



Fundamental Rights  
Forum  
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# Fundamental Rights Forum 2018

## 'Belonging'

Vienna, 25-27 September 2018

The Fundamental Rights Forum is a unique space for dialogue on the pressing human rights challenges in the European Union. Leading global and European voices from politics, human rights, international and regional intergovernmental organisations, civil society, faith communities, the arts, business, trade unions and others meet in Vienna every two years to engage in new conversations and shape critical human rights agendas. In innovative ways they transform complex thinking into practical solutions.

At the Fundamental Rights Forum 2016 participants addressed migration, the digital age and inclusion. They exchanged promising practices to better respect, protect, fulfil and promote fundamental rights. The Chair's Statement from the 2016 Forum called for concerted action by international, European and national institutions as well as civil society and other leaders to promote human rights. They were challenged to deliver positive and sustainable change that makes a difference for people on the street.

### Why the Fundamental Rights Forum?

Seventy years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the EU has forged a strong set of human rights commitments, guided in all its legislation and policies by its Charter of Fundamental Rights. Despite this, the commitment to human rights is being eroded in the face of global threats. The EU and its Member States are struggling to find effective answers to problems people face, as a result of security concerns, economic crisis and changing global migratory patterns. In addition, the blurring of facts, fiction and fears in public debate is increasingly contributing to growing polarisation and 'othering', which in turn is exploited by populist movements. This results increasingly in groups being separated, excluded and put to the margins of our societies.

There is a serious risk that people in the EU are losing their sense of belonging to the societies they live in and the values on which the EU is built. The consultation leading to the 2017 EU Citizenship report shows that Europeans expect more to be done to promote common values. European leaders have acknowledged that people expect their governments to provide justice, protection and fairness with full respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law. Enhanced

trust in the democratic and judicial institutions will increase that sense of belonging. Societies also need to offer opportunities for everyone to get involved and be valued including in the labour market. More must be done so that people experience the true sense of belonging and can be motivated to stand up for values and to build fair societies. The Forum will be a catalyst to (re-) discover the means to ignite in our societies a passion for fairness, justice and equality.



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### What will be the Forum's focus in 2018?

Taking the legacy of the 2016 Forum as a point of departure and inspired by the call of the 193 States signatories to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to 'leave nobody behind', the 2018 Forum will focus on strengthening the ties that bind all persons in the EU in the societies they live in. Building on the basic need for people to feel safe, secure and belong to a wider community, the Forum will explore the theme

of 'Belonging'. 'Belonging' is understood as a dynamic process, constructed and negotiated along multiple axes of differences – as Member States to the European Union, as citizens and non-citizens to their EU Member States, and as individuals to their cities, neighbourhoods and communities. The Forum will demonstrate that human rights are for everyone and must be respected by everyone. Increasing the sense of belonging will be greatly facilitated when partnerships are enhanced among communities and institutions that rarely engage with each other. The Forum is the space where new thinking will be charted on such questions as:

- How do we ensure the fulfilment of rights guaranteed by international treaties so that all, including marginalised and vulnerable groups, are embraced in our societies?
- How can duty bearers and rights holders be motivated to build fairer societies?
- How can rights be communicated to those most in need but also to duty bearers that have a legal obligation to respect fundamental rights?
- How can international organisations and governments better work with those engaged at local level to increase a genuine sense of belonging of all in the EU?
- How do we support cities and local communities as spaces in which human rights of all are valued and promoted?
- How can those who are traditionally not seen as human rights actors (businesses, faith leaders, bloggers & vloggers) better contribute to inclusive societies where people feel they belong? What is the role of the arts in promoting and protecting human rights?
- How should schools better respond to the need for citizenship education?
- How do we make meaningful such human rights as participation in public life and the right of the child to be heard?
- Are social issues best framed in the 'human rights' language or do we need alternative discourses that deliver more effective messages while staying faithful to the human rights commitments that have been entered into?

In a consultation process taking place before summer 2017, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights will further identify key issues on the theme harvesting the wide range of scientific, political and practical insights.

### How will the Forum 2018 be organised?

The Forum will promote real-time problem-solving through policy simulations and participatory methods based on interactive technology (Forum app).

There will be workshops, *connect.reflect.act* - talks, panel debates with lively speakers from different walks of life and a *market place of ideas* where organisations engage with participants. A global network of strategic high quality partners will shape parts of the programme. Promotion of the SDGs in the EU context will be a red thread throughout the Forum acknowledging how SDGs are drivers for inclusive and thriving societies, and a reminder of how the EU must address its needs as part of the global community.



### What will be the outcome and follow up of the Forum?

The Forum will aim at developing concrete and sustainable initiatives by and with policy makers, civil society, faith communities, the arts, academia, business, trade unions and others. By way of example, the Agency will work with those EU Member States holding the EU Presidency at and in between the 2018 and 2020 Forums to bring innovative 'promising practices' to complex discussions on the EU policy agenda. Members of the European Parliament will be invited by the Forum to take inspiration for the 2019 European Parliament elections. With a new European Commission to take office in the 2nd half of 2019 the Agency will present evidence-based advice of the Forum to the Commission when preparing for the new legislature. Other Forum's outputs, such as the results from the workshops and panel debates, will provide a solid basis for action by local, national, European and international human rights communities.