



FRA Press Release

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## **Europe's human rights crisis surmountable, say participants at key conference to find ways forward**

**Suggestions to help tackle Europe's pressing human rights crisis were captured at the Fundamental Rights Forum in Vienna. Over 700 leading experts from around the world contributed to the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights' event. All the 100+ practical ideas that were generated are being distilled in the Forum Chair's Statement.**

*"Yes, we have a crisis of fundamental rights in Europe but also the goodwill, energy and ideas to overcome it. This is what we debated over the last four days in Vienna during the Fundamental Rights Forum 2016,"* said FRA Director and Forum Chair [Michael O'Flaherty](#). *"Human rights cannot be viewed as an optional extra that can be sacrificed. They are the cornerstone of European identity; if we lose them we will lose Europe."*

The EU has built up a strong fundamental rights system over the years. However, rights are in crisis. Trust in democratic institutions is falling, undermining rights protection and promotion that ultimately benefit us all. To move forward, Europe must work together, always mindful that Europe is not alone in today's increasingly interdependent world.

Areas that need joint action include:

1. Ensuring fundamental rights are not a niche issue but are instead mainstreamed in all policy discussions and decisions at the EU and national level, particularly in the social and economic sectors.
2. Building a strong fundamental rights culture through rights education that is essential in today's societies. This includes improving rights awareness among everyone in the EU.
3. Strengthening the oversight by parliaments and rights watchdogs, the national human rights bodies, to better hold governments account of their fundamental rights obligations.
4. Guaranteeing that everyone, including vulnerable groups, is involved in decisions on policy measures that affect them.

The Forum focused on the three most pressing fundamental rights challenges facing the EU today: refugee protection, inclusion and the digital age. Three of the very many suggestions were:

- Broadening legal ways of reaching safety as an alternative to risky irregular entry. EU Institutions and Member States could consider enlarged resettlement schemes, as well as building public support for responsible asylum policies through political leadership and creating powerful counter-narratives to anti-refugee rhetoric.
- National, regional and local authorities, the business sector, professional groups and civil society should work together to use EU funds to stimulate socially responsible and inclusive growth that fosters fundamental rights and respect for diversity.
- A 'traffic light' warning system for users of digital technology, by IT companies and their regulators. Red lights would warn of the potential reuse of personal their data.

FRA will publish the full Chair's statement of concrete suggestions in these three areas soon. FRA pledges to use every opportunity to present and discuss these findings with stakeholders throughout the EU. Already FRA will present the statement to the EU Council in July.

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**Notes to editors:**

- The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) provides evidence-based advice to EU and national decision makers, thereby contributing to more informed and better targeted debates and policies on fundamental rights.
- FRA's Fundamental Rights Forum 2016 met in Vienna from 20-23 June.