of information and pooling of knowledge" between FRA and civil society organisations working inside the EU.<sup>18</sup>

Cooperation between FRA and the FRP takes place through:

- **Exchange of information and pooling of practices:**<sup>19</sup> FRA enables the exchange of knowledge and practices among FRP participants, and among FRP participants and other fundamental rights actors. To this end, FRA invites FRP participants for meetings which can take the form of a meeting of all FRP participants, or of smaller, thematic meetings focused around specific issues. FRA also engages to invite relevant civil society organisations to its other thematic meetings in order to ensure that the civil society perspective is heard. In addition, modern online communication tools (such as e-FRP, video conferencing) is used to facilitate exchanges without the need to meet physically.
- **Project level cooperation:**<sup>20</sup> Civil society organisations are invited to feed their specific frontline knowledge into the work of the Agency (project formulation, implementation and dissemination). Considering the role of civil society organisations as disseminators/multipliers of FRA's work, the Agency involves civil society organisations early on in its projects, shares information timely (including in advance where feasible) and invites civil society organisations to jointly develop complementary communication and dissemination strategies.
- **Consultations:**<sup>21</sup> One of the tasks of the FRP is to provide feedback and suggestions for the Agency's Annual Work Programme and Annual Report. Results of these consultations are presented to FRA's Management Board.

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<sup>17</sup> Art. 10 of the Founding Regulation

<sup>18</sup> Art. 10 (2) of the Founding Regulation

<sup>19</sup> Art. 10 (2) Founding Regulation

<sup>20</sup> Art. 10 (3) Founding Regulation

<sup>21</sup> Art. 10 (4) Founding Regulation

- **Advisory Panel:**<sup>22</sup> The FRP elects an Advisory Panel every second year, drawing members from among all FRP participants. The AP is consultative and supports the work of the FRA Director in organising and coordinating the FRP.

## 4.2. FRA - civil society cooperation more broadly

The FRP is FRA's main channel for cooperation with civil society. Where useful or needed, civil society organisations beyond the FRP can also be invited to cooperate with FRA. Engaging with non-FRP civil society organisations should be done with a view to having them join the FRP in the medium term.

- **Exchange of information and pooling of practices:** FRA enables the exchange of knowledge and practices among fundamental rights actors. To this end, FRA engages to invite relevant civil society organisations to its key meetings in order to ensure that the civil society perspective is heard. Also for smaller thematic meetings input by relevant civil society organisations who may not be FRP participants will be invited where this is considered useful.<sup>23</sup>
- **Project level cooperation:** Where the same results could not be with FRP participants themselves, civil society organisations beyond the FRP are invited to feed their specific knowledge into the work of the Agency (project formulation, implementation and dissemination).
- **Awareness Raising:** FRA is asked to '*develop a communication strategy and promote dialogue with civil society, in order to raise public awareness of fundamental rights ...*'.<sup>24</sup> (for details see point 4.1.)

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<sup>22</sup> For details on the Advisory Panel, its Terms of reference and work, see <http://fra.europa.eu/en/cooperation/civil-society/advisory-panel>

<sup>23</sup> Art. 6 Founding Regulation

<sup>24</sup> Art. 4(h) of the Founding Regulation

## 5. Follow-up

The responsibility for the implementation, follow-up and evaluation of this cooperation framework strategy lies with FRA (Communication and Outreach Department, as well as with specific FRA thematic project teams), with a key role for the Advisory Panel, and support by FRP participant organisations.

The FRA FRP team takes the lead and acts as secretariat for implementing and evaluating this strategy, in close partnership with the FRP Advisory Panel.

The tasks and activities for each year are then laid down in an **annual work plan** between the FRA FRP team and the FRP Advisory Panel.<sup>25</sup> The work plan needs to be in line with FRA's respective Annual Work Programmes.

The implementation will be evaluated annually by the FRA FRP team and Advisory Panel. The Advisory Panel and the FRA FRP team report to the FRA Management Board every year about the work and progress made. Notably, the AP presents a report about its work to the Management Board at the end of its term.

Every second year (with every new Advisory Panel), a workshop will be held between FRA and the Advisory Panel in order to update this Strategic Framework.

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<sup>25</sup> See the work plan for Oct 2014-June 2016 on [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-ap\\_work\\_plan\\_2014-2016.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-ap_work_plan_2014-2016.pdf)  
The work plan shall be sent to the FRA Management Board for information.