**A vote is a fundamental right to cherish**

Rights areas:

* [Equality, non-discrimination and racism](https://fra.europa.eu/en/taxonomy/term/974)
* [Hate crime](https://fra.europa.eu/en/taxonomy/term/977)



Across Europe, recent elections and referendums have made one thing very clear: voting matters. How we vote – and whether we vote at all – can change our societies for generations.

**Publication**

[**Shifting perceptions: towards a rights‑based approach to ageing**](https://fra.europa.eu/node/27012)

It was also a good reminder of the risks that are never far away from election campaigns. Many recent votes have been marred by reports of deliberate efforts to manipulate voters with fake news.

So how to respond? The first step is to inform ourselves. To seek out reliable information on the issues that matter to us. The second is to get involved, whether by voting or campaigning or encouraging others to vote. The European Parliament elections on 23-26 May provide a chance to do just that.

Yet the right to participate in free elections is just one example of a right all too often taken for granted. Until, that is, it is under threat. That threat is also an opportunity to recommit to the values we hold dear, from fairness to respect and solidarity.

Many of these values are also fundamental rights, legally protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the EU’s own bill of rights. And they are present in all areas of life, even if we do not always see straight away how they can help us solve the challenges we face.

Take ageing, the topic of a [recent paper](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-fundamental-rights-report-2018-focus_en.pdf) by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Older people contribute to our families and communities in myriad ways, from sitting on schoolboards to volunteering at local projects and providing much-needed childcare. Still, across Europe older people have real worries about whether they will get the support they need to stay in their home as they age, or if they will be financially secure in retirement. This is a question of fundamental rights that everybody in the EU will face: the right to grow old with dignity.

Or take the technology now ever present in our homes and workplaces. Almost half of Europeans use social media nearly every day. Algorithms sort through job applications, decide on insurance premiums and determine the information we see. This raises some old fundamental rights questions in new contexts. How can we preserve our privacy online? Who is accountable for making sure the decisions made by computers are fair? These challenges go beyond national borders. Solving them demands more of the sort of close cooperation that is the daily business of the EU.

Look at any list of issues that matter to voters, and employment is likely to be near the top. But evidence shows that we are a long way from a labour market that is a level playing field for all. Many people face unfair treatment when looking for a job, whether because of their age, their gender or a foreign-sounding surname. Indeed, a [recent FRA survey](https://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2015/eu-midis-ii-european-union-minorities-and-discrimination-survey/publications) showed that nearly a third of respondents felt discriminated against based on their ethnic or immigrant background in the previous five years. This deprives the European economy of much-needed talent and individuals of the sense of belonging and contributing to society that comes from having a job.

The next European Parliament will help to determine how Europe will address these issues. So with these elections , it is a good time to ask ourselves who we want to tackle them over the next five years. I hope the answer will include parliamentarians with a commitment to fundamental rights. Ensuring that means exercising the most basic of democratic rights: voting. And voting for fundamental rights.