

# FRA research: Providing robust, comparable data and analysis

## The FRA mandate

The **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)** provides “assistance and expertise on fundamental rights to the relevant institutions and authorities of the Community and its Member States,” in line with its founding regulation 168/2007. The FRA bases this assistance on evidence, produced by its teams of legal and social science experts, **who collect and analyse “objective, reliable and comparable information and data”**.

Drawing on this research, the FRA formulates “conclusions and opinions” for European Union (EU) and national decision makers to support them when they “take measures or formulate courses of action [...] to fully respect fundamental rights.” FRA assistance and expertise thus contributes to more informed, solidly framed and contextualised debates and policies on fundamental rights in the EU and EU Member States.

## FRA research

The FRA engages in legal and social science research to pinpoint practices within the EU that show promise in their adherence, promotion and respect for fundamental rights and to identify areas where there remains work to be done to meet internationally accepted standards. These standards are found in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which sets forth a binding list of rights for the EU and its Member States when interpreting and applying EU law. Reference is also made to treaties and other instruments of the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

To ensure the comparability of findings, FRA research typically covers all EU Member States. Comparable data are crucial to portraying comprehensively the situation on the ground.

The FRA may, however, limit its work to selected EU Member States when, for example: a topic is not relevant to all EU Member States; it is testing a new research questionnaire; or resources are limited.

## Selecting research topics

The areas of work for the FRA are defined by:

- a five year Multi-annual Framework (MAF), adopted by the Council of the European Union;
- an Annual Work Programme, outlining specific projects and shaped in consultation with key stakeholders, which is adopted by the FRA Management Board composed of independent experts;
- consultations with key stakeholders over the elaboration and implementation of individual projects to ensure they are tailored to meet the challenges identified and policy needs;
- EU institutions may also ask the FRA to provide a fundamental rights analysis of legislative proposals. As an example, see the two FRA opinions issued in 2011 at the request of the European Parliament on the draft Directive regarding the European Investigation Order and on the Proposal for a Directive on the use of Passenger Name Record (PNR) data;
- exceptionally, the FRA may report on an urgent fundamental rights situation in one EU Member State and, at the request of an EU institution, the FRA may work on a specific area outside its MAF.

## Gathering and analysing data

FRA legal and social science experts use a variety of data collection methodologies, selected based on the nature of the issues to be examined.

The FRA collects information about the protection of fundamental rights in the legal framework of the EU Member States through country-level experts who draw information from sources including legislative instruments, court judgments and academic commentary.

**Legal analyses** provide an overview of the formal legal situation. Legislation does not, however, always guarantee effective redress for fundamental rights violations, in part because victims are not aware of existing laws or do

not always report such incidents. Therefore, to complement the legal analyses, the FRA assesses the day-to-day experiences of individuals. This **social science research** is based either on an analysis of existing data (secondary data) or on FRA-led fieldwork that generates new data (primary data).

Existing secondary data are rarely comparable among EU Member States, because of differences in the way data are collected. For example, on how a target population is defined: some surveys covering violence against women focus only on women of child-bearing age, others on domestic violence only.

Primary data is information collected directly from first-hand experience, through, for example, interviews or surveys. The FRA collects primary data through fieldwork.

Secondary data is information that has already been collected or published by others, such as official statistics, and publications on research findings by academic institutions, NGOs and international organisations.

To ensure better comparability, the FRA collects its own primary data. It conducts fieldwork research through quantitative and/or qualitative surveys. FRA experts design and draft surveys, which are applied in a variety of ways – including face-to-face interviews or online questionnaires.

As the FRA often works in areas where there has been little comparable research, it also develops

and implements new sampling and research methodologies.

## Quantitative surveys

Quantitative surveys are large-scale surveys that map the scale and nature of particular fundamental rights issues, producing comparable data on, for example, experiences of discrimination. They typically ask a series of detailed questions about the characteristics of an incident. Did the person involved report the incident? If not, why not? If so, how was he/she treated when doing so? Quantitative surveys typically also collect data about respondents' characteristics, to make it possible to draw comparisons by aspects such as sex, age, education and occupation. This information is collected and reported anonymously to ensure privacy and encourage people to take part in the surveys. As an example see the 2009 FRA EU-MIDIS survey, which interviewed 23,500 people across the 27 EU Member States.

## Qualitative research

Qualitative research includes individual interviews, as well as the use of focus group discussions. These methods,

among others, provide more detailed responses and greater contextualisation of research findings.

## Analyses

The FRA analyses data in a number of ways. For example, quantitative research analysis could include tests of probability to find out whether certain results are occurring by chance or not. This allows FRA experts to determine if research findings can be interpreted as objective readings of a situation.

## Guaranteeing scientific soundness of FRA research

The scientific quality of FRA research is guaranteed at each step of the process:

- When the FRA works with contractors, they are selected through a rigorous quality-assurance procedure.
- FRA research experts monitor the progress and quality of research, analyse the data collected and compile the final reports.
- An internal peer review checks each report for quality and consistency.
- The FRA Scientific Committee of 11 independent fundamental rights experts conducts a quality check. Committee members are selected by the FRA Management Board based on European Parliament recommendation.

## The FRA provides comparable and robust data and analyses based on rigorous research methodologies in the social sciences and legal fields.

### Further information:

An overview of FRA research activities is available on the FRA website at:

[http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/research/research\\_en.htm](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/research/research_en.htm)

All FRA publications, including language versions, are also available online at:

[http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/research/publications/publications\\_en.htm](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/research/publications/publications_en.htm)