[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

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.

- 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.
The Slovak constitution

The Constitution of the Slovak Republic

★ It contains Slovakia’s bill of rights. Adopted on 1 September, it entered into force on 1 October 1992.
★ The constitution has nine titles and 156 articles. Title two of the constitution sets out 44 provisions on human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights.

The constitution, the EU Charter and the ECHR

★ The constitution does not specifically mention the EU Charter or the European Convention of Human Rights.
★ However, Article 7 (2) refers to EU law, stating that it takes precedence over Slovak law.

How is the Charter used in Slovakia?

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 Slovakia include:

★ Charter’s precedence over domestic law
In 2015, members of parliament submitted a motion to check whether the Electronic Communications Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Act on Police Force are compatible with the Charter, the ECHR, and the constitution. The Constitutional Court found – in its Decision No. PL. ÚS 10/2014-78 of 29 April 2015 – the Charter applicable and stated that, in accordance with Article 7 (5) of the constitution, it took precedence over domestic legislation. However, because it found that the challenged legislation was unconstitutional, the legislation’s compatibility with the Charter did not need to be further established.

★ Right to good administration (Article 41)
In a case (Case 10Sža/4/2016) from 2016, the Ministry of the Interior decided not to include a person in the programme of support and protection for victims of human trafficking. This decision was communicated only to the International Organization for Migration, not to the applicant herself. This was the first case in Slovakia on access to justice in the context of the programme for victims of human trafficking. The applicant appealed to the Supreme Court to clarify the consequences of accepting that the decision on non-inclusion in the programme was indeed an individual administrative act. The Supreme Court referred to Article 41 of the Charter and, while not holding it applicable as such – the court held that the right applies as a general principle of law rather than as a Charter right – it stressed the judiciary’s overall responsibility for enforcing the right to good governance.

★ Consumer protection (Article 38)
In a decision of 28 June 2016 (Case 17Co/286/2015), the regional Court of Prešov dealt with consumer protection as laid down in the Charter. It stated:

“The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (the ‘EU Charter’) recognises the same values as the constitution; however, the area in which it provides protection of rights beyond the constitution is precisely the area of consumer legal relationships. In this respect, Article 38 of the Charter should be noted, according to which the states’ policies shall ensure a high level of consumer protection. Given the wording of Article 7 of the constitution, in light of the Lisbon Treaty, the Charter is part of the legal order of the Slovak Republic. The Charter obliges the Slovak Republic, as an EU Member State, to ensure a high level of consumer protection and the Court of Appeal considers that the provisions of Article 5b of the Consumer Protection Act are among the rules that lead to the fulfilment of Article 38 of the Charter.”
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.

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 Freedoms
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

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
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.

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 Slovakia, a few Charter rights appear not to be fully mirrored in national constitutional law – for instance, workers’ right to information and consultation within the undertaking (Article 27), right of access to placement services (Article 29) or access to services of general economic interest (Article 36).

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Human dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-19</td>
<td>Freedoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-26</td>
<td>Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-38</td>
<td>Solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39-46</td>
<td>Citizen’s rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47-50</td>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’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.