

How can FRA and civil society step up cooperation to achieve more impact on fundamental rights?

1-3 October 2014

MEETING REPORT

Report compiled by FRA and the FRP Advisory Panel



Summary

The aim of the meeting was to discuss how increased cooperation and a good division of labour between the different actors can result in greater fundamental rights protection. The objective was to develop the foundations for a Strategic Framework for Cooperation between FRA and civil society up to 2020. The framework would set out the strategic purpose, and outline impact criteria, priority areas, initial actions and the principles of cooperation.

The workshop brought together several key actors to discuss how FRA and civil society can step up their cooperation in order to achieve more impact in making fundamental rights a reality for everyone in the EU.

The participants discussed the foundations and cornerstones for a new “Strategic Framework for FRA-civil society cooperation”, which will subsequently be drafted by the FRA Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) team and its Advisory Panel, based on the outcomes of the workshop.

The event was the first of this kind organised by FRA. All participants actively engaged in the discussions and effectively contributed to the final outcomes of the meeting.

The meeting was divided into three parts over three days:

- 1) First meeting of the new FRP Advisory Panel (1 October)
- 2) Workshop: enhancing cooperation for impact, with an enlarged group¹ (2 October)
- 3) Follow-up of the workshop outcomes by the new Advisory Panel and the FRA FRP team (3 October)

Day 1: First meeting of the new FRP Advisory Panel (AP)

On Day 1, the first formal meeting of the new FRP Advisory Panel took place. Four members of the previous AP also joined this meeting in order to share their experiences and allow for a proper handover.

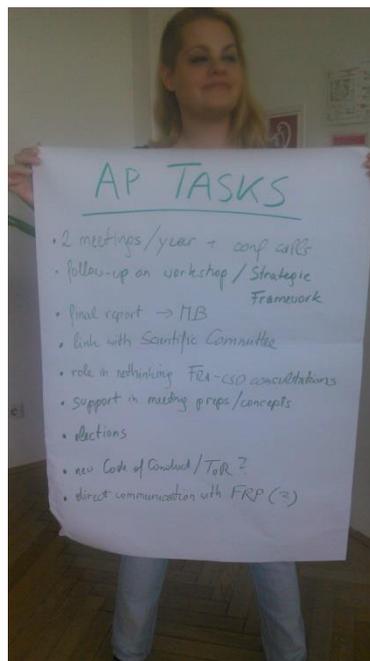
Wednesday, 1 October

New AP

- Welcome by FRA Director
- Round of introductions:
Who am I & why is it important for me to be part of this AP
- Upcoming activities of FRA/context of civil society work

Previous and new AP

- Round of introductions
- Key points and learnings from previous AP
- Concrete suggestions
- Preparations for workshop
- *What insights do I take with me?*



The topics discussed ranged from the tasks, roles and responsibilities of the AP to its terms of reference, mandate and the election procedures.

¹ See p. 4

The Workshop on Day 2

Participants

- Eight members of the Advisory Panel of the FRA Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP)
- Four members of the former FRP Advisory Panel
- One representative from the FRA Management Board, working group “national impact”
- Chair and one member of the FRA Scientific Committee
- One representative from the European Commission, DG Justice, Fundamental Rights Unit
- FRA Director and 11 FRA experts



The FRA Director *Morten Kjærum* welcomed the participants and emphasised the importance of developing meaningful cooperation between FRA and civil society further in order to better map, understand, implement and protect fundamental rights in the future. He highlighted the relevance of FRA’s Fundamental Rights Platform as a tool to enable strategic debate and underlined the fact that it is important to walk this path together, as difficult as it might sometimes seem.

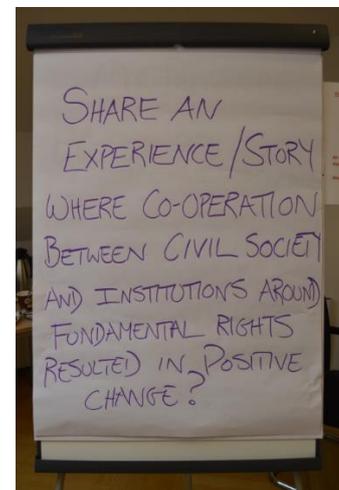
The participants engaged in a dynamic exchange of opinions and perspectives on successful practices. They highlighted crucial challenges that should be taken into account in order to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of cooperation and mutual engagement between FRA and civil society. An emphasis was placed on identifying capacities and constraints, roles and responsibilities and mutual expectations regarding both FRA and civil society organisations (working at the local, national and European level).

Participants presented themselves and stated why it was important to be together. Answers ranged from “understanding each other better and working together”, to an increased awareness of each other’s roles, to specific themes such as child rights and Roma rights.



What are the conditions that enable positive change?

Participants then worked in pairs, and shared a story between each other about an experience where cooperation between civil society and European institutions in the field of fundamental rights resulted in positive change. Conditions were identified that were considered crucial in making this change possible.



From the conversations held, the following conditions emerged as being important factors for positive outcomes of cooperation:

- **Being in conversation:** face-to-face meetings, broad, systematic and regular debates
- **Trust:** building trust among all stakeholders and actors
- **Engaging and taking ownership:** commitment, mutual support, early engagement with civil society
- **Understanding roles and responsibilities:** identify strengths and expertise of relevant actors, understanding and respecting each other's role, respect boundaries of other partners' mandate
- **Having clear objectives:** realistic expectations, structure and planning, concrete solutions/objectives
- **Sharing knowledge:** exchange of knowledge, sharing good practice internally and externally, enhanced dissemination of fundamental rights findings
- **Connection and communication:** timely communication
- **Vision:** persistence / long breath
- **Human relations:** working in relationship, open to listen...



How to increase impact through cooperation?

Having recognised the key conditions underlying past successful practices, the debate continued in small working groups. Participants responded to how different actors can cooperate to achieve greater impact.

The sessions evolved around the following four questions:

- *How can FRA best use the FRP to achieve impact?*
- *How can the FRP best use FRA to achieve impact?*
- *How to achieve impact by FRA facilitating exchange between CSOs?*
- *How to achieve impact by FRA facilitating exchange between CSOs and decision-makers?*

Participants from different backgrounds brought to the table their different perspectives and approaches to the topic:



Each working group then formulated a statement, summarising how greater cooperation could help create change:

- “We can break the silos! And we can make the FRP a process and not only an event.”
- “Helping to make fundamental rights a reality for all in the EU through dialogue and maximising opportunities for visibility of FRA and its fundamental rights message, including at the national level.”

- “FRA and civil society cooperate in order to achieve impact for people, through focus (issues, geographical, time), early engagement and the exchange of practices.”
- “FRA involves CSOs from early stage on all levels (EU to grassroots) to communicate (our) key findings (research opinions) and experiences to achieve impact”
- “Strategic cooperation (especially in 2015), Civil society has a share in FRA, CS responsibility for FRA regulation and mandate”
- “We could achieve an impact at national level on policy makers regarding the implementation and adoption of legislation regarding fundamental rights and discrimination”
- “We can foster awareness of fundamental rights situation (evidences) for civil society, policy makers and FRA itself.”



WE CAN BREAK THE SILOS!
 + WE CAN MAKE THE FRA A PROJECT AND NOT ONLY AN EVENT

FRA AND CIVIL SOCIETY COOPERATE IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE IMPACT FOR PEOPLE, THROUGH FOCUS*, EARLY ENGAGEMENT COOPERATION, AND THE EXCHANGE OF PRACTICES.
 * issues, geographical, time

What are the principles of cooperation and the strategic purpose?

On the basis of the statements that the working groups formulated, the shared principles of cooperation and the elements of strategic purpose were identified:

- Raising awareness and visibility
- Communicating through dialogue key findings and experiences
- Breaking the silos
- Mainstreaming human rights (at all stages)
- Considering FRP as a process, not an event
- Creating an impact at national level on policy makers
- Focusing on specific issues, countries and timing
- Engaging civil society early in FRA work

What are the key areas of cooperation?

A mind map was created based on participants' ideas of cooperation for impact between FRA and civil society.



Participants were asked to prioritise and choose the three areas they found most relevant in order to achieve impact on fundamental rights, and on which cooperation activities to focus in the coming years.



Results from the working groups

Using FRA results / Focusing on thematic areas

- FRA to invite stakeholders into the process early (earlier)
- Focus on cooperation rather than differences
- Consider expanding the number of available translations of publications

Strengthening FRA mandate

- Discuss the FRA mandate and try to agree on the interpretation of at least some of its crucial articles (considering it can be understood differently, from “narrow” to broad)
- Leave room for interpretation
- Further clarify the role of civil society within the mandate
- Understand the FRP tasks in relation to the FRA mandate

Understanding the capacities and constraints of CSOs

- Get to know FRP members better; carry out a mapping to understand:
 - a) the national political contexts NGOs work in (e.g., learn more about what it means to work in hostile environments)
 - b) how NGOs are governed, i.e., if they are supported by funding and if so, what type (e.g., EU-projects, private donors or depending on volunteers).
- Exchange good practices at FRP meetings; to tackle structural constraints and enhance the capacities of CSO, which would also enhance their ability to support and cooperate with FRA.
- While meeting around thematic agendas, use the occasion to integrate structural topics to build the capacity of CSOs.

Awareness raising & joint communication strategy

- Early information to CSOs is crucial for their own work planning (per thematic mapping). FRA to share 2015 planning with the FRP.
- Thematic mapping of FRP organisations. Send detailed information as per mapping.
- Develop dissemination strategy together with the key stakeholders early on in the project (share media contacts, key figures, etc.). Pilot project: apply conference calls to one project in 2015 in order to develop joint FRA-CSO dissemination strategy.
- Establish own press releases or other media activities by national CSOs.
- Elaborate on the language issue.
- Set up a list of one person per country (from FRA networks).
- Establish contact list of relevant media contacts (with the help of FRP participants).

Funding

- FRA and CSOs could work together to establish some way of supporting (small) NGOs to access core project funding at the EU/national level from public or private sources (donors).
- FRA to fund thematic meetings or other activities to enhance FRA-CSOs contact.
- FRA to support CSOs when applying for funding (letters, etc).

Day 3: Follow-up

On Day 3, the new AP and the FRA FRP team continued their discussions on the basis of the outcomes of the workshop. A concrete plan of activities for the next 18 months was developed, the first steps of which will be to compile the draft Strategic Framework for Cooperation.

Members of the new FRP Advisory Panel

Ms Tove Linnea Brandvik - [European Network on Independent Living \(ENIL\)](#)
 Mr Valentín González - [European Network Against Racism \(ENAR\)](#)
 Ms Gabriela Hrabanova - [ERGO Network for European Roma](#)
 Mr Panagiotis Pardalis - [The Smile of the Child](#)
 Mr Pablo Rojas Coppari - [Migrant Rights Centre Ireland \(MRCI\)](#) (and [Platform for International Cooperation for Undocumented Migrants \(PICUM\)](#))
 Ms Annica Ryngebeck - [Social Platform](#)
 Ms Sanja Sarnavka - [Human Rights House Zagreb](#)
 Mr Luciano Scagliotti - [Centro d'Iniziativa per l'Europa del Piemonte](#)
 Ms Marianne Schulze - [Austrian League for Human Rights](#)

Work Plan Advisory Panel and FRA-FRP team:

http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-ap_work_plan_2014-2016.pdf



Many thanks also to the moderator and graphic facilitators – Maria Scordialos, Odysseas Velentzas and Nikos Rovakis.

