

## Human rights can build a fairer society but challenges remain

*‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’* states the first Article of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of gender, nationality, place of residence, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, birth, age, race, religion, language, disability, family status, or any other status, individuals are all equally entitled to the enjoyment of all human rights without discrimination.

Around 88% of people in the EU believe that *“human rights are important for creating a fairer society”*. The highest levels of agreement with this statement are found in Finland (95%) and Malta (96%). The survey findings<sup>2</sup> from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) show that people in the EU widely believe that human rights have a useful and meaningful role in their lives.

FRA findings also indicate that people’s income and education levels, can have an impact on their views on human rights. People, who struggle to make ends meet on their household income and those whose highest completed level of education is lower secondary education or less, are more likely to think that not everyone benefits equally from human rights and that some take unfair advantage of rights protection. As FRA Director, Michael O’Flaherty, said *“It is alarming how many young Europeans or those who struggle to make ends meet feel abandoned by human rights. Human rights are for everyone and nobody should feel left behind.”*<sup>3</sup>

In this context, FRA recommends that the EU and its Member States undertake targeted measures to ensure that those socially disadvantaged are effectively informed on their rights and how to claim them. Actions should be undertaken to help improve rights awareness for people who have lower levels of education. FRA recommends National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), Equality Bodies and Ombuds Institutions to communicate, promote and make accessible the fundamental rights that people are entitled to.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/#:~:text=Article%201.,in%20a%20spirit%20of%20brotherhood.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/fundamental-rights-survey-trust>

<sup>3</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/pr-2020-fundamental-rights-survey-trust\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/pr-2020-fundamental-rights-survey-trust_en.pdf)

Moreover, many EU respondents are not aware of the three main international human rights instruments; the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Council of Europe European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (1950), and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (2000). Out of these three, the Charter is less well known than the other two. Around 68% of people in the EU have heard of the ECHR or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (67%), compared with about half of all people who have heard of the Charter (53 %).

In this regard, EU Member States are urged to consider how to provide accessible information to the public on the fundamental rights enshrined in the Charter. In return, this would also support NHRIs in their efforts to promote awareness and improve the implementation of the Charter.

Indeed, NHRIs are the cornerstone for the promotion and protection of human rights.<sup>4</sup> In Malta, legislation is currently being discussed in Parliament to transform the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) into a Human Rights and Equality Commission (HREC). With this transformation, Malta's legal framework on human rights and equality will be strengthened with the widening of NCPE's remit and sanctioning powers. The new Commission will be answering directly to Parliament and thus being wholly independent of a particular Ministry. This institution will monitor the implementation of the strengthened equality legislation and provide individuals with a stronger mechanism against discrimination and other human rights breaches.

In order to “*ensure continued support for human rights, it is necessary to inform people in all segments of society about how human rights are important for them not as abstract concepts, but in relation to their daily lived realities*”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/NHRI/1950-UNDP-UHCHR-Toolkit-LR.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/fundamental-rights-survey-trust>