FRP Advisory Panel meeting
9-10 November 2017
Meeting report

The newly established Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) Advisory Panel met for its first session at FRA in Vienna on 9-10 November 2017.

Objectives:

- Informing the incoming Advisory Panel about FRP, establishing the Panel as a group and discussing its upcoming roles and tasks;
- Informing about ongoing and upcoming FRA activities, notably about the project on civil society space;
- Exchanging views with the Panel on civil society space in the EU;
- Consulting the Panel in view of the Fundamental Rights Forum.

Main agenda points:

- An introduction to FRA’s mandate and work
- The Fundamental Rights Platform and the role of the Advisory Panel
- FRA’s work on civil society space in the EU
- Fundamental Rights Forum 2018
- Advisory Panel input into further developing the FRP
Welcome and introduction by FRA Director Michael O’Flaherty:

The FRA Director provided an introduction to FRA’s activities and challenges, emphasising the worrying patterns of discourse against and violations of human rights in Europe. The Platform and the Advisory Panel share 10 years of cooperation, he commented on the great importance of FRP organisations’ help to disseminate, to consult and to aid enormously in FRA’s work. A cooperation strategy had been developed jointly with the previous Advisory Panel, which identified five shared aims:

1. Facilitating the exchange of information and pooling of knowledge
2. Bringing relevant civil society expertise, knowledge and information to FRA work
3. Jointly communicating FRA evidence in order to achieve impact
4. Jointly raising awareness of fundamental rights
5. Empowering and strengthening civil society

The Director remarked the uniqueness of the current advisory panel (the 5th) due to its diversity, for the first time representing all groups listed as “civil society” in FRA’s Founding Regulation.

Seven main tasks for the new Advisory Panel:

1. Inviting underrepresented organisations to the Platform: filling gaps of key players
2. Further developing the planned thematic cooperation strands
3. Building a true network: possibly a space for peer learning and for exchange of good practice
4. Reaching out better at national level
5. Civil Society space: raising awareness among policy makers and how to support CSOs
7. Improving communication with, and among, the Platform
The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) today & tomorrow

This introductory session explained FRA’s mandate, history and developments, which were presented by Gabriel Toggenburg, senior legal advisory at FRA. Subsequently, the three Heads of operational departments, Friso Roscam Abbing, Head of Fundamental Rights Promotion Department, Joanna Goodey, Head of Freedoms and Justice Department, and Ioannis Dimitrakopoulos, Head of Equality and Citizens’ Rights department, presented the work of their respective examples, also explaining FRA’s modes of working – in research, stakeholder cooperation, and communication.

The Fundamental Rights Platform and the advisory panel: legal basis, history and tasks

FRA’s founding regulation (Ref. Council Regulation (EC) 168/2007 of 15 /02/2007) recognises the important role of civil society in FRA’s work and asks FRA to establish the Fundamental Rights Platform as a mechanism for dialogue and close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.

The platform is formed by 6 thematic groups: Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Trade unions, Employers’ organisations, Social and professional organisations, Churches, religious, philosophical and non-confessional organisations and universities and other experts of European and international bodies or organisations.

Its main activities are: information exchange, meetings, contributing to FRA projects, consultations, outcomes and recommendations of civil society events, capacity building for civil society organisations and FRA project on safeguarding civil society space.

◊ FRA: Make it clearer what the advantages and benefits are for CSOs by being part of the Platform. To be used on website, factsheet, invitation for new organisations to register.
FRA’s work on civil society space: Discussion- reactions and input from Advisory panel

FRA presented its new draft report on civil society spaces, the panel’s contributed with a fruitful discussion, supplied with a helpful input and provided critical and crucial comments to the report and its recommendations.

◊ FRA: Include points discussed into draft report.
◊ FRA and AP: Conference call early 2018 to discuss follow up of report.
◊ FRA: Ensure Brussels-based AP members are invited to NGO Forum December.
◊ FRA: Invite AP to launch of report; share report (in advance).

FRA’s Fundamental Rights Forum- information, consultation and AP’s role

Friso Roscam Abbing presented the Forum – background, concept, theme, ideas, programme structure. (see http://fundamentalrightsforum.eu/). AP was then invited for feedback and discussion.

Note: Entire AP will be invited to attend the Forum, travel and accommodation will be covered. Forum will take place from 25-27 September 2018 in Vienna, at MetaStadt.

Main points raised:

- Young people as contributors – what do we learn from young people’s perspectives? Give a role to youth, they should also be listened to. [FRA has embarked on a specific process how to integrate the youth perspective]. Find more connections between youth, middle aged people and older people; youth is not the problem in human rights issues, we need to focus more on the “fossilised fears” of the middle aged–do it more intergenerational –bridging generations. A youth-only event would therefore not be helpful.
- “Grass roots” vs. “organised” as target group.
- Concept of belonging – how does it translate in other languages? Can this be problematic?
- Inter-sectorial perspective to meet different people and break the traditional silos (also among speakers).
- Preparatory engagement before the Forum – strengthen the pre-dimension.
- Pose a theoretical challenge to participants and have them come together to solve it – people are more inclined to talk about barriers than about solutions. So we
should identify barriers beforehand and frame the discussion around them, with a focus on an end result (solutions)

- Audience must not be only white, more diversity among participants and speakers.
- Cost coverage: partnership with cities. Multinational companies as potential funders for participants? Some universities may fund PhD students.
- No need to agree with everyone.
- Contact big technological corporations – e.g. someone who works with Facebook counteracting hate speech.
- Some people’s costs are higher than others (e.g. disabled persons), take it into account when deciding for a lump-sum funding.
- People whose rights are violated the most are often the ones with less financial resources – think about the implications of inviting them to attend, how to make this possible.
- Use the space as a communications tool- the way we organize it physically mirrors the conceptual approach. Create paths, belonging as an emotion and movement. Give motion names (e.g. “from identity to identities”).
- Translation?
- Civic space strand – session on civic space should be there.
- Agenda of business and human rights in Europe:
  - National action plans on business and human rights
  - Best practices in law – French law on diligence? Dutch child labour law?
  - Mineral import practices legislation
- Human rights foundations + concrete names of big companies that work in the human rights area.
- “Floor is yours” (Open Space) and speed-dating sessions should be organised. Organisation made on the spot - no prearranged marketplace sessions
- Erasmus+ program outcomes and sharing best practices.
- Selection criteria for participants and CSOs? Balance among participant categories in working groups?
- Rights holders present should be already connected to CSOs and active in the field (inviting people that are not directly connected to human rights action might be lost work for the specific purpose)
- How to involve the Member States?
- Structured dialogue between young people and Member States
- Make connections to the Austrian Presidency programme
- How do we educate in human rights? Examples of tools from Council of Europe: compass and compasito
- Business leaders as facilitators
• Look outside of human rights world: successful change campaigns? Innovations?
• A space that provides a sense of solidarity, positivism, resilience and hope; but also something that challenges; why aren’t our narratives resonating and our actions having an impact? → what do we need from the Forum as a human rights movement?
• Worth looking outside the human rights movement – look for success in other areas that have led to positive changes of behaviour, and think about comparative lessons, i.e. innovations in environmental area.
• Do we want to include those who don’t think like we think? → No, as they might feel cornered in such a setting. These conversations are very needed, but would need safer environment. We should first build our ‘logos’ and standpoints, then confronting opponents with them. Rather, go for challenging key speakers that will challenge CSOs, or challenging spaces – as a midpoint in between the two previous options
• Virtual participants able to interfere through internet channels
• Networking
• Graphic harvesting
• Inclusion as part of belonging
• Intersectional leaders, i.e. refugee leader coming from business sector
• Seeing yourself from “outside”, not belonging in one category
• Students as participants
• Look at funding models to finance participants, invite funders & foundations to help with funds
• US ‘black lives matter’ as an example or a movement to engage with?
• Menu option in which people are forced to step out of their usual perspective and attend sessions not necessarily related to their field of expertise

◊ FRA: Include points discussed into Forum concept and programme development.
◊ FRA and AP: Conference call early 2018 to discuss preps for Forum and AP involvement / notably strand on civil society space.
◊ FRA and AP volunteers: continue working on youth component.
Further developing the FRP - concrete next steps

Civil society space

FRA report public launch planned for January. FRA Director to present contents of report on 5 December at EU NGO Forum in Brussels. FRP plans its own event to present the report. FRP plans a survey on civil society space in autumn 2018, among FRP plus possibly other umbrella organisations.

- A day on civil society space could be organised in selected Member States via EU representations. (NLOs). Include MB participation in these civil society events.
- Stressed importance of FRA’s role as EU Agency: “the witness”.
- Ensure the topic of shrinking civil society spaces stays in the spotlight.
- Put energy on state level incl. policy makers.
- Toolkit, good practices, resources, etc. Identifying “champions in the EU”.
- Invite, include or motivate government officials who are sensitive to the topic.
- Government partners to tackle “problematic” countries + local media.
- Use 70th anniversary of UDHR and 20th of UNHHRD (2018)
- Partner CIVICUS.

◊ FRA: Organise launch event in Brussels, invite AP, communicate report in advance, in January.
◊ FRA: involve AP (2 volunteers) in developing the survey on civil society space, in spring.
◊ FRA and AP: conference call on next steps in advocacy on civil society space.
◊ Distribution of the report at World Economic Forum (Davos January). Possible side event at Human Rights Council in March.

Network building & thematic cooperation

The FRP is currently mainly a database with organisations, with regular interactions and consultations. How can it be developed into a true network? How should “thematic cooperation” look like? At the point of registration, organisations are asked to give details about their activities and expertise.

- There exist already many thematic networks in the EU. Added value of FRP would be to break these silos and to connect organisations horizontally, rather than per Multi-Annual Framework themes. Separate thematic groups into functional groups: communication, strategic litigation, advocacy, and create intersection of dialogue. (Communities of practice)
- Mapping of the organisations/Networks/Thematic levels.
• Support sub-groups to network.
• Profile of the members of the platform in FRA newsletter.
• Support intersectional dialogue.
• Strengthen connection between Nat. Networks on thematic levels at the National Level.
• Assist NGOs to challenge laws including law firms (ex. Hungarian laws).

◊ FRA: Develop draft concept on new “thematic-functional approach”, to be discussed with AP in early 2018.

Strengthening human rights infrastructure - reaching out at national level

FRA has initiated a project on strengthening human rights infrastructure at national level – which also includes CSOs. In a first phase, 7 countries have been chosen for a pilot (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Croatia, Italy, Netherlands). The project and planned ways of reaching out and of connecting national stakeholders were presented. Currently, there are over 550 organisations registered in the FRP database; however distribution across countries as well as themes is patchy.

FRA aims to fill obvious gaps, by inviting organisations in a targeted way. AP is invited to help identify additional organisations. This will also be relevant in view of the planned survey on civil society space, to ensure coverage is valid across all countries.

• Focus not only on proposed seven FRA pilot countries, but in particular for civil society also on HU & PL.
• Examples of FRA’s work on the field.
• MB to influence on where SDGs are placed.
• Invitation to German anti-racism network.

◊ FRA send to AP excel of organisations, and let AP know where help is needed in identifying additional organisations to be invited to register in the FRP database. AP will provide input on the missing CSOs in the FRP by end February, and advise on further reach out.
◊ FRA to develop compelling invitation which states clearly what the added value of FRP is.

Consultations

As per Founding Regulation, FRA consults with civil society via the FRP on its Annual Work Programme, as well as on its Annual Report on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU. Currently these consultations are done via online survey. FRA aims to develop additional, more meaningful ways of consulting.

• Provide feedback to the consulted organisation.
Next AP meeting could be timed in a way to allow for a discussion on upcoming consultation of FRA Work Programme 2020, and conversation with Annual report team.

Articulate benefit for commenting on consultations—Annual Report as an advocacy tool.

- FRA to organise next AP meeting at a moment relevant for feeding into AWP 2020 consultations [would be end May/early June] – doodle to be sent. FRA Planning Team and Annual Report team to be invited to next AP meeting.
- FRA to provide feedback on consultations.

**Improving communication**

FRA informs and communicates with FRP via the following channels: separate section on FRA website, weekly internal newsletter, FRA Facebook account (not FRP specific), FRA twitter account (not FRP specific), FRP inbox: frp@fra.europa.eu, FRA has signed up to newsletters of organisations (where team speaks the languages). FRA is also planning webinars. What else could be useful? Should a separate FRP twitter channel be developed? How could the AP itself communicate with the Platform?

- AP considers that information provided to FRP is sufficient.
- FRP Twitter channel would be most welcome.
- Blog entries by themes, to stimulate the debate.
- Profile of the members of the platform in FRA newsletter.
- Consider inviting FRP organisations for conference calls on specific themes.

- FRA to develop concept for FRP twitter channel and involve AP.
- FRA to develop concept for webinars and involve AP.
- FRA and AP conference call on how AP itself could communicate with the Platform.

**Closure**

FRA thanked all meeting participants for their very rich and constructive input over the 2-day meeting. AP appreciated all information given and the good and productive atmosphere.