



THE EU CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

in Finland

CHARTER COUNTRY-SHEET

“**[N]ational authorities** (judicial authorities, law enforcement bodies and administrations) are **key actors** in giving concrete effect to the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Charter”

European Parliament (2015), Resolution on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2013–2014) 2014/2254(INI)), Strasbourg, 8 September 2015, recital P.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is the EU's bill of human rights. It contains 50 articles with substantive rights and principles, followed by four articles with general provisions. Member States have a duty to respect the rights and observe the principles of the Charter whenever they are acting within the scope of binding EU law. Where the Charter provisions are sufficiently precise and unconditional, they can have a direct effect at the national level – for instance in national courtrooms. Charter provisions that are 'principles' can only be invoked before a court if implemented by legislative or executive acts.

Member States have an explicit duty to promote the Charter's application. This country-sheet supports that effort by giving examples of the Charter's use and highlighting how it adds value.

The EU Charter as an obligation: when are Finnish authorities required to apply it?

- ★ Given that EU law is predominantly implemented at national level, national judges, parliamentarians, government officials and legal practitioners are core 'Charter agents' on whom the EU system relies.
- ★ The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights primarily addresses the EU itself. It binds EU Member States "only when they are implementing Union law" (Article 51 of the Charter). However, a significant part of national law- and policymaking is directly or indirectly influenced by EU law. Wherever a legislative file, a judicial case or factual situation falls within the scope of binding EU law, the EU Charter applies and can be used by and invoked before national authorities.
- ★ It is not always easy to draw the borders of the Charter's field of application. The question of whether the Charter applies is central to the proper implementation of EU law. FRA's handbook on *Applying the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in law and policymaking at national level* provides some guidance on this issue.



How is the Charter used in Finland?

All EU Member States apply the EU Charter – but not always to its full potential. The Charter is sometimes referred to in the context of upcoming legislation or debates in parliaments. National authorities and courts also sometimes refer to the Charter in their decisions and rulings. Examples from Finland include:

★ Government policies: the 2016 memorandum

In 2016, the Ministry of Justice published a Memorandum on the Interpretation and implementation of the EU Charter for fundamental rights (document OM 1/469/2016). It aims to provide practical assistance for Finnish civil servants in the EU and national legislative work, particularly when considering questions relating to the application of fundamental rights in EU law. The memorandum seeks to provide practical help in identifying situations where the EU Charter applies, and for understanding how it differs from other fundamental and human rights instruments, especially the ECHR and national constitutional rights.

★ Parliamentary debate: stressing the relevance of the EU Charter

A general statement on the relevance of the Charter provides a quote by the Chairperson of the parliament's Constitutional Law Committee:

"The significance of the European Union as an actor in the field of fundamental and human rights has increased, and EU law has a notable impact on the realisation of rights at the national level. The fundamental rights norms of the EU must be introduced more clearly to the work of national authorities and courts, and there is a need to increase awareness concerning the content of rights and principles that are protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the way these rights and principles are applied. This has been the position of the Grand Committee of the Parliament in its statement 6/2014. Guardians of law, other oversight authorities, courts and other human rights actors have a central role in this process."

Parliamentary debate on the Annual Report 2014 of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, 2 December 2015.

★ National courts: respect for private and family life (Article 7), protection of personal data (Article 8), scope and interpretation of rights and principles (Article 52)

In 2017, the Supreme Administrative Court (**Case 3872/2017**) concluded that the provisions in the Passport Act concerning storage of fingerprint data in the passport register and the limitations imposed on the right to private life and the protection of personal data are precise and defined in sufficient detail. The case concerned the Finnish Embassy in Switzerland, which had rejected a passport application because the applicant had not agreed to have his fingerprints stored, not only in the passport's data chip but also in the passport register. The court checked the Personal Data Act (523/1999) against the EU Charter and the **European Convention on Human Rights**.

The Finnish constitution

The Constitution of Finland

- ★ It was adopted on 11 June 1999 and entered into force on 1 March 2000.

Fundamental rights in the constitution

- ★ The catalogue of basic rights and liberties in the Constitution Act had been subject to a total reform in 1995 and was incorporated in Chapter 2 of the new constitution.
- ★ The constitution has 13 chapters and 131 sections. Chapter 2 consists of 18 sections that also include socio-economic rights.

References to supranational and international law

- ★ The Constitution of Finland does not explicitly refer to the **European Convention on Human Rights**, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights or EU primary law. However, there are several references to Finland's international human rights obligations in general.

The Charter's added value

The Charter is a legally binding document. It includes civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Moreover, it benefits from the strength of EU law, which often has direct effect and, in principle and unlike international law, must be granted supremacy over national law. However, in many contexts it may not be possible to directly invoke the Charter – for instance, because the respective Charter provision is a principle and not a right and was not implemented by a legislative or executive act; or is otherwise not directly applicable; or does not apply at all because the case at hand falls outside the scope of EU law. In any case, the Charter increases the visibility of rights. It explicitly spells out rights and principles that are often not expressly laid out in other international human rights documents, such as the ECHR (as shown in Figure 1). Unlike the Council of Europe's European Social Charter, the EU Charter does not offer the possibility to be bound only by selected provisions; Member States are bound by all of its provisions.

Given the breadth of rights explicitly covered by the Charter, it can help to increase the visibility of rights at national level. Moreover, national courts do sometimes use the Charter to interpret or further develop national law, even outside the scope of EU law.

- No ECHR equivalent
- More extensive than ECHR
- Equivalent protection to ECHR
- EU context-specific

Note: The figure is based on the Explanations on the Charter and a textual comparison of the two documents in order to show how the Charter increases the visibility of entitlements (some of the rights not explicitly contained in the ECHR are covered by the case law, which however is less visible to a non-expert).

Source: FRA, 2018

Figure 1: What rights are covered? Comparing the Charter and the ECHR

Charter articles and text of the ECHR: differences and equivalence in coverage

Art.1-5 Dignity

- 1 Human dignity
- 2 Life
- 3 Integrity of the person
- 4 Torture; inhuman, degrading treatment
- 5 Slavery and forced labour

Art.6-19 Freedom

- 6 Liberty and security
- 7 Private and family life
- 8 Personal data
- 9 Marry and found family
- 10 Thought conscience and religion
- 11 Expression and information
- 12 Assembly and association
- 13 Arts and sciences
- 14 Education
- 15 Choose occupation and engage in work
- 16 Conduct a business
- 17 Property
- 18 Asylum
- 19 Removal, expulsion or extradition

Art.20-26 Equality

- 20 Equality before the law
- 21 Non-discrimination
- 22 Cultural, religious and linguistic diversity
- 23 Equality: men and women
- 24 The child
- 25 Elderly
- 26 Integration of persons with disabilities

Art.27-38 Solidarity

- 27 Workers right to information and consultation
- 28 Collective bargaining and action
- 29 Access to placement services
- 30 Unjustified dismissal
- 31 Fair and just working conditions
- 32 Prohibition of child labour; protection at work
- 33 Family and professional life
- 34 Social security and assistance
- 35 Health care
- 36 Access to services of economic interest
- 37 Environmental protection
- 38 Consumer protection

Art.39-46 Citizen's rights

- 39 Vote and stand as candidate to EP
- 40 Vote and candidate at municipal elections
- 41 Good administration
- 42 Access to documents
- 43 European ombudsman
- 44 Petition (EP)
- 45 Movement and residence
- 46 Diplomatic and consular protection

Art.47-50 Justice

- 47 Effective remedy and fair trial
- 48 Presumption of innocence; right of defence
- 49 Legality and proportionality of offences and penalties
- 50 *Ne bis in idem*

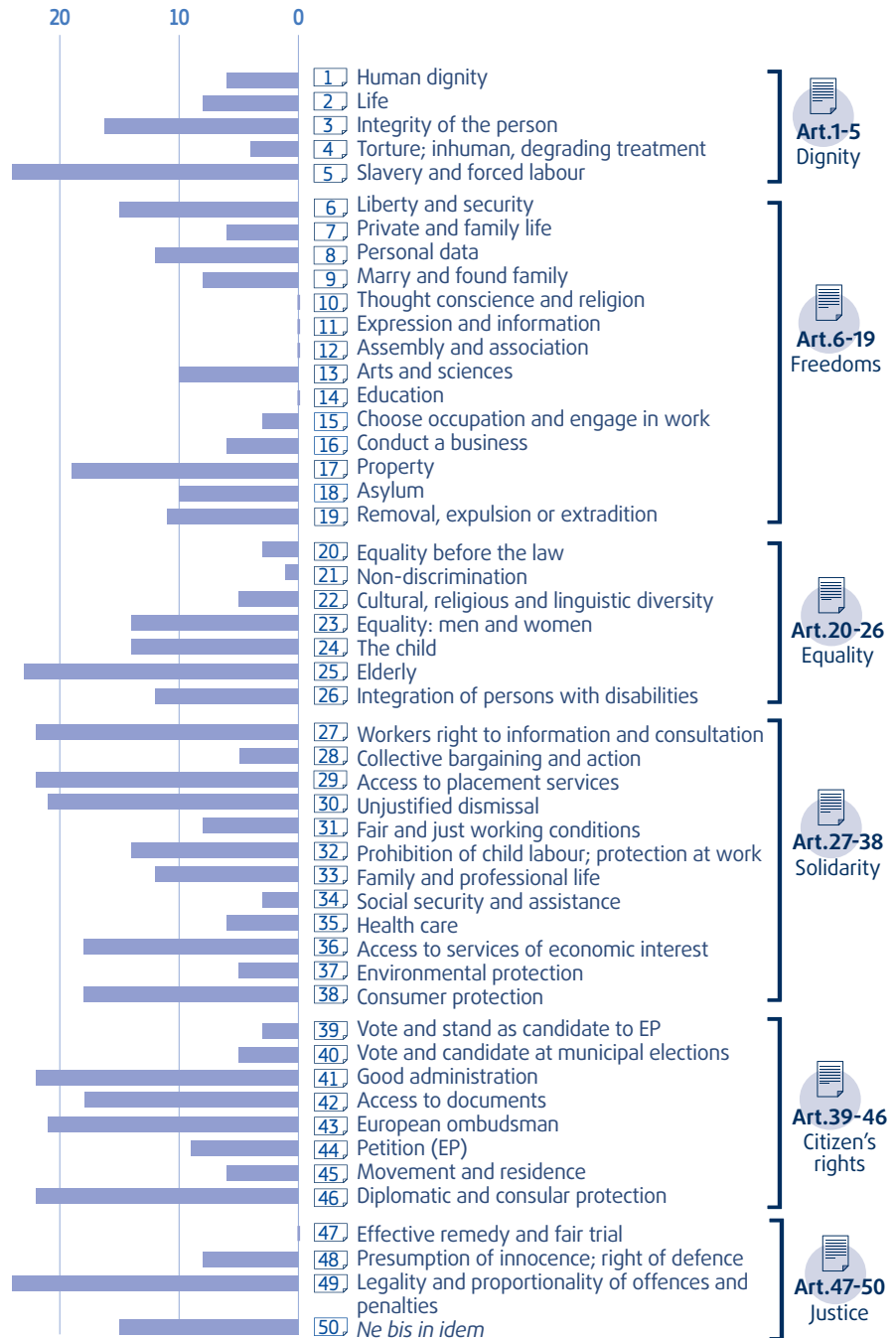
When comparing the Charter with the constitutions of EU Member States, it becomes evident that the text of the Charter is often more explicit about certain rights. For example, in Finland, some Charter rights appear not to be fully mirrored in national constitutional law – for instance, the prohibition of slavery and forced labour (Article 5), right to marry and right to found a family (Article 9), prohibition of child labour and protection of young people at work (Article 32), family and professional life (Article 33), access to services of general economic interest (Article 36), consumer

protection (Article 38), presumption of innocence and right to defence (Article 48) and the right not to be tried or punished twice for the same criminal offence (Article 50).

The absence of certain rights from a constitutional text by no means implies that they are not protected by the legal order. However, explicit guarantees in a constitutional text make these rights more visible and so also more accessible. In this sense, the Charter can strengthen less well-known rights.

Figure 2: Does the Charter add to the visibility of rights? Comparing the Charter and national constitutions

Number of EU Member States that do not have equivalent/explicit provisions for this Article in their constitutional texts



Note: The figure is based on a textual comparison of the Charter and written constitutional law of the EU Member States (excluding the United Kingdom) in order to show under which provisions the Charter is most likely to increase the visibility of entitlements. EU-specific entitlements (the Charter provisions that are in Figure 1 marked in pale yellow) were considered as reflected in national constitutions if a comparable provision could be identified (for instance a constitutional provision concerning a national Ombudsperson).

Source: FRA, 2018

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: *a young instrument*

- ★ A European Convention drafted the Charter. The Convention was composed of 15 representatives of the then 15 EU Member States, 46 parliamentarians (16 members of the European Parliament and 30 members of national parliaments), and one European Commission representative. The Convention also consulted civil society.
- ★ The European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the EU solemnly proclaimed the Charter in December 2000.
- ★ With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009, the Charter became legally binding. It is a relatively new legal instrument that is increasingly used at national level.

Further information

- ★ **The EU Charter**, available on EUR-Lex.
- ★ The **Explanations relating to the Charter of fundamental rights**, by the Presidium of the European Convention.
- ★ **Charterpedia** – a FRA webspace bringing together Charter-related information, including national case law.
- ★ **EU Charter app** – a FRA app to access EU Charter rights anytime, anywhere, as well as national and CJEU case law using the Charter.
- ★ FRA (2018), **Applying the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in law and policymaking at national level**, Luxembourg, Publications Office.
- ★ FRA (2018), Opinion 4/2018, **Challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights**.
- ★ **Thematic FRA-CoE/ECtHR handbooks on European law**: Non-discrimination (2018), Asylum (2014), Data protection (2018), Children's rights (2015), and Access to justice (2016).
- ★ FRA's annual *Fundamental Rights Report* contains a **specific chapter** dedicated to the use of the Charter at national level.
- ★ European Commission, **Annual reports on the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**.

FRA – EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Tel: +43 158030-0 – Fax: +43 158030-699

fra.europa.eu – info@fra.europa.eu

 facebook.com/fundamentalrights

 twitter.com/EURightsAgency

 linkedin.com/company/eu-fundamental-rights-agency

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