

# COVID-19 underlines importance of strong fundamental rights protection



*"The COVID-19 pandemic has had, and will continue to have, a profound impact on the fundamental rights of everyone across the EU. Persistent inequalities, harassment and prejudices are likely to worsen,"* says FRA Director [Michael O'Flaherty](#). *"Governments need to ensure planning for the 'new normal' to lead to a fair and just society that honours the dignity of everyone and ensures that no one is left behind."*

FRA's [Fundamental Rights Report 2020](#) reflects on the developments and shortfalls of human rights protection in the EU over the past year. Its [focus section](#) highlights how the EU's Fundamental Rights Charter has gained visibility and sparked a new fundamental rights culture at EU level. But nationally, awareness and use of the Charter remain limited despite it being legally binding for 10 years. The insights presented will hopefully encourage others, including governments, to take ownership of this great instrument – and give it full force so that it can truly help transform people's lives.

Other key issues identified include:

- Respecting **fundamental rights at borders** remained one of the top human rights challenges in the EU. Migrants died at sea, and faced violence and pushbacks at land borders. Some Member States threatened humanitarian rescue boats. In others, migrants continued to experience

overcrowding and homelessness. Child detention also increased, including unaccompanied children who were without guardians to aid them.

- Member States urgently need to stop such fundamental rights abuses, and develop effective measures to protect the rights of children, particularly unaccompanied children.
- Child poverty rates in the EU improved slightly. But 1 in 4 children remain at **risk of poverty**. This means that children still go to bed hungry and live in poor conditions with their health and education suffering. Children with foreign parents fare worse with 4 in 10 at risk. For children in single-parent households, it is 1 in 3.
  - The EU should adopt its Child Guarantee initiative with clear targets and sufficient funding to reduce child poverty.
- Governments and companies are rushing to embrace the potential benefits of **Artificial Intelligence**. Ethics and fundamental rights considerations are beginning to take shape as the European Commission and Council of Europe formulate guidelines and laws.
  - The EU and its Member States should ensure future regulations incorporate thorough and transparent fundamental rights impact assessments of the use of AI, coupled with independent supervisory bodies.

The report summarises and analyses major human rights developments in the EU over 2019. It contains [proposals for action](#) covering the EU's Fundamental Rights Charter and its use by Member States; equality and non-discrimination; racism and related intolerance; Roma inclusion; asylum, borders and migration; information society, privacy and data protection; child rights; access to justice; and implementing the UN's disability convention.

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