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Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the EU: a matter of human and fundamental rights



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This publication was originally published in 2019 as part of the FRA *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*, available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/fundamental-rights-report-2019>.

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Print	ISBN 978-92-9474-542-2	doi:10.2811/03320	TK-01-19-200-EN-C
PDF	ISBN 978-92-9474-541-5	doi:10.2811/624376	TK-01-19-200-EN-N



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Introduction

Amid all of humanity's progress, major challenges remain, and the European Union (EU) is not immune from them. Global challenges to ensuring a sustainable future not only call into question our ways of producing and consuming products and services and our financial system, but also raise concerns regarding respect for human and fundamental rights.¹ In this regard 2018 and 2019 are two crucial years for the EU. Proposals have been submitted and discussions are on-going concerning future EU strategy and policies on sustainability.² At the same time, EU institutions and Member States are continuing their negotiations on proposals for future EU funding instruments that can contribute to achieving sustainable development, which also link access to EU funding to the application and implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.³

In response to global challenges, heads of state and government of the United Nations' members adopted in 2015 the declaration on 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is "a global plan for action for people, planet and prosperity", under the pledge to "leave no one behind", which is at the core of the 2030 Agenda,⁴ and to "endeavour to reach the furthest behind first".⁵ It is also a plan "grounded" in international human rights commitments.⁶ Its review process lies with the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), which is the main UN platform on sustainable development and in 2019 will address the theme 'Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality'.⁷

The SDGs are a roadmap towards a more equitable, just, inclusive and sustainable model of development, applicable universally to developing and developed countries alike. This roadmap can only be achieved if it realises human and fundamental rights for all without discrimination, particularly for those more left behind than others, such as marginalised communities. The human and fundamental rights dimension of SDGs, and their universal applicability, are two major differences between the new sustainable development framework and the previous one; the latter was structured around the millennium development goals (MDGs), which were designed to apply to developing countries.⁸

This chapter explores the human and fundamental rights dimensions of two of the 2030 Agenda's 17 SDGs in Member States' and the EU's internal policies.⁹ The objective is to connect the dots of the human rights landscape and to highlight strong trends in two important fields: the reduction of inequalities (targeted by SDG 10) and the promotion of peace, justice and strong institutions (targeted by SDG 16). Identifying the gaps in data and policies will help identify possible avenues for progress with respect to fundamental

rights. SDG 10 and SDG 16 will receive special attention during the 2019 High Level Political Forum. Data collected and analysed by FRA are appropriate to complement existing data from other sources and could be taken into consideration in populating SDG-relevant indicators.

FRA ACTIVITY

Providing data relevant to a broad range of SDGs

The data presented in this chapter focus on FRA's work relating to SDGs 10 and 16, but FRA research covers aspects of many other SDGs – such as SDG 1 on poverty, SDG 4 on quality education, and SDG 5 on gender equality. For examples of FRA projects and deliverables linked to different SDGs, see [FRA's webpage on cooperating with international organisations](#).

In relation to SDG 5, FRA published in 2014 the first – and to date only – EU-wide survey on violence against women. It is based on interviews with 42,000 women across the EU, who were asked about their experiences of physical, sexual and psychological violence, including intimate partner violence ('domestic violence'), in the 12 months before the survey, and since the age of 15. The data collected and analysed by FRA are used by Eurostat in its 2018 report on monitoring the SDGs, populating the EU SDG indicators on violence against women in respect to the SDG on gender equality (SDG 5) and the SDG on peace, justice, strong institutions (SDG 16). FRA's violence against women data remain the only comparative data source in the EU on violence against women. FRA is also a member of the task force established by Eurostat to develop a survey on gender-based violence in different EU Member States.

For more information, see FRA (2014), [Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results report](#), Luxembourg, Publications Office; Eurostat (2018), [Sustainable development in the European Union – Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context – 2018 edition](#), Luxembourg, Publications Office, pp.107 and 300; [Commission webpage on Eurostat's task force on the development of a survey on gender-based violence](#).

The EU has been instrumental in shaping and adopting a universally applicable 2030 Agenda and a list of SDGs reflecting human rights commitments.¹⁰ It pledges to be the frontrunner in their implementation in the context of both its external action and its internal policies. In addition to data collection and monitoring of the SDGs, the EU is taking positive action to assist EU Member States to attain SDGs. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Charter), which is part of EU primary law,¹¹ and concrete EU legislation – such as, for example, the anti-discrimination directives – provide a strong normative framework for the implementation



of SDGs in a human and fundamental rights compliant way. A whole range of policies and tools, including the EU’s strategy for sustainable growth, the proposals on the new EU budget for the period 2021-2027, the European Semester policy coordination mechanism, and the European Pillar of Social Rights, offer multiple opportunities in this respect.¹²

The primary responsibility for the implementation of Agenda 2030 and its sustainable development goals lies, however, with national governments. In his closing speech at the Intersessional meeting of the Human Rights Council on SDGs and human rights in January 2019, FRA’s director highlighted that within “all the planning at the national level we need to engage all of the actors in a respectful and participatory manner”.¹³

This requires forging strong partnerships with key actors and stakeholders, ranging from local authorities to national human rights institutions, equality bodies and Ombuds institutions, business communities and, especially, civil society.

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights requires both the EU and its Member States, when they act within the scope of EU law, to embed a rights-based approach to sustainable development. Table 1 shows how specific fundamental rights commitments are linked to SDGs on reducing inequality (SDG 10) and on promoting peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). The examples used correspond to concrete SDG targets particularly relevant in the context of internal EU policies.

Table 1: Examples of SDG 10 and SDG 16 targets corresponding to EU Fundamental Rights Charter provisions

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Examples of SDG targets related to internal policies	Examples of relevant provisions of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
SDG 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target 10.2 calls for empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status Target 10.3 calls for ensuring equal opportunity and reducing inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard Target 10.4 calls for adopting policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieving greater equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to human dignity (Article 1) Right to education (Article 14) Equality before the law (Article 20) Non-discrimination (Article 21) Equality between women and men (Article 23) Rights of the child (Article 24) Rights of the elderly (Article 25) Integration of persons with disabilities (Article 26) Fair and just working conditions (Article 31) Social security and social assistance (Article 34) Right to health care (Article 35)
SDG 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target 16.1 calls for significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere Target 16.3 calls for promoting the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensuring equal access to justice for all Target 16.b calls for promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to human dignity (Article 1) Right to life (Article 2) Right to integrity of the person (Article 3) Prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 4) Right to liberty and security (Article 6) Right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial (Article 47) Presumption of innocence and right of defence (Article 48) Principles of legality and proportionality of criminal offences and penalties (Article 49) Right not to be tried or punished twice in criminal proceedings for the same criminal offence (Article 50) Equality before the law (Article 20) Non-discrimination (Article 21) Equality between women and men (Article 23)

Source: FRA, 2019



1

Linking SDGs and human rights at the international level



1.1 Seeking to realise the human rights of all

In the context of the 2030 Agenda, sustainable development is conceptualised under three equal and interconnected dimensions: economic, environmental, and social. Based on the fundamental pledge to “leave no one behind”, the 2030 Agenda explicitly underlines that it is “grounded” in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which continues to serve as the necessary human rights compass 70 years after its adoption, and international human rights treaties.¹⁴ In this respect, the 2030 Agenda makes clear that the SDGs “seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”.¹⁵

The EU has highlighted the interconnectedness of all three dimensions of sustainable development and the universal applicability of SDGs, stressing that eradicating poverty and reducing inequality should be a major focus.¹⁶ During the consultations for the adoption of the SDGs, the EU pointed out that reducing inequality is essential for more peaceful societies, whereas more equal societies are more likely to generate sustainable development.¹⁷ In this light, the EU has strongly supported that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs should embed a rights-based approach to sustainable development,¹⁸ which also respects the inter-related principles of the rule of law and good governance.¹⁹ The EU Council confirmed this approach once again in April 2019, adopting its Conclusions “Towards an Ever More Sustainable Union”.²⁰

Promising practice

Highlighting the links between the SDGs and human rights

The **Danish** Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), a national human rights institution, has developed the Human Rights Guide to the SDGs, which clearly demonstrates the significant extent to which SDGs are linked with international and regional human rights standards. According to this project, all SDGs and more than 90 % of the 169 SDG targets are relevant to international human rights instruments and correspond to international legally binding human rights provisions. The DIHR has also developed a UPR Data Explorer, which allows users to explore how recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) are linked to the 169 SDG targets.

For more information, see the website of the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has pointed out that human rights considerations and international human rights law commitments are reflected in all 17 SDGs.²¹ In its words, the SDGs “mirror the human rights framework” and “are closely aligned with human rights standards”, encompassing not only development-related economic and social rights, but also civil and political rights.²²

“[The 2030 Agenda] opens a tremendous opportunity for greater integration of human rights goals, including the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms, into national policies and the work of the UN. The Sustainable Development Goals will not progress without discussion of and progress on the so-called ‘sensitive’ issues of human rights [...] development must focus, above all, on the well-being and rights of the people.”

Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Opening Statement, 39th session of the UN Human Rights Council, 10 September 2018.

1.2 SDGs in line with existing international human rights commitments and mechanisms

The existing international and European human rights framework provides useful opportunities for monitoring progress in the realisation of SDGs from a human-rights perspective (see Figure 1).

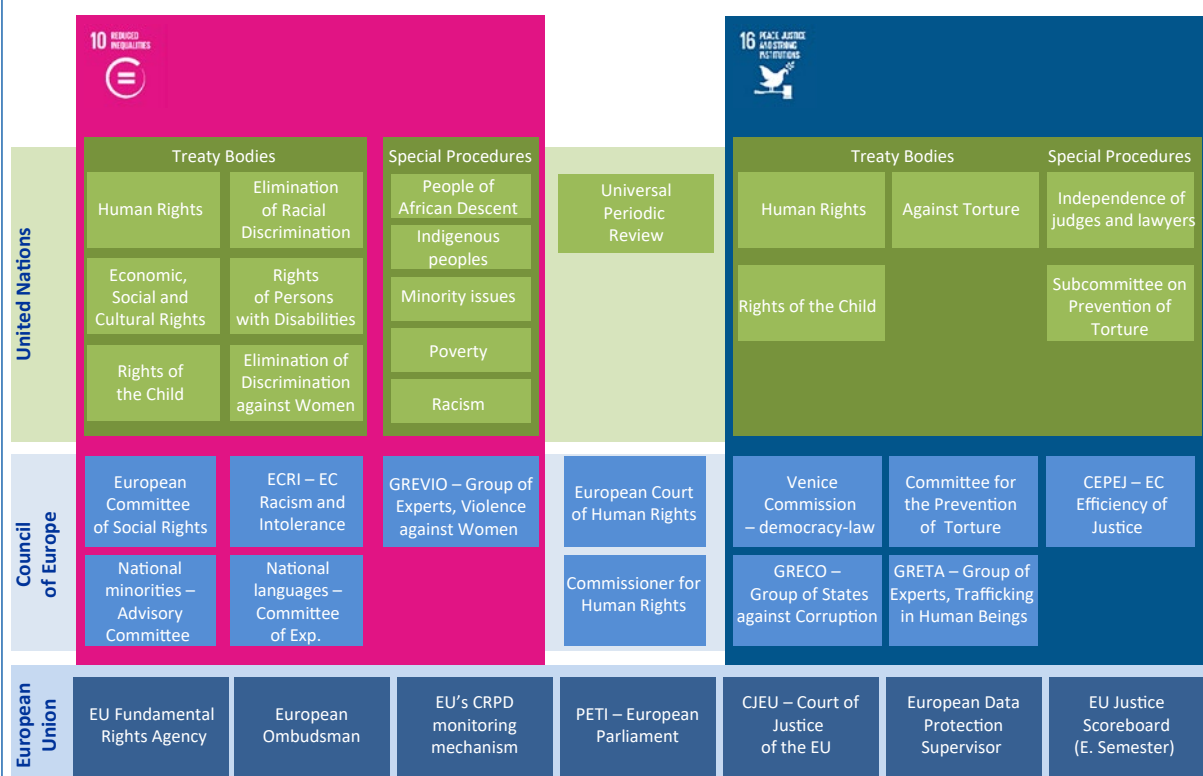
At global level, data and evidence on major human rights developments are collected by treaty bodies that monitor compliance with obligations deriving from international human rights instruments. UN human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council (HRC), also provide evidence and recommendations that can help monitor progress in SDG implementation. The UPR, for instance, as an inter-governmental and state-driven review process, examines the fulfilment by each State of its human rights obligations and commitments.²³ It is based on information provided by the State under review in the form of a national report and by treaty

bodies and special procedures, as well as by other actors, such as national human rights institutions and civil society. Currently, the HRC is implementing the third cycle of the UPR.

In parallel, the HRC also implements Special Procedures, as part of the UN human rights protection system.²⁴ These are implemented by independent experts mandated to collect evidence and report to the HRC, and often to the UN General Assembly, on specific countries or specific thematic issues, ranging from extreme poverty and human rights, the human rights of migrants, older persons or persons with disabilities, to the issue of arbitrary detention, the independence of judges and lawyers, etc.²⁵

The evidence collected by these mechanisms is compiled by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI) linking them to SDGs. The UHRI includes recommendations from all these mechanisms, in searchable form, which can be used by governments to improve SDG implementation. In addition, UHRI identifies systemic, recurring and unresolved human rights issues that may impede the realisation of SDGs.²⁶

Figure 1: Overview of key international and European mechanisms of a human rights remit relevant to SDGs 10 and 16



Note: CRPD = Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; EC = European Commission; E. Semester = European Semester; PETI = Committee on Petitions.

Source: FRA, 2019

SDG global indicator on independent national human rights institutions (indicator 16.a.1)

The global SDG 16.a.1 indicator refers to the “Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles”. OHCHR supports the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), which assesses the national human rights institutions’ (NHRIs) compliance with the United Nations Paris Principles.* The EU does not include this indicator in the EU SDG-indicator-set used to monitor progress towards SDG 16 in an EU context. According to GANHRI accreditation, 16 EU Member States have national human rights institutions compliant with the Paris principles.

In view of reinvigorating the legitimacy of human rights and of promoting monitoring mechanisms, FRA builds on and supports the work of NHRIs and other national human rights bodies, such as Equality Bodies and Ombuds institutions.

*These principles set out standards for NHRIs to meet as regards their mandate and competence; autonomy from government; independence; pluralism; adequate resources; and adequate powers of investigation.

*For more information, see OHCHR’s [webpage on the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions](#); FRA’s [webpage on its work with national human rights bodies](#); and FRA (2017), *Between promise and delivery: 10 years of fundamental rights in the EU*, Publications Office, Luxembourg.*

At the broader European level, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Social Charter (ESC) of the Council of Europe (CoE), the natural complement of the convention in the area of social and economic rights, are the two major regional treaties underpinning a human rights-based approach towards the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. The bodies overseeing their respect and implementation can be useful in this regard. The European Court of Human Rights ensures the observance of the ECHR, and its case law should be taken into account when designing measures implementing SDGs, especially as regards issues related to peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). On the other hand, the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) monitors compliance with the Charter, and its conclusions and decisions can also provide valuable input as regards particularly reducing inequality (SDG 10). Its decisions in the context of the collective complaints system²⁷ of the ESC have a special added value since they do not determine individual violations of rights but system-level problems in law or in practice.

The Council of Europe also contributes to implementing SDGs across Europe in multiple other ways.²⁸ For example, it collects Annual Penal Statistics concerning the composition of prison populations,²⁹ contributing data for the global SDG indicator on “unsentenced detainees as proportion of the overall prison population” (indicator 16.3.2).³⁰ In 2016, it shows that, on average across 24 EU Member States,³¹ around 20 % of the prison population were detainees who had not yet received a final sentence.³² Another example is the work of the Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), which monitors compliance with anti-corruption standards and carries out evaluation procedures.³³ GRECO provides recommendations and assesses their implementation. According to its 2019 programme of activities, “GRECO’s evaluation reports and recommendations also serve as a yardstick for member states when implementing Target 5 of Sustainable Goal 16 (‘Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms’).”³⁴

2

Implementing SDGs in the EU: what do available data show?



The close links between sustainable development goals and human and fundamental rights are established at both the EU and the international level. At the same time, no country is exempt from poverty, inequality and discrimination, no country is free from threats to peaceful and inclusive societies and to fundamental rights and the rule of law. This is what data provided by Eurostat and FRA suggest with regard to the EU and its Member States. Some selected examples are presented below, focusing on data relevant to the SDGs on reducing inequality (SDG 10) and on promoting peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

and does not focus on specific SDGs targets. To measure progress on the SDG on reducing inequality, Eurostat uses six individual indicators as well as three others that are used to measure progress in multiple areas. To measure progress on the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions, it again uses six individual indicators, as well as one used in other areas, too. The Member States, however, are mainly responsible for populating these indicators with transparent, comparable, accessible and valid data.

**Eurostat (2019), EU SDG indicator list; see also UN, Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) (2017), Conference of European Statisticians: Road Map on statistics for SDGs, New York and Geneva, November 2017.*

Indicators to measure SDG implementation

In 2017, the UN General Assembly adopted a global indicator framework to measure progress in achieving all 17 SDGs. It consists of 232 indicators, covering all 169 specific SDGs' targets.* Eleven of these refer to reducing inequality (SDG 10) within and between countries; and 22 refer to peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

** UN, General Assembly (2017), Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/71/313, 6 July 2017 and annual refinements. The total number of indicators listed is 244; however, nine of them are repeated under two or three different targets.*

Reflecting on EU-specific characteristics and focusing mainly on internal policies, Eurostat has adopted its own set of EU-relevant 100 SDG indicators; 41 of these are multi-purpose, serving to measure aspects related to more than one goal.* Eurostat is called on to monitor general progress towards the SDGs in an EU context,

FRA ACTIVITY

Measuring SDG implementation: FRA's contribution

Over the years, FRA has developed significant expertise in collecting and analysing data on multiple areas, including in particular equality and discrimination, but also on experiences of bias-motivated violence or harassment and on violence against women. In parallel, FRA pioneered in specific areas of its work the application of the model of human rights indicators developed by OHCHR with the contribution of FRA. The model consists of three parallel categories of indicators, each measuring different aspects of the fulfilment of human rights commitments: structural indicators identify the legal commitments and institutional framework in place; process indicators identify the concrete actions taken and resources invested to achieve targeted goals; and outcome indicators identify the outcome of specific policies.

FRA has delivered related indicators in the area of the rights of the child, Roma inclusion and, in particular, the rights of persons with disabilities. In this regard, for example, FRA developed a full set of S-P-O indicators on their right to political participation grouped into four key themes: lifting legal and administrative barriers; increasing rights awareness; making political participation more accessible; and expanding opportunities for participation.

The agency plays an important role in complementing existing data relevant for SDGs with data on the experiences of harder-to-reach groups of the population and more at risk of being left behind or of women facing violence. Eurostat used FRA data on violence against women to populate EU indicator 05.10 relevant for SDG 5 on gender equality, as well as the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). These data can also be used to assess progress in relation to SDG global indicators 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, measuring violence inflicted to women by intimate partners or other persons; as well as indicators relevant for measuring the proportion of the population subjected to violence, including sexual violence (indicator 16.1.3); the proportion of young persons who experienced sexual violence by the age of 18 years (indicator 16.2.3); or the proportion of victims of violence who reported their victimisation to the competent authorities (indicator 16.3.1). National data collections on violence against women are still rare in many EU Member States. An online database on FRA's webpage provides detailed data for each country, which Member States can potentially use for their voluntary national reports.

In 2018, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) conducted for the first time a gender-based violence survey, based on FRA's questionnaire and methodology, in South East Europe and in Eastern European OSCE countries that are not EU Member States.* First results will be available in March 2019. These data could also be used to populate SDG-relevant indicators.

In addition, FRA assists EU institutions and Member States in shaping the collection of data that are also relevant for SDGs, and supports a rights-based analysis of these data. In 2018, the EU High Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity set up a Subgroup on Equality Data facilitated by FRA and composed of interested Member States, the European Commission and Eurostat. The subgroup has developed a set of 11 guidelines on improving the collection and use of equality data, a compendium of Member States' practices related to the guidelines, and a diagnostic mapping tool that Member States can use to assess their situation concerning equality data and identify possible gaps. Further information is provided in Chapter 3 of FRA's *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*.

*See the OSCE's webpage on its *Survey on the Well-being and Safety of Women*.

2.1 Reducing inequality remains a challenge in the EU

2.1.1 Inequality among the population

The 2018 Eurostat SDG report on the SDG on reducing inequality (SDG 10) uses available data and focuses on income inequality within European societies and on economic development between countries.³⁵ Whereas differences in GDP-per-capita between EU Member States have been converging over the long term, trend data show an increase of inequality within countries, both in the long and short term. According to Eurostat, the rate of people living in income poverty in the EU increased by 8.3 % between 2005 and 2016, with the largest increases occurring in recent years.³⁶ In most EU Member States, and on average across the EU, Eurostat concludes that "the gap between the rich and the poor [has been] widening slightly" over the past years, while "the poor become poorer in the EU and the number of poor is increasing".³⁷

However, more recent data, reflecting developments in 2017, suggest that this trend has recently drawn to a halt, and that the situation in the EU is currently improving. Indicators such as on inequality of income distribution, income share of the bottom 40 % of the population, the relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap or the share of people at-risk-of poverty after social transfers, paint a more positive picture.³⁸

Analysing income inequality is possibly one of the most appropriate ways to reflect on inequality and discrimination in exercising rights within a society. Income inequality is not per se a rights violation. However, as an inequality of outcome, it can reflect inequality of opportunities, and lead to discrimination and inequality in the enjoyment of a whole range of fundamental and human rights, such as the right to education, health – linked also to unequal exposure to environmental degradation and climate change³⁹ – or social and housing assistance, the rights of children, older people and people with disabilities, or the right to access justice, all protected under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (see Table 1. At the same time, inequality of opportunities, discrimination and inequality in the enjoyment of rights can also result in inequality of outcomes in a vicious cycle of persisting and even deepening inequality that is transmitted from one generation to another. Eurostat also suggest that "[A]nother way to measure inequality of outcomes within countries is by looking at income poverty as inequality and poverty are closely interrelated".⁴⁰ People living in poverty may more often face the spectre of social exclusion compromising all their rights and leading to a higher risk of having to cope with



discrimination in their everyday life. The risk further increases when poverty intersects with other grounds of discrimination – such as, for example, disability, age, and immigrant or minority background. In extreme cases, living in severe poverty and inequality conditions may violate the right to human dignity.

The Eurostat monitoring report highlights rising levels of inequality and an increase in the at-risk-of-poverty rate over the past five and past 15 years, which constitute a movement away from sustainable

development objectives. Its peak was in 2015 and 2016 (see Table 2).⁴¹ Looking at the actual level of income among those below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap) shows a significant decrease in the median income of the poor in comparison with the rest of the population. However, looking into the most recent income data on 2017 published by Eurostat, a slight improvement can be observed across all income inequality indicators, showing first signs of a reverting trend and progress towards the EU targets.⁴²

Table 2: Trends in inequality and poverty within EU Member States: indicators measuring progress towards SDG 10, EU-28

Indicator	Long-term trend (past 15 years)	Short-term trend (past 5 years)
Inequalities within countries		
Inequality of income distribution	↘ (!)	↘
Income share of the bottom 40% of the population	↘ (!)	↘
Relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap	↘ (!)	↘
People at risk of income poverty after social transfers	↘ (!)	↘

Moderate movement away from SD objectives



Significant movement away from SD objectives



Note: Eurostat’s upcoming 2019 SDG monitoring report shows a reverse in trend regarding the income share of the bottom 40 % of the population.

Source: Eurostat, 2018 [Sustainable development in the European Union – Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context – 2018 edition, p. 184]

2.1.2 Inequality affecting specific population groups

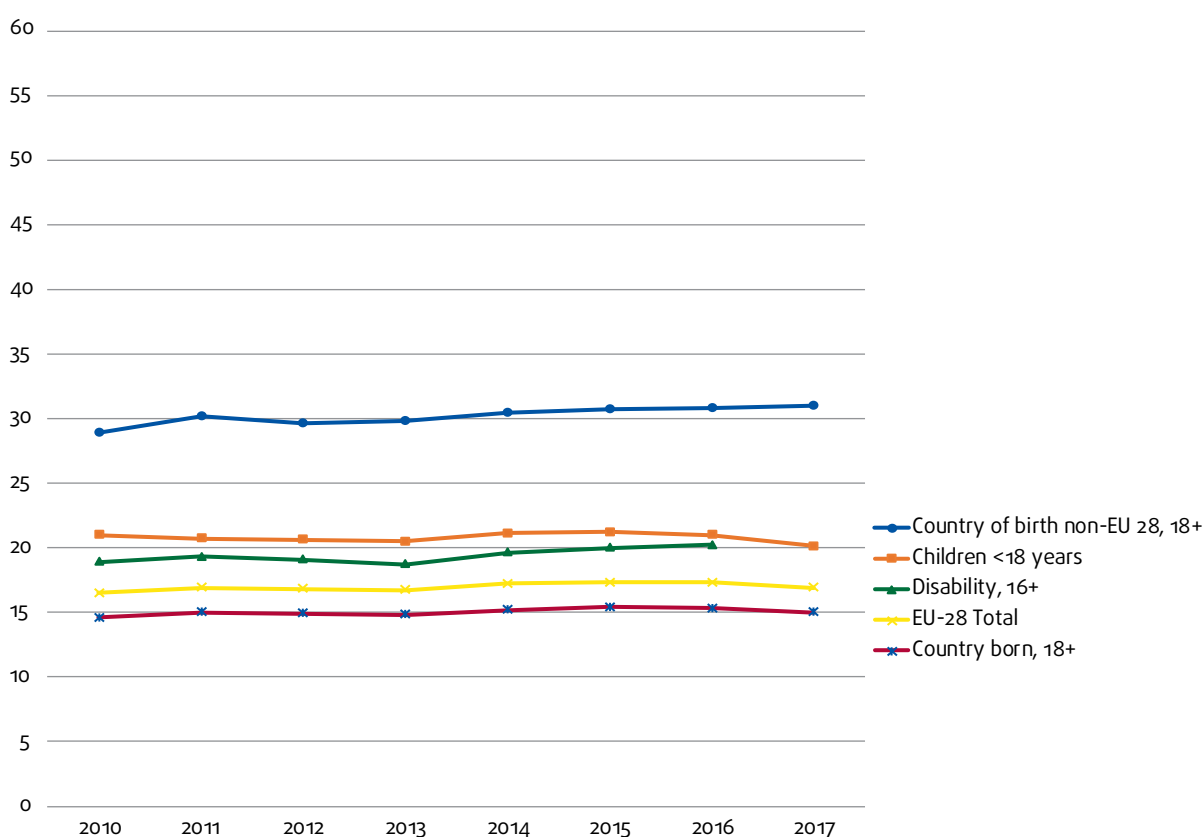
Designing and implementing policies to reduce inequality and interrelated poverty requires far more detailed information than an overall national or EU average estimate can provide. This is important to understand how different population groups and areas are affected and what the results are of relevant existing policy measures. The pledge of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to leave no one behind and to endeavour to reach those furthest behind first. Therefore it needs to take into account disaggregated data to monitor the commitments and design policies for the most vulnerable and marginalised population groups.

Certain population groups, such as children, people with disabilities, immigrants and Roma, are at greater risk of poverty. Eurostat data and FRA’s findings indicate that

these groups are more frequently affected by income inequality and poverty (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). Thus, they often face greater challenges in the enjoyment of their fundamental rights on equal footing as compared with the rest of the population. It can be further challenging when being Roma or having an immigrant background is combined with other grounds that may have an impact, regardless of ethnic or immigrant identity or background – such as, for example, being a child.

Figure 2 shows trends for the at-risk-of-poverty rate (i.e. income poverty) for different subgroups. Whereas the overall trend (EU-28 total) indicates a slight but steady decrease in the past two years, disaggregation shows that this trend is only true for children and country-born adults, while for third-country-born persons there is a slight increase in the at-risk-of-poverty rate in 2017. Persons with a disability face an above-average risk of poverty, with a steady increase since 2013.⁴³

Figure 2: At-risk-of-poverty rate (below 60 % of median equivalised income after social transfers) in EU-28, by different groups (%)



Note: 2017 figure for disability was not available at the time of extraction.
 Source: Eurostat, 2019 [EU-SILC, At-risk-of-poverty rate-EU-SILC survey [ilc_li02], [hlth_dpeo20], [ilc_li32] extracted 22.03.2019]

Global Compact for Migration

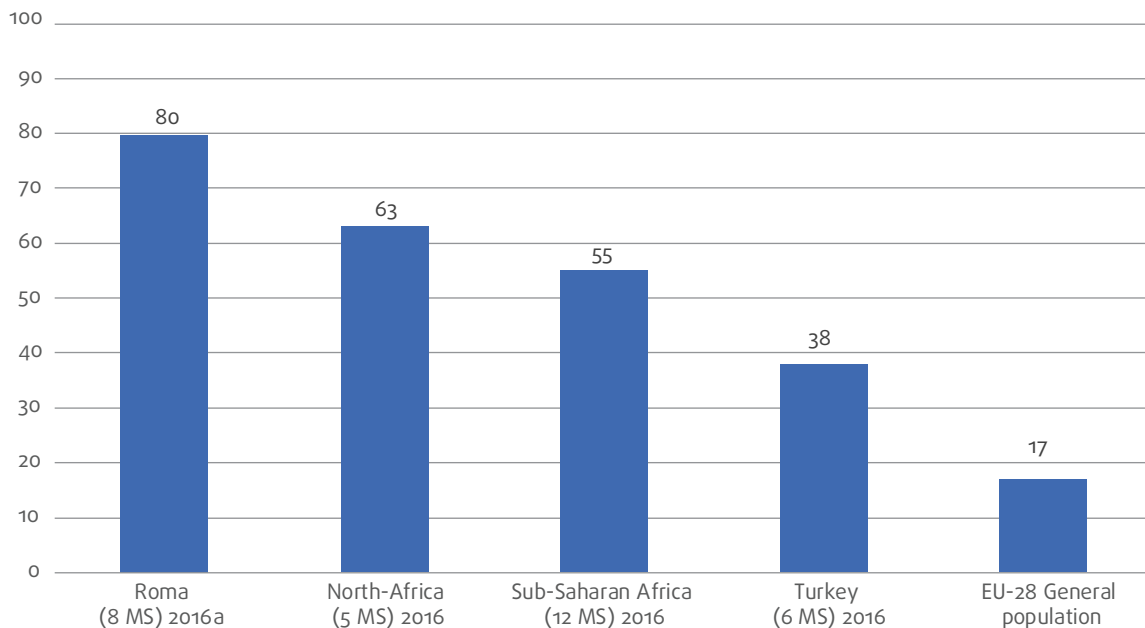
An interesting development in the field of migration in 2018 was the adoption of the [Global Compact for Migration](#) – a legally non-binding agreement “rooted in the 2030 Agenda”, which sets out a policy framework for safe, orderly and regular migration that could contribute to reducing inequality globally.

Among the 23 objectives introduced by the compact is the objective to “[c]ollect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies”. However, not all EU Member States have endorsed the compact.

For more information, see Chapter 6 of FRA’s Fundamental Rights Report 2019.

Figure 3 shows the striking differences between the at-risk-of-poverty rate among the EU-28 general population and among various minority groups, including Roma, as estimated according to FRA’s survey on minorities and discrimination conducted in 2015-2016 (EU-MIDIS II). It shows that, in comparison with an overall at-risk-of-poverty rate of around 17 % for the general population, 80 % of Roma, 63 % of persons of North African descent, and 55 % of persons of Sub-Saharan African descent, on average in the surveyed countries, had an income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. This underlines the need to disaggregate data to monitor policy targets and to reach out to vulnerable and often invisible groups.

Figure 3: Estimated at-risk-of-poverty rate^a for the EU-28 general population and for immigrants and descendants of immigrants, as well as Roma,^b in selected Member States in 2016 (%)



Notes: ^a At-risk-of-poverty based on the EU-MIDIS II survey are all persons with an equivalised current monthly disposable household income below the twelfth of the national at-risk-of-poverty threshold 2014 (published by Eurostat). The equivalised disposable income is the total income of a household, after tax and other deductions, divided by the number of household members converted into equalised adults; using the so-called modified OECD equivalence scale (1-0.5-0.3).

^b EU MIDIS II (2016) covered target groups in the following Member States: Roma (nine Member States): BG, CZ, EL, ES, HR, HU, PT, RO, SK. Average of 8 countries, value for Portugal cannot be published for quality reasons. Immigrants and their descendants from Turkey (six Member States): AT, BE, DE, DK, NL, SE. SSAFR. Immigrants and their descendants from Sub-Saharan Africa (12 Member States): AT, DE, DK, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, MT, PT, SE, UK. NOAFR. Immigrants and their descendants from North Africa (five Member States): BE, ES, FR, IT, NL.

Source: FRA, EU-MIDIS II 2016; Eurostat [EU-SILC, [ilc_li02], extracted 22.03.2019]

One of the targets of the SDG on reducing inequality is to “ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard” (SDG target 10.3). A corresponding target of the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions is to “promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development” (SDG target 16.b). The same indicator is applied for both of these targets, namely the indicator on the “proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law” (indicator 10.3.1 for SDG 10 and indicator 16.b.1 for SDG 16). In its surveys, FRA reaches out to vulnerable and marginalised populations and asks about discrimination and harassment, as this constitutes a violation of their rights guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, particularly their right to non-discrimination as enshrined in Article 21. Such data collected by FRA are presented in [Section 2.2](#) on the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions.

2.2 Data gaps and challenges in monitoring the realisation of peace, justice and strong institutions

Eurostat points out that “a comprehensive assessment of the EU progress towards SDG 16 is not possible due to several gaps in the data”.⁴⁴ The 2018 SDG Eurostat report measures progress made in implementing peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) by applying indicators on homicide rates, perceptions of crime, public expenditure on justice, perceptions about the independence of justice, perceptions regarding corruption, as well as the confidence of the population towards EU institutions.⁴⁵ In this respect, the report also reproduces FRA data on violence against women to populate its relevant multi-purpose indicator on “Physical and sexual violence to women experienced within 12 months prior to the interview”.

Important challenges, however, remain, as regards, for example, violence against women, discrimination and harassment, as well as experiences of bias-motivated violence against different population groups such as LGBTI persons, ethnic or religious minorities, and immigrants and their descendants. These challenges raise concerns about respect for human and fundamental rights, as guaranteed under the Charter (see [Table 1](#)). FRA has over the past years collected relevant data, as briefly outlined below. EU institutions and Member States could use such data to fill in existing gaps in the data and to assess relevant indicators suggested under the UN global indicator framework for SDGs.⁴⁶ They could thus help address persisting challenges in implementing the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions.

2.2.1 The EU: a safer place to live?

Reflecting on data relating to peaceful societies, Eurostat suggests that “the EU has become a safer place to live”⁴⁷: the proportion of deaths due to homicide dropped by 46.9 % between 2002 and 2015; the proportion of the population who reported feeling that crime, violence or vandalism in their area is a problem for them also fell from almost 16 % in 2007 to 12 %⁴⁸ in 2017. Average numbers on perceptions of crime, violence and vandalism hide strong differences across EU Member States, as well as across socio-economic sub-groups in the EU.⁴⁹

Perceptions of crime and perceptions of the justice system are often interrelated. The Eurostat report highlights the importance of the Justice Scoreboard, through which the EU monitors the efficiency, quality and independence of national justice systems.⁵⁰ In respect to the independence of courts and judges, it points out that 56 % of Europeans responding to a Eurobarometer survey in 2018 considered it to be ‘very good’ or ‘fairly good’, an increase of four percentage points compared to 2016, albeit with persisting differences between Member States.⁵¹

However, the Eurostat report does not reflect developments regarding the rule of law in Hungary and Poland, in relation particularly to national legislation and measures affecting the independence of the judiciary, which triggered the European Parliament’s and the

European Commission’s use of the procedures provided in Article 7 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU).⁵² Relevant proceedings are still in progress. Article 7 sets out a mechanism for EU institutions to hold Member States accountable for actions that breach EU founding values, including human rights and the rule of law. For more on this, see [Section 3.1.2](#) and Chapter 9 of FRA’s *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*.

2.2.2 Women in Europe remain exposed to high levels of violence

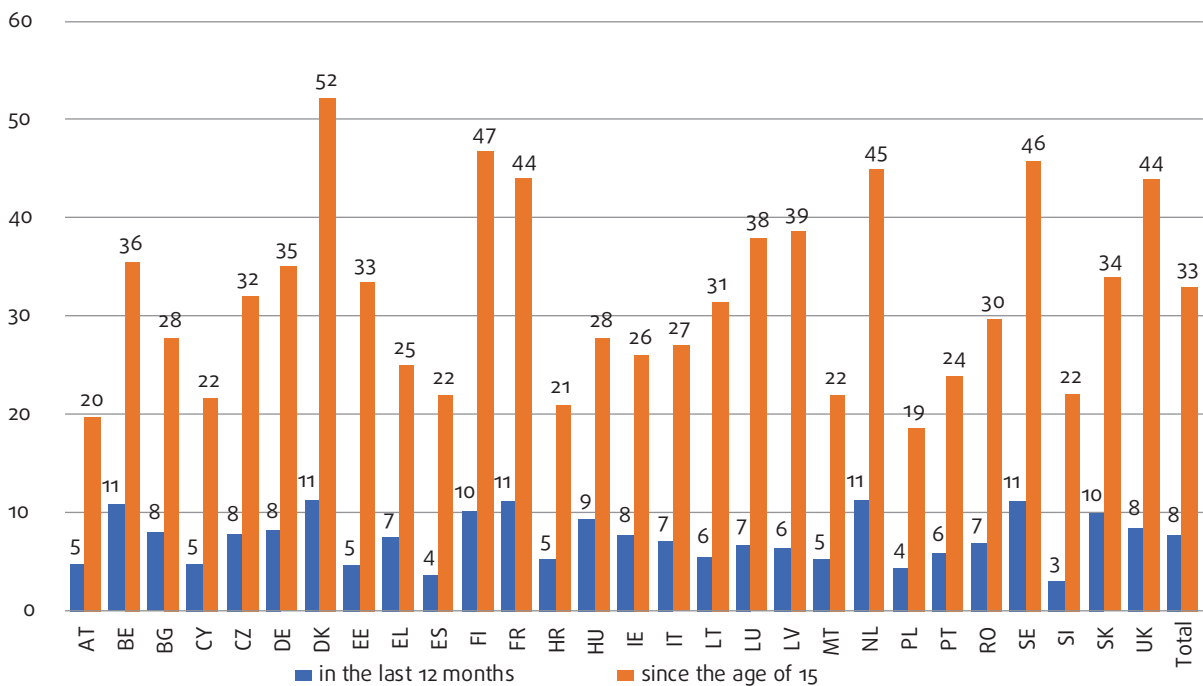
FRA’s 2012 survey on violence against women⁵³ remains the only source for EU-comparable data; its results are included in Eurostat’s 2018 SDG report.⁵⁴ These data show that one in three women in the EU reported having experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, and that 8 % of women surveyed said they had experienced such violence in the 12 months before the survey (see [Figure 4](#)). For more on violence against women and on the Council of Europe’s [Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence \(Istanbul Convention\)](#), see Chapter 9 of FRA’s *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*.

FRA’s data point out striking violations of the right to human dignity and the integrity of the person, and raise questions regarding respect for, and fulfilment of, the principle of non-discrimination, the right to equality between women and men, and the right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial, as enshrined in the Charter. Moreover, as mentioned above, they are relevant for several global SDG indicators – such as, for example, the proportion of the population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months, an indicator used under SDG 16.1.3 global indicator framework (see also [Section 2](#)).

Eurostat has set up a task force bringing together different Member States, relevant Commission services, FRA, the European Institute for Gender Equality, as well as independent experts, to develop a survey on gender-based violence.⁵⁵ The collection of data is planned to take place between 2020 and 2022, depending on the availability of national statistical institutes.



Figure 4: Women, aged 18-74 years, who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their current or previous partner, or by any other person, since the age of 15 and in the 12 months before the survey, by EU Member State (%)



Notes: SDG indicator 16.1.3 consists of the proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months. FRA’s data covers only women aged 18-74 years. It can also be used to assess SDG indicators 5.2.1, 5.2.2, and 11.7.2.

Source: FRA, Violence against women survey, 2012

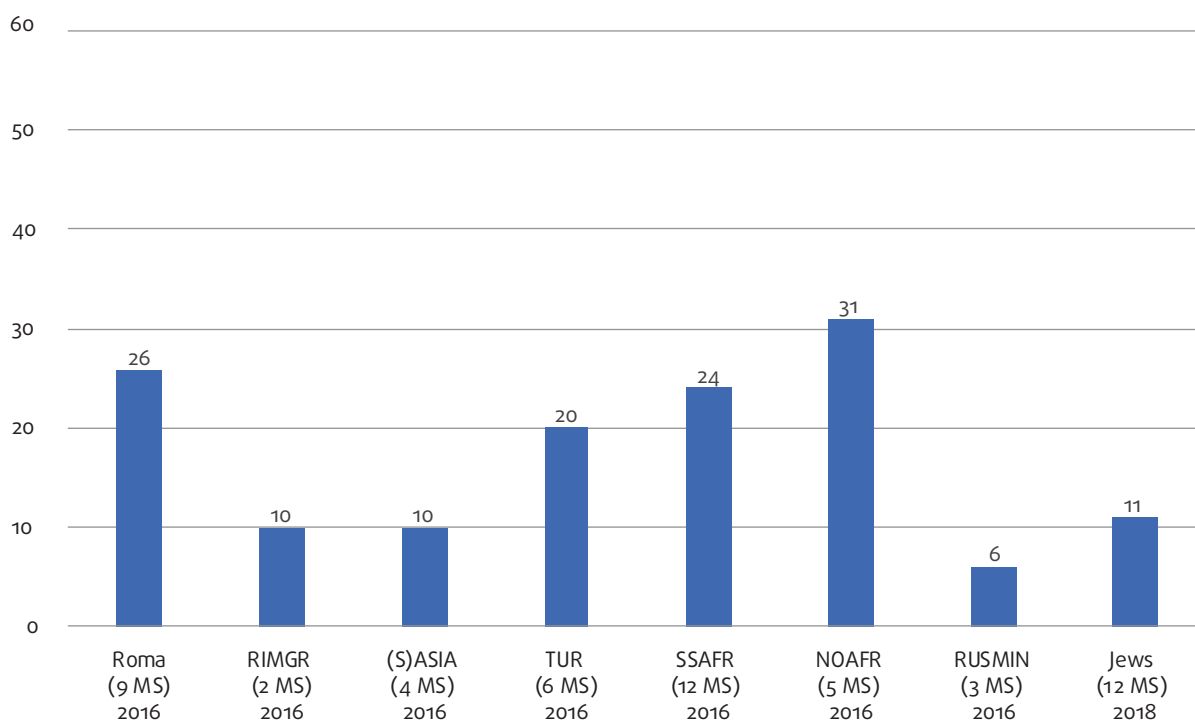
2.2.3 Immigrants, minorities and LGBTI persons in the EU are exposed to a higher rate of discrimination

Eurostat’s 2018 SDG report does not include data on discrimination experiences of immigrants, minorities and LGBTI persons in the EU. FRA collects such data through large-scale surveys on experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, ethnic origin, skin colour, religion or immigrant background, including their reporting to competent authorities. These data highlight persisting challenges regarding non-discrimination, prohibited by Article 21 of the Charter, and could be used in monitoring progress

in the implementation of SDGs at both EU and national levels.

The data show alarming rates of experiences with discrimination among several surveyed population groups. For example, the EU-MIDIS II survey on immigrants and minorities⁵⁶ illustrates that a large proportion of Roma (26 %), as well as immigrants and descendants of immigrants with North African origin (31 %) or Sub-Saharan (24 %) origin, felt discriminated against in the 12 months before the survey due to their ethnic or immigrant background – especially in employment, both when looking for work and at work, and when accessing public or private services (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Rate of discrimination experienced due to ethnic or immigrant background in the 12 months before the survey, in selected EU-MS (%)^{a,b,c}



Notes: ^a Corresponds to SDG indicator 16.b.1 and 10.3.1 Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law.

^b Domains of daily life asked about in the survey: looking for work, at work, education (self or as parent), health, housing and other public or private services (public administration, restaurant or bar, public transport, shop).

^c Acronyms for target groups refer to immigrants from [country/region] and their descendants: TUR = Turkey, SSAFR = Sub-Saharan Africa, NOAFR = North Africa, (S)ASIA = South Asia and Asia, RIMGR = recent immigrants from non-EU countries, RUSMIN = Russian minority, ROMA = self-identified Roma (umbrella term for different groups), Jews = self-identified Jews

Sources: FRA, EU-MIDIS II 2016; FRA, Second Survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU 2018

With respect to discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, 17 % of Muslim respondents in EU-MIDIS II said they felt discriminated against in the five years before the survey.⁵⁷ FRA's second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews also found that 21 % of Jewish respondents felt discriminated against because of their religion in the 12 months before the survey.⁵⁸

Furthermore, in FRA's 2012 online survey of LGBT persons, almost one out of two respondents (47 %) indicated that they felt discriminated against or harassed on the grounds of sexual orientation in the 12 months prior to the survey;⁵⁹ 13 % felt discriminated against when looking for work, and 19 % did so when at work.⁶⁰

2.2.4 Bias-motivated violence and harassment in the EU remain blind spots

There is a lack of relevant official comparable data related to bias-motivated (hate-motivated) violence and harassment. Hence, Eurostat's 2018 SDG report does not include any data on this phenomenon. FRA has repeatedly pointed out this important data gap. The only available comparable data have been collected by FRA itself through its major surveys: EU-MIDIS II, the survey on LGBT persons, or the survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews. These data include information on experiences of violence and harassment, as well as on the extent to which these are reported to

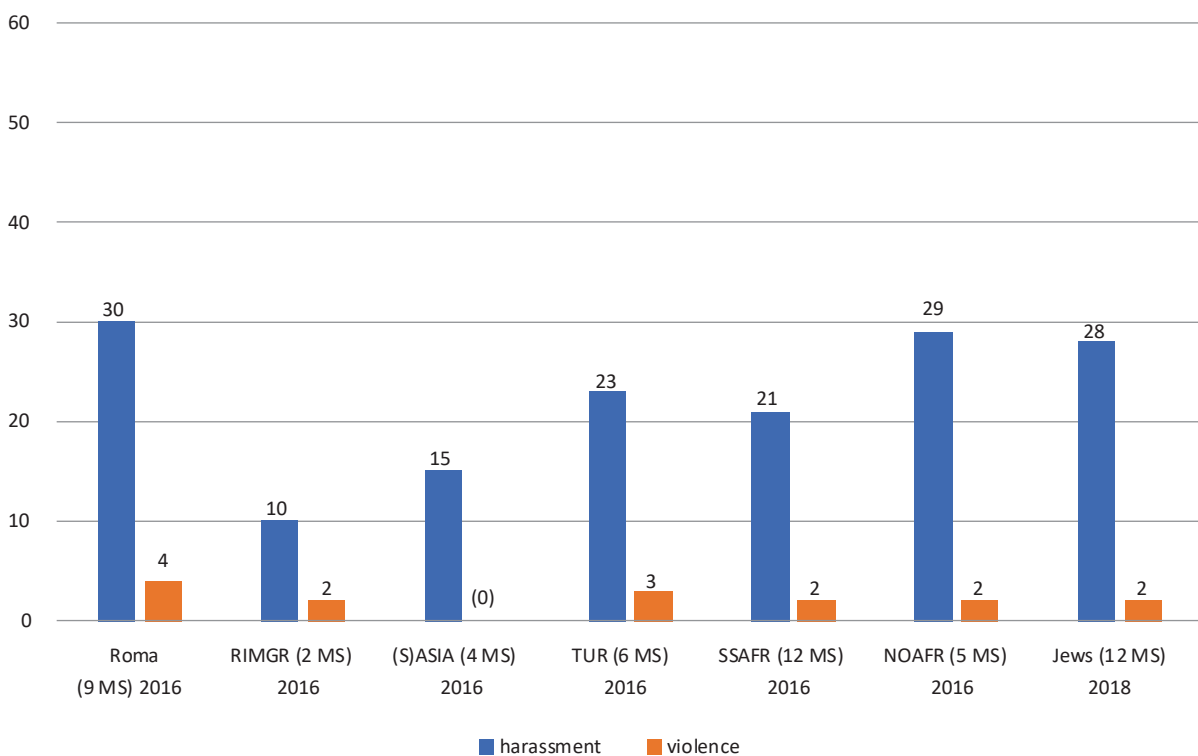
competent authorities, and could support measuring the implementation of the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). Such data would at the same time help assess respect for relevant rights provided for in the Charter – such as, for example, the right to the integrity of the person, the right to non-discrimination and rights related to access to justice.

Overall, the proportion of respondents who say they experienced bias-motivated physical violence due to their ethnic origin, immigrant background, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation in the year before various FRA surveys is small. Specifically, 3 % of

immigrants and their descendants⁶¹ and 4 % of Roma⁶² in EU-MIDIS II; 3 % of all respondents in the 2012 online LGBT survey;⁶³ and 2 % of Jewish respondents in the relevant survey of 2018.⁶⁴

A much higher proportion of the population surveyed by FRA experienced harassment – such as insults and threats, offensive gestures or cyber-harassment. For example, in the year preceding each respective survey, 24 % of Roma and immigrants and descendants of immigrants said that they experienced bias-motivated harassment;⁶⁵ 19 % of all LGBT respondents indicated this;⁶⁶ as did 28 % of Jewish respondents (see Figure 6).⁶⁷

Figure 6: Experiences of hate-motivated violence^a and harassment^b due to ethnic or immigrant background for different minority groups, 12 months before the survey, in selected EU-Member States (%):^{c,d,e}



Notes: ^a Experiences of physical attacks due to ethnic or immigrant background in the past five years.
^b Harassment was asked about in terms of five acts including: offensive or threatening comments; being threatened with violence; offensive gestures or inappropriate staring; receiving offensive emails or text messages; and finding offensive, personal comments on the internet.
^c Comparison between surveys is limited. EU-MIDIS is a random probability survey with personal interviews, whereas the Jewish survey was conducted as an online opt-in survey. Interpret with caution as only four acts were asked about in the survey of Jewish persons, excluding ‘being threatened with violence’.
^d Acronyms for target groups refer to immigrants from [country/region] and their descendants: TUR = Turkey, SSAFR = Sub-Saharan Africa, NOAFR = North Africa, (S)ASIA = South Asia and Asia, RIMGR = recent immigrants from non-EU countries, ROMA = self-identified Roma (umbrella term for different groups), Jews = self-identified Jews.
^e EU-MIDIS II (2016) covered target groups in the following Member States: Roma: BG, CZ, EL, ES, HR, HU, PT, RO, SK; RIMGR: PL, SI; ASIA/SASIA: CY, EL, IT, UK; TUR: AT, BE, DE, DK, NL, SE; SSAFR: AT, DE, DK, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, MT, PT, SE, UK; NOAFR: BE, ES, FR, IT, NL. The 2nd Survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU (2018) covered Jews in DE, BE, NL, PL, ES, SE, DK, AT, FR, IT, UK, HU.

Source: FRA, EU-MIDIS II 2016; FRA, Second Survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU 2018

3

Tools for implementing SDGs in line with fundamental rights obligations in the EU and its Member States



Data are necessary to inform policy and monitor the effectiveness of its implementation. This section examines a range of policy tools at EU and national levels that can achieve human rights-compliant implementation of sustainable development goals provided that they are systematically informed by robust and relevant data.

3.1 The EU level: framework, measures and opportunities to achieve SDGs

Sustainable development has long been a core ambition of the EU integration process.⁶⁸ The first EU sustainable development strategy dates to 2001. It was revised in 2006 to become more comprehensive and rights-based and was reviewed again in 2009,⁶⁹ reflecting the EU's fundamental commitment to the principles of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, equality and non-discrimination.⁷⁰ Sustainability and values, including human rights, taken together shape a coherent framework where all three dimensions of sustainability – economic, environmental and social – are met under the common denominator of the well-being of the European peoples. This is reflected in EU primary law, which lays down economic, environmental and social objectives⁷¹, while urging the EU to ensure “consistency between its policies and activities, taking all of its objectives into account”.⁷² Furthermore, as previously shown, the EU has constantly called for a universally applicable rights-based approach towards the SDGs, not only in regard to its external action, but also in terms of internal policies.⁷³ This approach was once again explicitly reaffirmed by the Council of the EU in June 2017.⁷⁴

3.1.1 EU tools and actions towards a more sustainable future

The EU disposes of a range of tools, measures and policies that help to steer states' action towards achieving all SDGs.⁷⁵ The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights can be instrumental in promoting equality and non-discrimination, as well as peaceful and inclusive societies that are respectful of fundamental rights and the rule of law (see [Table 1](#)). It contains numerous provisions on rights and principles that are legally binding not only for EU institutions – for example, when they develop EU law and policy – but also for EU Member States when acting within the scope of EU law.

In relation to the SDG on reducing inequality (SDG 10), the EU has in place since 2000 legal measures to fight discrimination and promote equal opportunities. The main EU directives in this context prohibit discrimination on the basis of race or ethnic origin in all spheres of social life, and discrimination in the area of employment on the basis of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.⁷⁶ In regard to gender equality, the EU adopted in 2004 the directive on equal treatment for men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services, and in 2006 the directive on equal treatment for men and women in matters of employment and occupation.⁷⁷

However, important areas such as education, health care, social protection, social advantages, housing, or goods and services available to the public are not covered in relation to grounds of discrimination other than race or ethnic origin and partially gender. The European Commission proposal of 2008 for a “horizontal” Equal Treatment Directive that would prohibit discrimination based on religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, still lacks the necessary consensus at the Council of the EU.⁷⁸ This persisting stagnation creates an artificial ‘hierarchy’ of protected grounds of discrimination, which is not in line with Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights on

non-discrimination. In 2018, the Commission’s monitoring report on the European Pillar of Social Rights reaffirms its willingness to continue promoting the adoption of this proposal.⁷⁹ See also Chapter 3 of FRA’s *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*.

The EU’s anti-discrimination legislation is also relevant for the implementation of the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16), as this goal includes a target to “Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development” (SDG target 16.b). Furthermore, the EU contributes to SDG 16 targets by taking concrete action to guarantee justice throughout the EU in criminal, civil or contract law and by promoting judicial co-operation between Member States. For example, regarding the promotion of the rule of law, access to justice for all and the protection of fundamental rights, the EU has adopted criminal law provisions to fight racism and xenophobia in the form of a Council Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law.⁸⁰ The EU has also taken significant measures to protect victims of crime through the Victims’ Rights Directive⁸¹ and the rights of those suspected or accused of crime through the directives on procedural safeguards and rights of persons who are suspects or accused in criminal proceedings.⁸² For more on access to justice, see Chapter 9 of FRA’s *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*.

An issue of particular relevance for sustainable development and the implementation of SDG 16 is access to justice in environmental matters. In addition to Article 47 of the Charter on the right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial, which is applicable in environmental matters, the EU is since 2005 a party to, and thus bound by, the Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters (Aarhus Convention).⁸³

FRA ACTIVITY

Facilitating access to justice

To facilitate access to justice, in 2018, FRA, in close cooperation with the European Commission, updated the fundamental rights section of the European e-Justice Portal. The portal includes two interactive tools: the CharterClick tool, which helps to determine whether the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is applicable in specific cases, and the Fundamental Rights Interactive Tool (FRIT), originally developed by FRA, which helps individuals determine which is the competent national non-judicial body in case of fundamental rights violations. In addition, the portal includes extensive information on different topics – such as, for example, relevant national case law concerning the freedom of movement – a collection also based on FRA research.

See the online [European e-Justice Portal: Fundamental Rights in the European Union](#) and its [webpage on Freedom of movement and other Union citizens’ rights](#).

Implementing SDGs in a way that is respectful of human and fundamental rights also requires the active involvement of businesses and appropriate private investment. In this respect, the Commission in March 2018 adopted the Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth.⁸⁴ The action plan is meant to be “instrumental to help deliver” on SDGs. One of its objectives is to promote corporate governance and investment decision-making that takes “into due account” environmental and social considerations. The action plan underlines that “[s]ocial considerations may refer to issues of inequality, inclusiveness, labour relations, investment in human capital and communities” and acknowledges that “[e]nvironmental and social considerations are often intertwined, as especially climate change can exacerbate existing systems of inequality”. In this action plan, the Commission announced that in 2019 it will carry out analytical and consultative work with relevant stakeholders to assess “the possible need to require corporate boards to develop and disclose a sustainability strategy, including appropriate due diligence throughout the supply chain, and measurable sustainability targets”. Such due diligence is also applicable with respect to human and fundamental rights. Other relevant initiatives by the European Commission consider the promotion of human and fundamental rights through corporate social responsibility and responsible business contact that also involves action to respect and protect human and fundamental rights while conducting business, and to provide adequate access to remedy in case of rights violations.⁸⁵

3.1.2 Opportunities to reinforce coordination and implementation of SDGs at EU level

Need for a comprehensive implementation strategy

Both the European Parliament⁸⁶ and the EU Council have invited the European Commission to develop a comprehensive strategy to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.⁸⁷ In January 2019, the Commission published its reflection paper “Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030”.⁸⁸ It underlines that the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights are “non-negotiable principles and values” forming the foundation upon which the EU is built and recalls that “[t]hey are also established as an integral part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the SDGs”.⁸⁹ Moreover, it points out that addressing inequality is important for “bolstering social cohesion” and “securing social and political stability” in the EU.⁹⁰ The reflection paper also highlights that “businesses have a vital role to play in the sustainability transition” and that there is space to “identify appropriate measures

and tangible ways in which more sustainable business conduct can be promoted”.

The objective of the reflection paper is to “pave the way for a comprehensive implementation strategy in 2019” in the EU and inform the relevant debate.⁹¹ In this regard, it tables three different scenarios for the structures, tools and policies to be adopted by EU institutions for achieving the SDGs, outlining what they would mean in practice, as well as their respective advantages and disadvantages.⁹² The first scenario calls for endorsing the SDGs at the highest EU political level as “the overarching strategic policy objectives for the EU and its Member States”. In this way, the SDGs will “determine the strategic framework of the EU and its Member States”, requiring strategic, coordinated action by the EU and its Member States, including regional and local authorities. The second scenario calls for “mainstreaming” SDGs in all relevant EU policies in line with the EU strategy for growth in the post-2020 period “while not binding EU Member States to achieving collectively the SDG commitments in the EU”. In order to reinforce EU policy coherence and ensure that the EU moves closer to the SDGs, this scenario calls for stronger mainstreaming of SDGs in the European Semester to coordinate and monitor national policies implementing the SDGs in line with the post-EU2020 growth strategy. The third scenario prioritises external EU action “helping the rest of the world catch up, while pursuing improvements at EU level”, since “the EU is already a frontrunner in many aspects related to the SDGs”.

Among the three scenarios, the first is in line with the recommendation of the High Level Multi-stakeholder Platform on SDGs.⁹³ This platform was established by the Commission in 2017.⁹⁴ It brought together a range of key stakeholders, including social partners, civil society and experts to discuss and advise the Commission on aspects of SDG implementation. The platform recommended that the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs should be at the core of the post-Europe 2020 strategy, and supports the adoption by the EU of a ‘Sustainable Europe 2030 strategy’ that includes the respect for human rights and the rule of law among its fundamental principles.

European Semester

The European Semester is the core cycle of economic and fiscal policy coordination within the EU. The fiscal and macroeconomic policies that are the main concern of the European Semester play a key role in decisions about social policy. Therefore, the different documents produced in the context of the European Semester also contain social policy considerations. This is reflected clearly in the joint employment reports accompanying the European Commission’s annual growth surveys, drawing on data of the EU Social Scoreboard.⁹⁵ Such considerations are also included in the country-specific

recommendations (CSRs) adopted by the EU Council for each Member State. In 2018, for example, a number of CSRs reflect on inequality, in particular in accessing the labour market, education, health services, or on income inequality related to poverty within Member States.⁹⁶

Moreover, the European Semester, drawing on data provided in the EU Justice Scoreboard,⁹⁷ also considers aspects of the functioning of the judicial systems of Member States and the rule of law, in light of their decisive role in fostering economic performance.⁹⁸

However, the implementation of the SDGs and relevant fundamental rights requirements so far are not part of the considerations of country-specific recommendations adopted in the context of the European Semester.

European Pillar of Social Rights

A tool with an important, but untapped, potential is the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). This is a proclamation of rights and principles in the area of social rights adopted in November 2017 by the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission.⁹⁹ The EPSR includes a list of rights and principles that correspond directly or indirectly to specific SDGs.¹⁰⁰ In its Preamble, the EPSR designates “significant inequality” among the challenges facing all EU Member States. Principle 3 includes a general clause on equal opportunities.¹⁰¹

The EPSR is not legally binding.¹⁰² Nevertheless, several of its provisions correspond to rights and principles that are already enshrined in the EU acquis, in particular in the Charter. This is the case, for example, with the provisions regarding equal opportunities, non-discrimination and gender equality. The EPSR provisions also reflect legal obligations that are included in the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe, which are to a large extent binding for EU Member States.¹⁰³

In order to monitor the gradual implementation of the EPSR, the European Commission developed an EU Social Scoreboard, feeding also into the European Semester.¹⁰⁴

EU’s new Multiannual Financial Framework

Sustainability is a core guiding principle in the proposal for the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the EU’s budget for 2021-2027,¹⁰⁵ since EU investments are “key to Europe’s future prosperity and its leadership on the global Sustainable Development Goals”.¹⁰⁶ The European Social Fund+ (ESF+), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Asylum and Migration Fund, as well as the Justice, Rights and Values Fund could meaningfully contribute to the implementation of SDGs 10 and 16.

FRA ACTIVITY

Bolstering budgetary efforts to protect children

In its recent report on child poverty in the EU, which includes considerations on the proposals regarding the new EU MFF, FRA supports the European Commission's proposal to identify children living at risk of poverty or social exclusion as a priority for the programming period 2021–2027 under the EU's budget. FRA has also spoken out in favour of the establishment of a European Child Guarantee Scheme, noting that such a scheme should receive adequate funding from both national and EU resources.

See FRA (2018), *Combating child poverty: an issue of fundamental rights*, Publications Office, Luxembourg.

The proposal for a new Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), which lays down the common rules for the functioning of all the Funds mentioned above, underlines that “the objectives of the Funds should be pursued in the framework of sustainable development”.¹⁰⁷ Its Article 67 (1) provides that, when selecting operations to be funded by the EU Funds, national managing authorities should establish and apply “criteria and procedures which are non-discriminatory, transparent, ensure gender equality and take account of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the principle of sustainable development and of the Union policy on the environment in accordance with Articles 11 and 191 (1) of the TFEU”.

In addition, the proposal reinforces the conditionality mechanism of the current CPR that Member States have to comply with to have access to EU funds.¹⁰⁸ The new mechanism could contribute to the fundamental rights-compliant implementation of SDGs since it establishes among the “horizontal enabling conditions” the “effective application and implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights” and the “implementation and application of the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (UNCPRD) in accordance with Council Decision 2010/48/EC”.

FRA ACTIVITY

Supporting funding conditions that promote application of the Charter

In its opinion to the European Parliament on the challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, FRA supports the adoption of the new enabling condition for accessing EU funding, which requires the effective application and implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

See FRA, *Opinion 4/2018, Challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights*.

Monitoring compliance of the operations supported by EU Funds with the foreseen conditionalities will be a challenging issue in the context of the new MFF. Such effective monitoring is not just a formal matter, but corresponds to the need to ensure that EU funding is spent in accordance with both the EU legal framework and the EU policy priorities and objectives. According to the new CPR proposal, the European Commission will have the right, throughout the whole programming period, to freeze relevant payments, if a breach of a certain enabling condition is identified.¹⁰⁹

In this context, the monitoring committees of EU-funded programmes have a decisive role. The new CPR will therefore urge Member States to include in these committees with a right to vote not only representatives of national authorities, but also economic and social partners, bodies representing civil society and environmental partners, as well as bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and non-discrimination (relevant also for SDG targets 16.6 and 16.7 on institutions and decision making).¹¹⁰

EU mechanisms aiming to maintain and promote the rule of law

Many EU policies and prominent pieces of EU legislation can be seen as promoting peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). However, a few of them explicitly and specifically address the rule of law (SDG target 16.3) – one of the Union's core values (Article 2 of the TEU) that any State that wants to apply for EU membership has to respect (Article 49 of the TEU), and every EU Member State is expected to uphold (Article 7 of the TEU). The rule of law is one of the principles that “inspired its own creation, development and enlargement” (Article 21 of the TEU) and guides EU “action on the international scene”.

Article 7 of the TEU allows the Council of the European Union to determine that there is a clear risk of a serious breach by a Member State of the values referred to in Article 2. For more on this, see Chapter 9 of FRA's *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*. Triggering Article 7 can ultimately even lead to the suspension of the concerned Member States' voting rights within the Council. Such a decision requires a unanimous finding by the Council of the EU that there has been a breach of the EU's founding values. Such a procedure is currently pending vis-à-vis Hungary and Poland.¹¹¹

Another avenue to protect the rule of law is the regular infringement procedure, based on Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).¹¹² Developments that can amount to backsliding in terms of the rule of law in various EU Member States in recent years prompted proposals for additional complementary mechanisms.¹¹³ In March 2013, the European Commission initiated the EU Justice Scoreboard – an annual, non-binding

tool presenting trends in the area of justice.¹¹⁴ In 2014, the Commission launched a new “Framework to strengthen the Rule of Law”, which aims to prevent emerging threats to the rule of law from escalating to the point where the Commission has to trigger the Article 7 procedure.¹¹⁵ At the end of that year, the Council adopted conclusions establishing an “annual rule of law dialogue within the Council” (General Affairs).¹¹⁶ The fourth dialogue took place in November 2018, dedicated to the topic of trust in public institutions. As in earlier years, FRA’s Director gave the introductory remarks.¹¹⁷

Proposed regulation links rule of law and EU funding

In addition to the proposal for the Common Provisions Regulation, the European Commission, in the context of the new MFF package, has proposed the adoption of a horizontal regulation “on the protection of the Union’s budget in case of generalised deficiencies as regards the rule of law in the Member States”.

As an example of “generalised deficiency”, the proposal refers to situations where the independence of the judiciary is endangered, or there is a failure to prevent, correct and sanction arbitrary or unlawful decisions by public authorities. In case of a “generalised deficiency”, the European Commission and the Council of the EU would be able to take appropriate measures against a Member State – for example, to suspend the approval of programmes, commitments or payments.

Linking EU funding to a monitoring and sanctioning procedure regarding the respect of the rule of law by Member States could be a useful institutional mechanism to help protect this principle, which is vital for ensuring well-functioning state institutions. In this sense, it could also contribute to the fulfilment of SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG target 16.3).

See European Commission (2018), Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of the Union’s budget in case of generalised deficiencies as regards the rule of law in the Member States, COM/2018/324 final, Brussels, 2 May 2018.

In October 2016, the European Parliament, considering among other issues that “some Member State governments deny that upholding Union principles and values is a Treaty obligation, or that the Union has the authority to ensure compliance”, adopted a resolution calling for the establishment of an “EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights”.¹¹⁸ The resolution comes with detailed recommendations for a draft “Inter-institutional Agreement on arrangements concerning monitoring and follow up procedures on the situation of Democracy, the Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights in the Member States and EU institutions”. Discussions on how the EU could best protect and

promote the rule of law also continued amongst Member States – such as among the ‘friends of the rule of law’, a group of Member States that informally discusses how to best proceed on the topic. In 2018, the Member States’ representatives discussed a concrete proposal, tabled by Belgium, to establish a Periodic Peer Review of the Rule of Law within the EU.

The ongoing development by FRA of a European Union Fundamental Rights Information System (EFRIS)¹¹⁹ would improve the accessibility of data and information available under the United Nations, Council of Europe and EU mechanisms and instruments. It could be drawn on in various contexts, including in any rule of law evaluation, and thereby strengthen the evidence base of such procedures. Moreover, such an interactive tool can also assist measurement of progress in achieving SDGs, in particular the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

3.2 National level: leverage to steer SDG implementation in full compliance with human rights

3.2.1 National and local government actions to implement SDGs

The Agenda 2030 and the SDGs are global, and the EU’s contributions to their achievement through its policies and tools is crucial – but their effective realisation is a matter of policies and actions carried out at the national, regional and local levels.¹²⁰ This is particularly the case regarding SDGs that are more related to the social area, and that have an impact on the enjoyment of fundamental rights, including SDGs 10 and 16. The importance of national responsibility in social policy is also reflected in the EU legal framework on the division of competences between the EU and Member States.¹²¹

EU Member States have overall demonstrated ownership of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.¹²² By the end of 2018, all but four had submitted voluntary national review (VNR) reports to the UN’s High Level Political Forum. **Croatia** and the **United Kingdom** will present their reports in 2019, while **Austria** and **Bulgaria** are expected to submit their first VNR reports in 2020.¹²³ On EU Member States’ VNRs, see also Chapter 8 of FRA’s *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*.

Moreover, according to the global SDG Index ranking, all EU Member States are in the top 50 of 156 countries under evaluation, while seven are among the top ten.¹²⁴ This good performance is reflected in all SDGs. Six EU Member States are among the top ten in regard to the SDG on

reducing inequality (SDG 10) and four in regard to the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).¹²⁵

One challenge for EU Member States is to identify gaps and better align their existing national frameworks for sustainable development with their SDG commitments. In this respect, some Member States revise their national frameworks, while others adopt new strategies and action plans targeting SDGs explicitly, which appears to be a more promising practice.

Member States' approaches to assigning coordination and monitoring responsibilities regarding SDGs to institutional structures vary. In some Member States, this role is assigned to structures that directly report to the head of government. In others, high-level collective bodies, such as inter-ministerial committees, assume the responsibility to coordinate and monitor. Yet in others, this responsibility is allocated to specific ministries, usually foreign affairs or environment ministries, or the ministries responsible for financial and economic affairs.

Promising practice

Taking action to implement SDGs at national level

Finland in 2017 presented a National Implementation Plan that includes a focus on non-discrimination and equality policies. The national 2030 Agenda Coordination Secretariat is located within the Prime Minister's Office. The coordination task is supported by an Inter-Ministerial Network Secretariat, consisting of sustainable development focal points from all ministries.

The engagement of civil society and other stakeholders is an important element of Finland's sustainable development policies. The multi-stakeholder National Commission for Sustainable Development has served as the key mechanism. The most recent tool to boost concrete action and innovations for sustainable development is called "Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development". By 2018, there were over 600 commitments from all spheres of society.

For more information, see Finland, Government Report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 11/2017.

The need to have SDG focal points appointed in each ministry to follow up on and inform policies at the ministerial level with a SDG-perspective is also broadly recognised. Establishing ways to regularly involve important actors in the implementation of the SDGs – such as regional and local authorities, who depending on their competences may be responsible for developing and/or carrying out key activities related to SDG targets – is another challenge.

Localising SDGs

Localising SDGs and ensuring policy consistency between all levels of governments requires the active engagement of cities and municipalities in planning, implementing and monitoring SDGs. The contribution of the European Committee of Regions, cities' networks (e.g. EUROCITIES), and national associations of local authorities could be valuable in this respect. 'Human rights cities' can also help operationalise SDGs at the local level through a human rights angle. The intercultural cities network of the Council of Europe could contribute in similar ways.

At the global level, Local2030 is a multi-stakeholder initiative to support the local-level implementation of the SDGs. In 2018, a local and regional governments forum was organised as a special event around the UN's HLPF.

For more information, see the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law's webpage on human rights cities and the SDGs; the Council of Europe's webpage on its Intercultural cities programme; the UN's webpage on Local2030; and the webpage on the Local and Regional Governments' Forum.

3.2.2 Engagement of civil society

The engagement of civil society is not simply important, it is crucial. Civil society in all its manifestations and all its levels should be involved as a partner in the delivery of SDGs. Establishing partnerships between public authorities and civil society is essential for the implementation of all SDGs, and a concrete target of SDG 17 on strengthening the means of SDG implementation. At the EU level, the EU SDG multi-stakeholder platform serves as an inspiring example for Member States by bringing together the European Commission, representatives of regional and local authorities, businesses, trade unions, civil society organisations and experts.

FRA conducted a written consultation with civil society organisations (CSOs) that are members of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) operated by FRA.¹²⁶ The agency's questions focused on the relevance of the scope of different CSOs' work to SDGs 5, 10 and 16, as well as on whether, and how, they participate in the implementation and monitoring of these SDGs, particularly at national level (see Table 3). The results show that there is room for improvement in terms of civil society organisations in the field of fundamental rights playing a more active role in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. The findings outlined below, however, cannot be considered as representative for all the FRP members since participation in the consultation was rather limited. On the other hand, this limited participation in itself reveals a limited awareness of the importance of SDGs among civil society – which needs to be addressed.



Table 3: Civil society organisations' assessments of their work's relevance to select SDGs^{a,b,c}

SDG	High	Medium	Low
SDG 5 on gender equality	26 FRP Members, 18 of which are national CSOs	12 FRP Members, seven of which are national CSOs	11 FRP Members, nine of which are national CSOs
SDG 10 on reduced inequalities	25 FRP Members, 17 of which are national CSOs	14 FRP Members, nine of which are national CSOs	10 FRP Members, eight of which are national CSOs
SDG 16 on promoting peace, justice and strong institutions	30 FRP Members, 19 of which are national CSOs	8 FRP Members, six of which are national CSOs	11 FRP Members, nine of which are national CSOs

Notes: ^a Question: "How would you assess the relevance of the scope of your organisation regarding SDGs 5, 10 and 16?"

^b All respondents are members of FRA's Fundamental Rights Platform.

^c Total number of responses=49.

Source: FRA, 2019

In their responses, 19 of 34 (55 %) national-level CSOs and 12 out of 15 (80 %) CSOs with a European or international scope stated that they participate in the implementation and monitoring of SDGs in various ways. There is evidently scope for national-level CSOs to become more active. Governments could facilitate this by raising awareness among civil society and by inviting relevant organisations to participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of SDG-related activities.

Promising practice

Active engagement of civil society

The **Italian** Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) was established in 2016 to raise awareness among Italian society, economic stakeholders and institutions about the importance of the 2030 Agenda for the future of Italy, and to spread a culture of sustainability in the country, including social sustainability as addressed under the SDG on reduced inequalities (SDG 10) and the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). The alliance currently brings together over 200 member organisations. Over 300 experts contribute to the activities of ASviS through working groups active on specific SDGs and on cross-cutting issues. ASviS activities include the drafting of a yearly report, the development of a database on SDG indicators, the promotion of institutional dialogue, the dissemination of information, as well as the organisation of a Sustainable Development Festival every year, with more than 700 events across Italy.

For more information, see the ASviS website.

3.2.3 Engaging institutional national human rights actors in SDG implementation

National human rights institutions (NHRIs), equality bodies and Ombuds institutions have the mandate and experience to make a valuable contribution to the implementation of SDGs by introducing a more systematic fundamental rights perspective to existing SDG coordination and monitoring procedures. In this respect, the European Commission's recommendation on standards for equality bodies recognises that "[e]quality bodies are also valuable institutions for the sustained development of equal and inclusive democratic societies".¹²⁷

Drawing on consultations conducted through ENNHRI and Equinet, FRA found that their members see their mandate as being closely linked and relevant to the content of SDGs.¹²⁸ Table 4 presents to what extent these institutions, particularly equality bodies, see their mandate as being relevant to the content of the SDG on reducing inequality (SDG 10). As in the case of civil society organisations, the findings cannot be considered representative for all relevant institutions, since participation in the consultation was rather limited. On the other hand, this limited participation in itself reveals limited awareness of the importance of SDGs within NHRIs, equality bodies and Ombuds institutions – which needs to be addressed.

The respondents also mentioned their work's links with SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, as well as with other SDGs, such as SDG 4 on education, SDG 5 on gender equality or SDG 8 on decent work and employment. A number of the respondents pointed out that they contribute to the implementation of SDGs by receiving and examining complaints related to discrimination or violations of human rights, or by addressing human rights-related recommendations to governments – for example, the Ombudsman for Croatia

Table 4: Assessments by national human rights institutions, equality bodies and Ombuds-institutions of their mandate’s relevance to SDG 10 on reducing inequality^{a,b}

High	Medium
10	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unia (Belgium) • Commission for Protection Against Discrimination (Bulgaria) • Croatian Ombudsman (Croatia) • Défenseur des Droits (France) • Greek Ombudsman (Greece) • Equal Treatment Authority (Hungary) • Irish Human Rights and equality Commission (Ireland) • Office of equal opportunity Ombudsman (Lithuania) • NCPE (Malta) • Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland) • Slovak Center for Human Rights (Slovakia) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belgian Institute for Equality of Women and Men (Belgium) • Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (Finland) • CRPD (Malta)

Notes: ^a Question: “How would you assess the relevance of the mandate of your institution with the content of SDG 10 on reducing inequality?”

^b Total number of responses=14.

Source: FRA, 2019

and for Cyprus, the French and Greek human rights commissions, and the Swedish Equality Ombudsman.

In addition, some institutions contribute in a more targeted way to the monitoring of the implementation of SDGs at national level. The Institute for Human Rights in the Netherlands, for instance, is expected to report on the implementation of the SDGs in 2019. The Belgian Institute for Equality of Women and Men, the Romanian Institute for Human Rights, and the Slovak Centre for Human Rights have participated actively in consultations or are members of specially created national bodies observing the implementation of SDGs. However, this type of involvement is not widespread.

Very few such institutions collect data relevant to SDGs or engage with statistical offices. The Scottish Human Rights Commission and the Danish Institute for Human Rights are examples of institutions that do so. However, all possess valuable data, collected through their daily work, that could contribute to measuring SDG implementation. Some – such as Unia or the Commission for Protection against Discrimination in Bulgaria – publish such data, but without linking them to SDGs. The Institute for the equality of women and men in Belgium is actively involved in exercises on the use of indicators for the monitoring of SDG implementation and is emphasising the importance of disaggregating those indicators by sex in interactions with the Federal Planning Bureau and the statistical office.

The Institute of Human Rights in Germany provides another interesting example; it has published an analysis comparing SDGs with recommendations received by Germany from UN human rights treaty bodies over the past few years.¹²⁹

FRA ACTIVITY

Establishing platforms for SDG-related information exchanges

The Council of Europe, together with FRA, ENNHRI and EQUINET, have formed a collaborative platform and meet regularly to discuss issues of social and economic rights, the implementation of the European Social Charter, as well as its links and synergies with the European Pillar of Social Rights of the EU, in order to identify and address potential gaps in the enjoyment of social and economic rights at the national level.

The same partners have also established a more targeted initiative: the operational platform on Roma equality ('OPRE'). Both platforms contribute to the exchange of information and views on issues that relate to the SDG on reducing inequality (SDG 10), as well as to the SDG on poverty (SDG 1).

For more information, see the Council of Europe’s [webpage on the collaborative platform](#) and its [webpage on the OPRE platform](#).

Despite their interest and efforts, most NHRIs, equality bodies and Ombuds institutions are not yet very actively involved in the implementation of SDGs – for instance, through participation in relevant monitoring mechanisms. Increasing their engagement would ensure that the links between human and fundamental rights and policies to implement SDGs are better articulated. It would also contribute to developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; and would promote responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making, as required under SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.¹³⁰

FRA opinions

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human and fundamental rights are complementary in their common core objective to promote the well-being of all people. While the SDGs constitute a concrete and targeted global policy agenda to guide the actions of states and other actors, including the EU, human and fundamental rights constitute a comprehensive normative framework that creates legal obligations and accountability. The SDGs are grounded in human and fundamental rights and seek to realise them. At the same time, a rights-based approach to the SDGs is best placed to promote the implementation of the development goals.

All SDGs have a direct or indirect fundamental rights dimension and all of them are inter-connected. The rights dimension, however, is more prominent in some of them – such as SDG 10 on reducing inequality and SDG 16 on promoting peace, justice and strong institutions. In this respect, implementing and measuring SDGs 10 and 16 is also about implementing and measuring human and fundamental rights enshrined in international human rights instruments and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, such as the right to human dignity, non-discrimination and equality before the law and between women and men, the right to life and the integrity of the person, the right to social security and social assistance, or rights related to access to justice.

Data provided by Eurostat, which include FRA's data on violence against women, complemented by additional data collected and analysed by FRA on hard-to-reach population groups, such as ethnic or religious minorities, immigrants, or LGBTBI persons, highlight the need to enhance efforts to fully implement the SDGs. Inequality, in particular income inequality, has increased in the past years. Although that increase recently appears to have stopped, the overall rise in income inequality has led to compound challenges in enjoying fundamental rights on equal footing, especially for disadvantaged population groups. At the same time, discrimination and harassment, but also violence against people on discriminatory grounds, as well as violence against women, are a reality for a significant part of the population of the EU. In addition, new challenges to respect for the rule of law have emerged.

To address this reality and achieve SDGs in line with fundamental rights obligations, the EU and the Member States have at their disposal certain tools, such as robust anti-discrimination legislation and a range of sectoral policies. However, an overall EU strategy for comprehensive rights-based sustainable development, such as the one proposed by the EU's multi-stakeholder platform on SDGs for the period beyond 2020, has not

yet been formally tabled. In this respect, the European Commission published in early 2019 a reflection paper, introducing three possible scenarios for such a strategy in order to initiate the debate. Following this reflection paper, the EU Council adopted in April 2019 its Conclusions 'Towards an ever more sustainable Union'.

Effective policy monitoring and coordination mechanisms, such as the European Semester, can also play a major role in implementing the SDGs, drawing on data from the EU Justice and Social Scoreboards. So far, however, country-specific recommendations adopted in the context of the European Semester do not explicitly take into consideration either the SDG agenda or relevant fundamental rights requirements.

Another important tool is the use of EU Funds. Recent proposals by the European Commission link future EU funding in the context of the new Multiannual Financial Framework (EU budget) for the period 2021-2027 to rights-related conditionalities ('enabling conditions'), such as the respect and implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Moreover, the Commission has proposed avenues to protect the Union's budget in case of generalised deficiencies as regards the rule of law in the Member States.

Respecting and promoting fundamental rights, while promoting the SDGs and the overarching commitment to leave no one behind, requires expertise, as well as adequate and disaggregated data. Such data are not always available. Moreover, even when available, they are not always taken into consideration.

At the national level, a rights-based implementation of the SDGs would benefit from a more structured and systematic engagement of national human rights institutions, equality bodies and Ombuds institutions, local government, social partners, businesses and civil society in SDG-coordination and monitoring mechanisms, as well as in monitoring committees of EU Funds. Such an engagement would also contribute to strengthening institutions and hence to promoting the implementation of the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

In addition, the potential contribution of national human rights institutions, equality bodies and Ombuds institutions in collecting and analysing SDG- and fundamental rights-related data for hard-to-reach population groups is still largely untapped. In cooperation with national statistical authorities and drawing on their daily work, as well as on the expertise and technical assistance of FRA in this field, they could contribute substantially in this regard.

FRA opinion 1.1

The EU institutions should ensure that any future EU strategy for sustainable growth reflects, as appropriate, all SDGs and targets set by the global Agenda 2030, including the SDG on reducing inequality (SDG 10) and the SDG on promoting peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). Such a strategy should promote the mainstreaming and the implementation of SDGs, acknowledging the close links between all 17 SDGs and fundamental rights, as enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. EU Member States should adopt a similar approach when designing or revising their sustainable development strategies or action plans.

FRA opinion 1.2

The EU's European Semester policy cycle, in particular the European Commission's assessment and the resulting country-specific recommendations, should take into account the global Agenda 2030 and its sustainable development goals, as well as the relevant human and fundamental rights obligations enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and international human rights law. In this respect, for example, country-specific recommendations could include in their considerations the links between them and the implementation of specific SDGs and the respect of EU Charter provisions.

FRA opinion 1.3

EU Member States should involve civil society in all its manifestations and all its levels in the delivery of the SDGs. In this regard, they could consider the model of the European Commission's high-level multi-stakeholder platform on the implementation of the sustainable development goals as an inspirational example. In addition, they could consider inviting civil society organisations to be actively involved in SDG-implementation and monitoring activities, as well as to take measures to empower them through training and funding based on a concrete roadmap for their implementation.

FRA opinion 1.4

The EU legislator should adopt the new enabling condition covering the effective application and implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, as laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation proposed by the European Commission for the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. Such a strengthened form of conditionality would provide an additional means for promoting a rights-based implementation of SDGs. As a means to promote further achievement of the SDG on peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16), the EU institutions should continue the discussion and pursue the objective of protecting the Union's budget in case of generalised deficiencies as regards the rule of law in the Member States.

FRA opinion 1.5

EU Member States should ensure the active and meaningful participation of national human rights institutions, equality bodies or Ombuds institutions in monitoring committees of EU-funded programmes, and monitoring and coordination mechanisms of the implementation of the SDGs. As FRA has repeatedly underlined, in this respect Member States should provide them with adequate resources and assistance to develop their capacity to carry out these tasks.

FRA opinion 1.6

The EU institutions and Member States should consider using all available statistical data and other available evidence on discrimination and bias-motivated violence or harassment, as well as data on violence against women, to complement their reporting on relevant SDG indicators, including data and evidence provided by FRA. Member States should collect and disaggregate data relevant for the implementation of SDGs, particularly as regards vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups of the population, to ensure that no one is left behind. In this respect, they should consult FRA data to identify if these data can add and provide disaggregation to their national reporting and monitoring. Furthermore, Member States should promote the cooperation of national statistical authorities with national human rights institutions, equality bodies or Ombuds institutions. Member States should consider using the expert technical assistance and guidance of FRA in this field.



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HELPING TO MAKE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS A REALITY FOR EVERYONE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

This year's focus explores the interrelationship between the human and fundamental rights framework and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the global Agenda 2030 in the context of Member States' and the EU's internal policies. It takes a closer look at the SDGs related to reducing inequality (SDG 10) and promoting peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). The focus highlights the importance of collecting disaggregated data on hard-to-reach population groups to develop evidence-based, targeted and rights-compliant policies that help empower everyone, particularly those most at risk of being left behind.

The focus also examines how the EU and its Member States are following up on their commitment to embed a rights-based approach to sustainable development; looks at policy coordination tools and financial instruments that can help to promote SDG implementation in full respect of fundamental rights; and emphasises the importance of national human rights institutions, equality bodies and Ombuds institutions, as well as local authorities, business communities and civil society, in mainstreaming the human rights dimension of SDGs.



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