

Research Report

Center for European Studies

Jean Monnet ActEuR module

Fundamental Rights of the European Union and Good Practices

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1. Foreword

Fundamental rights are the rights that belong to each individual in the social and legal space of the European Union (EU). They apply irrespective of a person's origin, religion, language and way of life and translate into action the principles of dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizenship and justice, which are the EU core values. The Charter of Fundamental Rights (hereinafter referred to as 'The EU Charter'), proclaimed in December 2000 in Nice by the Parliament, the Commission and the European Council, enshrined the importance of these principles/rights as foundations of the European project and now represents a crossroads in the process of European integration. The EU assumed a formal responsibility before its citizens: the transition from an economic community to a Union based on the rule of law and fundamental rights. The Lisbon Treaty (Article 6(1) TEU) has 'constitutionalised' this choice, giving the EU Charter the same legal value as the Treaties.

One of the main objectives of the Jean Monnet Module *Activating EU Rights* (ActEuR) (www.centrostudieuropei.it/acteur), organised by the *Centre for European Studies DiSPS – University of Salerno (Italy)*, is to actively involve civil society representatives in a discussion on the potential and limits of the EU Charter, in order to bring out the good practices of actors engaged in the defence of fundamental rights at local and national level. This is a transversal objective of all ActEuR activities: **"Activating rights" is its main objective**. In other words, ActEuR aims to: a) establish a space for reflexivity in which the needs of civil society actors in their indispensable work of defending fundamental rights can emerge and, above all; b) understand how the European dimension of fundamental rights is involved in the actions they carried out. Indeed, one of the main difficulties of the process of constitutionalising fundamental rights in the EU is to make the European dimension of rights effective. We are neither referring to the limits of the Charter's application – as enshrined in its Article 51, which limits the Charter's applicability "exclusively in the implementation of Union law", thus circumscribing the Charter's scope of application to matters that fall within the EU's sphere of competence –, nor to the extensive interpretation of this article by the EU Court of Justice. To make the European dimension of rights effective, civil society actors need to have a greater awareness of how much the EU Charter can affect their actions.

The ActEuR Jean Monnet Module pursued this objective first and foremost through the **annual cycle of seminars** entitled **'The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in Practice: Open Lectures'** (please visit the web page: <https://www.centrostudieuropei.it/acteur/modulo-jean-monnet-2022/jean-monnet-lectures-2022/>). The seminars were held by national academics and experts in the field of human rights. They were important not only for the dissemination of the methodologies and the results of academic research, but also because they represented an opportunity to create stronger synergies between policy makers and organizations working in the field of fundamental rights and between these actors and the university students attending

the JM Teaching course. During the seminars, the participating civil society actors were able to discuss the difficulties, threats and good practices that characterize their work in the field of fundamental rights at local and national levels. The report is the result of this discussion.

In addition, the Jean Monnet Module staff carried out an *ad hoc* **research on the activities of Civil Society Organisations** (CSOs), based in Campania (IT),¹ in the field of fundamental rights. The research took place from October to December 2022.

The report has the following structure. Starting from the analyses conducted by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), we outline the main difficulties that civil society actors encounter at the European level in putting a European dimension of fundamental rights into practice. Subsequently, the research methodology and the sample interviewed are explained, and relevant results presented. In the conclusions, we provide an initial assessment of a) the ways CSOs activities intersect with the European dimension of rights, b) the issues that should be addressed in order to eliminate the obstacles that prevent this intersection.

2. The role of civil society in the protection and promotion of fundamental rights

The CSOs commitment to fundamental rights is multifaceted and differentiated, depending on the national and cultural context, the type and size of organisations. There are, on the one hand, large international organisations (e.g. Amnesty, Oxfam, Save the Children, etc.) with substantial human resources, and on the other hand, small organisations, mainly composed of volunteers and operating almost exclusively at the local level.

Regardless of these differences, all CSOs play a crucial role in promoting fundamental rights, contributing to the functioning of European democracies. They give citizens a voice on issues that concern them, assist rights holders, monitor the activities of governments and parliaments, advise policy makers and hold authorities to account.²

The EU pays much attention to the role played by CSOs, both in general and with regard to the field of fundamental rights. In particular, through the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), CSOs are constantly consulted as key components of Europe's fundamental rights architecture. The FRA has created a platform (<https://fra.europa.eu/en/cooperation/civil-society>) according to Article 10(1) of the Regulation establishing FRA (Council Regulation (EC) No 168/2007 of 15 February 2007), whose objectives are:

- *Exchange information*: FRA and the Platform consistently exchange information on their work and other relevant issues;

¹ The Campania region is the territory where the University of Salerno (Italy) operates and the Jean Monnet ActEuR Module is active.

² Nacci M.G. (2019), *La libertà di associazione ed i suoi limiti nelle dinamiche ordinamentali*, Bari, Cacucci.

- *Provide FRA with thematic input and strategic advice:* FRA seeks thematic input and strategic advice from the Platform organisations;
- *Connect organisations with FRA and among each other:* FRA aims to foster connections with and among Platform organisations;
- *Provide FRA 'Tools' and resources to organisations:* Some FRA materials and tools are of particular relevance for the functioning of civil society organisations.

The FRA has published several reports concerning the role of civil society in the implementation of fundamental rights. In particular, in the report 2022, entitled "*Protecting Civic Space in the EU*", a number of **critical issues and obstacles** to the full recognition of the role of civil society emerge: difficulties in **fundraising**, lack of adequate **access to relevant information** or clear standards and guidelines, a climate of **hostility** towards CSOs and fundamental rights defenders (more than one third of the contacted organisations report defamation campaigns by the media or state actors), and **low involvement** in policy and decision-making processes. Based on FRA reports, it is possible to observe that a negative trend is underway, aggravated by the **Covid-19 pandemic crisis**. In recent years, CSOs face increasing difficulties in supporting the protection, promotion and respect of human rights in the EU, due to both legal and practical restrictions. Although these difficulties are present in all EU Member States, they vary from country to country with regard to their exact nature and extent.³

Based on these premises, FRA has formulated indications for Member States to fully comply with their obligations to promote fundamental rights and to create an enabling environment for CSOs. Member States have numerous legitimate interests in adopting legislative and administrative provisions that may affect CSOs, including in the area of tax law or in relation to transparency, elections and lobbying laws.⁴

The research conducted focused on these critical points highlighted by the FRA trying to bring out their nature and consistency in relation to the regional context (Campania - Italy) in even more detail.

3. Research Methodology and Sample

The first step of the research was to build a **database of CSOs** operating in the field of fundamental rights **in Campania**. This was not an easy task for several reasons. First of all, as pointed out above, the organisations operating in this field can be very different from one another, in terms of legal form, size, purposes, activities. Moreover, the criteria on the basis of

³ FRA (2021a), *Covid-impact on civil society work* - Results of consultation with FRA's Fundamental Rights Platform, 24 February; FRA (2021b), *Human rights work in challenging times: Ways forward*, Report of the meeting of FRA's Fundamental Rights Platform.

⁴ FRA (2012), *Bringing rights to life: the fundamental rights landscape of the European Union*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

which to delimit the field of fundamental rights and identify the organisations belonging to it inevitably run the risk of being arbitrary: the notion of ‘fundamental right’ is by its very nature semantically fluid and open, and as such refers to a wide range of activities.

Faced with these difficulties, two operational choices were adopted. The first consisted in identifying the associations operating in Campania that represent the offshoots of major international organisations working in the field of fundamental/human rights, such as *Amnesty International*, *Human Rights Watch*, *Save the Children*, etc.. The second modality consisted in identifying, through the Single Register of Third Sector Entities (RUNTS) envisaged by Italian legislation (so-called “Third Sector Code”, Legislative Decree no. 117 of 3 July 2017), those organisations operating in Campania that refer in their name or bylaws to human rights, culture of peace, decentralised cooperation for development, international solidarity, or interculturalism. All the third sector organisations so identified were included in the database, regardless of their associative form: voluntary organisations, social promotion associations, cooperatives, foundations, etc. Based on these criteria, a total of **40 organisations** operating in the Campania region were selected.

The second step of the research consisted in drawing up a sheet for each of these organisations, which contained the following information: a brief description, an indication of the areas of intervention, web references and contact details of the organisation. Subsequently, **all 40 organisations were contacted** in order to verify their willingness to participate in the survey.

The third step of the research was the filling of the questionnaire by the CSOs involved. The questionnaire was delivered by e-mail or administered by telephone by an interviewer from October to December 2022. A total of **14 CSOs took part in the survey** and are listed below:

1. Oxfam
2. Gocce di Fraternità Aps
3. S.O. Solidarietà ONLUS
4. Amnesty International - Gruppo Italia 302
5. LTM Laici Terzo Mondo
6. Associazione Scuola di Pace
7. VIS Pangea – Comitato di Salerno
8. Energia per i diritti umani APS
9. Banco Alimentare Campania ONLUS
10. Mani Tese – Gruppo di Salerno
11. ISDE (International Society of Doctors for the Environment)
12. Poliambulatorio Emergency – Comitato di Ponticelli
13. Emergency – Comitato di Castel Volturno
14. Croce Rossa Italiana – Gruppo di Napoli

The questionnaire consists of 16 items, of which 2 are multiple-choice and 14 open-ended. This choice is linked to the exploratory nature of the research and the desire to leave more freedom to the respondents. The organisation of the questionnaire reflects the topics under investigation:

- socio-anagraphic data of the respondents;
- areas of intervention of the organisation;
- good practices (identified by the interviewees themselves);
- European dimension of rights, i.e. considerations or indications of what the EU does with regard to fundamental rights.
- regional critical issues in the field of fundamental rights.

The administration of the questionnaire involved 8 Association Presidents, 3 local referents, 2 project coordinators, 2 volunteers/activists (belonging to the same organisation). Nine men and six women were interviewed. All interviewees had a long experience within the CSOs involved in the research.

4. Results

4.1. The field of action

A first question addressed to the interviewees concerned the organisation's field of action. The answers given were very heterogeneous: from poverty alleviation to social and health care, from social inclusion to environmental security. This diversity can be traced back to the many rights enshrined in the EU Charter, e.g. (Art. 1) dignity, (Art. 2) right to life, (Art. 6) freedom and security, (Art. 21) non-discrimination, (Art. 34) social security and social assistance, (Art. 44) right of petition, and many others. Furthermore, one of the main fields of action of the organisations selected is human rights education. During the Vienna Conference (1993), the international community recognized the fundamental importance of human rights education for the promotion and dissemination of a universal human rights culture at all levels and, in particular, for the prevention of human rights violations.

Many of these organisations are committed to education for peace, interculturality, non-violent conflict management, active and responsible global citizenship, and for combating all forms of intolerance and racism. These are values that give substance to the ideals and historical forms of democracy.

What are the main fields of intervention of your organisation and what actions have you carried out in the past year in the field of rights?

The Association is committed to give a better future, with clean water and basic goods to families in Yemen with a campaign in Toys stores and to help to improve the school conditions of Italian children, with a campaign in Mondadori stores in Italy, providing school supplies (notebooks and pencil cases) and free after-school hours, with funds collected during the winter months.

The Association, established on 27 November 2004 with the aim of offering an effective contribution to the building of peace and respect for justice, operates in particular in the following areas: 1. education for peace, 2. defence of the least, 3. search for the common good in society and politics, 4. recovery of situations of hardship, 5. Franciscan culture, 6. correct with the environment, 7. fair trade, 8. ethical finance, 9. critical consumption, 10. responsible tourism.

Health field. Being a group of doctors, we are animated by the intention of bringing health parity to countries where health care is really poor. Being aware of the needs of the various territories, in addition to the health field we also intervened in the school, educational, social and agricultural fields.

Human rights: collecting signatures on campaigns, raising awareness on issues such as the war in Ukraine and the violation of human rights, Iran, Afghanistan, women's rights and Human Rights Education in schools.

Development cooperation in southern countries, peace education and reception, integration of migrants.

The focus is on inclusion and equality for migrants in Italy. In the last year we have set up a school of about 150 migrants for 13 classes, with a division by levels and language competence.

Education and training for global citizenship. In the past year, we have focused on the right to play, education and acceptance.

Development of cooperation (education, health, microcredit, women empowerment, food security), education for non-violence, World March for Peace and non-violence.

We mainly intervene in the fight against poverty through the recovery and redistribution of food surpluses. We redistribute them to more than 400 organisations/associations and 150 municipalities in the Campania region, which in turn enable us to support about 250 thousand people living in poverty. We also support soup Hitchens in the Campania region.

Training in high schools on human rights and international cooperation; organisation of fundraising events.

Protection of the citizen's right not to be polluted, the child's right not to be polluted, and intervention to protect maternity and pregnant women from pollution. We have seen that when there are very strong environmental problems, no one cares about the right to health, and the right to life of the citizens of that area. My association has scientifically developed the whole concept of epigenetics and environmental damage that is recreated on the embryo, conditioning the life of that child and future man even before birth.

Healthcare for fragile groups: migrants, homeless, disadvantaged groups in general.
Health care, socio-medical guidance and mediation. A few years ago, we succeeded in getting the Campania Region to approve a law, which allows children of foreign citizens without residence permits to have a free-choice paediatrician. This has allowed them to be enrolled in the national health system despite not having a tax code.
Family reunification, search and protection service.

4.2. Good practices

The importance of fundamental rights education emerges from some organizations' account of the actions they have carried out and that they consider 'Good Practice'.

To the question "can you tell us what you think is a good practice implemented by your organisation?", many answered **education for rights**. For example:

"What I consider a good practice implemented by our organisation is peace education in schools in Campania. I consider it 'Good Practice' because it aims to spread the ability to reflect on important issues (welcome, inclusion, brotherhood) from an early age" (LTM Laici Terzo Mondo Coordinator).

"For several years, the association has been going into middle and high schools to spread the principles of peace. (...) We have set up expressive, theatrical and image workshops with them. Every year we work on a theme that defines the annual project. This year it is on communication. We are working on the transmission of the principles of peace through communication as a tool" (President of 'Associazione Scuola di Pace').

"Training in schools as part of school PCTO projects. This activity, which has been carried out for years, has numerous implications for both the children and volunteers. In fact, it fits in as a school-work alternation activity showing how to organise and manage collection campaigns, how to run a stand [listening point]" (Volunteer of 'Mani Tese Salerno' Association).

The theme of fundamental rights cuts across school programs. Many of the interviewees rated their activities in schools as stemming from the need to spread a culture of rights starting with young people.

Some of the good practices reported by the interviewees, on the other hand, are more characterised by a **solidaristic impulse and focused on direct aid**, aimed at the weakest and most marginalized people. The projects called *"Wrapping the present gives a future"* (Oxfam), *"Much more than a gift package"* (Mani Tese Salerno) and *"Communication between reality and*

lies” (Associazione Scuola di Pace) are some of the reported “good practices” that aim to create forms of solidarity and social ties especially where poverty, marginalization and war are most present.

“The good practice that our association carries out is that of ‘Being there, Accompanying, Being there’. In particular, we are near young people of our city and families that we have hosted since this year with the creation of a reception centre for those fleeing war” (President of “VIS Pangea Salerno”).

“We work hard to implement practices in the health care of foreigners, especially those with and without residence permits. In 2021, the vaccination campaign was of fundamental importance. In fact, the Campania Region was the second region in Italy to update the platform to access vaccination, giving foreigners without residence permits and non-resident Europeans the opportunity to get the vaccine. Initially this was not possible, but we, together with other associations in Castel Volturno, such as Caritas and the Movement for Migrants and Refugees, persuaded the Region to change the system” (“Emergency Castel Volturno”).

“We have prevented more than 10 thousand tonnes of food from ending up in landfills because it was unmarketable, and we have allocated it to the 250 thousand people we assist every day. The distribution we did for free has a food economic value of over 30 million” (Director of “Banco Alimentare Campania ONLUS”).

Many organisations manifest ‘standing by’ in ways other than direct social assistance. These are **advocacy actions** such as, for example, the good practice reported to us by Amnesty Salerno called ‘*Collecting signatures for the release of prisoners of conscience*’.

Importantly, in most cases (12 out of 14 organisations), the good practices reported by the organisations’ representatives were implemented in **partnership with other organisations**, thus creating a network capable of nurturing the protection of fundamental rights. Three associations shared their commitment with Caritas; five with schools in the area; the remainder collaborated with other associations or companies to distribute goods or essential services. Apart from synergy with schools, the answers mainly show **lack of collaboration with public institutions**.

In addition, the representatives of the organisations were asked which geographical area was the target of the reported good practice. From the answers provided, it emerges that 27% of the ‘Good Practices’ were targeted at people residing in **non-European countries**, in Africa or the Middle East (Syria in particular), while 73% of the ‘Good Practices’ were targeted in **Campania or Italy**.

Regarding the ‘Good Practice’s target and the number of people involved, almost half of the organisations surveyed (6 out of 14) address a ‘general public’ and, in particular, young people. These are good practices carried out mainly in schools. The remaining part of the organisations

(8 out of 14), on the other hand, address the 'good practice' to a more specific audience: women from Nigeria, children from Syria, citizens of the municipalities of the 'Terra dei fuochi', needy families, migrants with and without residence permits and the homeless. Only 3 out of 14 organisations indicated the exact number of people involved.

4.3. The relationship with Europe

If and in what forms do the good practices reported by the organisations' representatives have to do with the EU? Representatives of 9 organisations stated that the 'Good Practice' implemented has to do with the EU, while for 5 organisations this relationship does not exist. This is a very interesting finding that reveals how the European dimension of fundamental rights is by no means absent from the good practices of civil society in Campania, at least as far as the sample analysed is concerned. On the basis of the answers provided by the interviewees, it is possible to discern **three dimensions of this relationship** between the EU and civil society engaged in the defence and promotion of fundamental rights: **economic**, **social**, and **normative** dimensions.

12. How does the "Good Practice" you reported have to do with the European Union?



Economic

"We used European Commission funding for part of the project" (LMT Laici Terzo Mondo).

Social

"In the project we include a series of the themes that should lead to the generation of an active citizenship, aware and sensitive to the other. Therefore, to the empowerment of a future citizen not of Italy, but of the world" (Associazione Scuola di Pace).

Legislative

"The EU has been showing interest in these rights several years. Just this year, the European Commission adopted the Nature Package, a genuine habitat restoration law with a new pesticide regulation" (ISDE International Society of Doctors for the Environment).

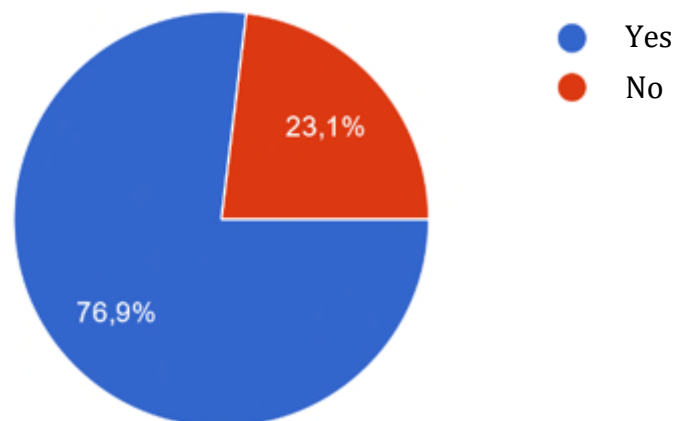
The **economic dimension** concerns access to funding for the implementation of good practice, through EU programmes.

The **social dimension**, on the other hand, emerges from those answers given by the interviewees that recall the link between the good practice and the principles of solidarity and citizenship promoted by the EU. In this sense, according to the respondents, EU provides a backdrop to the good practices implemented. Then, it is not surprising that, despite most of the CSOs interviewed address their action to the national and local context, the European dimension is very much present in the reported 'good practices'.

Finally, the **normative dimension** refers to the link between the 'good practice' and the agreements that the EU has signed especially with non-EU countries. These agreements represent the legal framework that made the reported good practice possible (*'We often ask the EU to review agreements made with third countries'* (Amnesty International group Italy 302). A favourable regulatory environment requires a strong legislative framework that protects and promotes the right to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression, in accordance with international human rights law and standards.

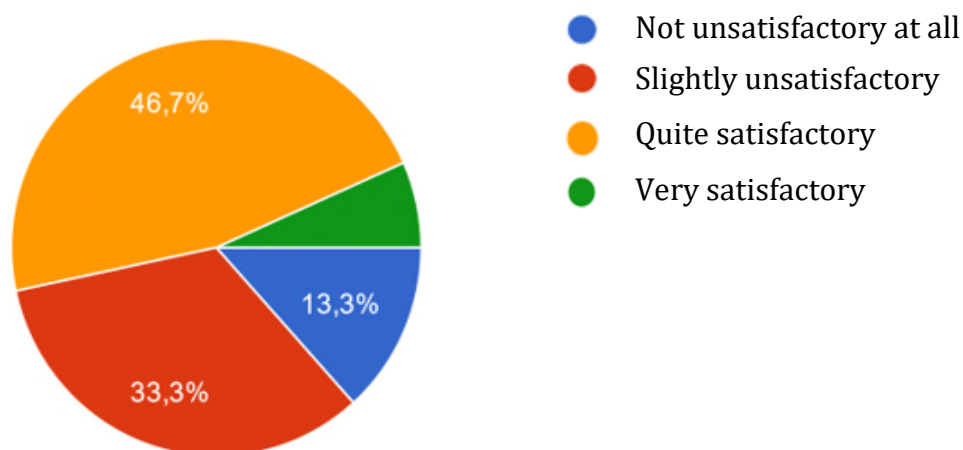
Another topic surveyed was the **participation of CSOs in EU calls for proposals**. Respondents were asked whether or not their organisation had benefited from EU funds and/or participated in EU calls for proposals in a network with other associations: 76.9% responded positively, as opposed to 23.1% who responded negatively.

Has your organization benefited from European funds or participated in EU calls with other organizations?



Participation in EU calls is commensurate with the **level of information** these CSOs claim to have on EU policies. This is a particularly relevant issue, crucial for the construction of a European dimension of fundamental rights. The dissemination of information from the European level to the local level allows CSOs to not only learn about EU policy developments, but to feel part of the construction of the EU, thereby increasing **transparency** and fostering a **sense of European citizenship**.

According to your experience, how would you define the availability of information on what the EU does in the field of rights?



Half of the sample (7 out of 14 representatives) stated on the basis of their own experience that they were fairly satisfied with the availability of information on what the EU does in the field of rights; representatives of 5 organisations were not very satisfied; 2 representatives were very dissatisfied.

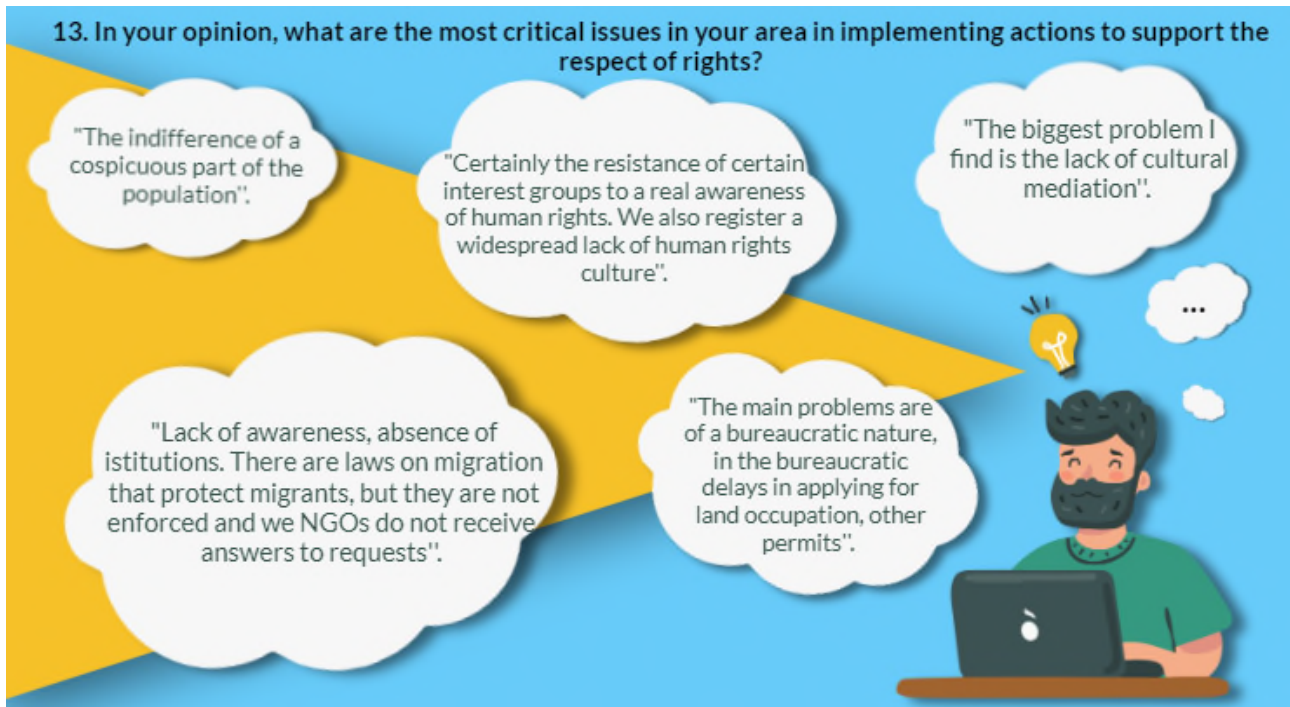
In recent years the EU has pursued a continuous exchange of information and opinions on the actions it takes in the field of rights, establishing a systematic and regular dialogue and consultation with associations and/or organisations. However, as the data also show, this work needs to be further strengthened in the face of the economic, social, political and health challenges affecting European society.

It is necessary to strengthen an **open, transparent and regular dialogue between the EU institutions and national and local civil society**. This implies the need to develop appropriate means for citizens and representative associations to make their views known and to exchange their opinions in all areas of EU action.⁵

4.4. Critical issues

The final object of analysis was the **critical issues** perceived by CSOs' representatives regarding the implementation of activities to defend and promote fundamental rights. The figure below summarises some of these critical issues.

⁵ FRA (2021a), *Covid-impact on civil society work* - Results of consultation with FRA's Fundamental Rights Platform, 24 February.



Most of the problems (9 out of 14 organisations) are of legal nature and concern the legislative **action of governments**, which are often judged to be **in conflict with fundamental rights**; the possibility of **contributing to policy-making**; the **lack of governments' attention** to the weakest segments of the population at national or local level. The representatives of 5 organisations, on the other hand, identified the greatest criticality in the **absence of a sense of civic responsibility** and interest by citizens in the actions taken.

When asked about what training would be necessary for organisations to improve their work in the field of rights, the interviewed representatives identified several needs, concerning communication and management of new technologies, project design and management, training on European legislation or rights legislation in a broad sense. Below are some of the training needs identified by the interviewees.

"What we need above all is social media management (to break the silence of the mass media), project design and management" (President of 'Energia per i diritti umani APS').

This response reveals the importance of the media in promoting the activities implemented by CSOs. They increasingly need to communicate their activities in such a way that institutions and the public opinion can understand their objectives and the way they operate. Organisations must encourage appropriate training of volunteers and staff. Other training needs concern the design and training of rights.

“It would probably be useful to broaden the base of activists with expertise in social planning, in order to improve programmes and thus the concrete impact of the actions carried out” (Activist ‘Amnesty International - Group Italy Salerno’).

“European legislation and planning. Unfortunately, my NGO does not manage to participate in many calls (like many others) because it is small to medium-sized. Most funds are only made available to large organizations” (President ‘S.O. Solidarietà ONLUS’).

“Dual training: scientific training and training in health rights. But above all in European legislation when certain rights are violated affecting our state of physical and mental well-being” (President ‘ISDE - International Society of Doctors for the Environment’).

Project drafting has become fundamental for any association, large or small.⁶ It means not only framing and organising the idea in detail, but also managing human resources, planning expenses and evaluating the social impact of the ‘Good Practices’ implemented. Many CSOs, especially **small CSOs**, have difficulties in obtaining up-to-date information on European funding and may find it more **difficult to access European programmes** than larger CSOs. What they demand is greater transparency of rules and accessibility to funds.

5. Conclusions and policy recommendations

The research revealed numerous difficulties faced by CSOs working on fundamental rights (e.g. training on European legislation, availability of and access to funding, the possibility to contribute to the development of rights policies, institutional or public opinion insensitivity).

CSOs operate under **constant pressure in a changing environment**. In some cases, these organisations take on the task of managing services that until now had been provided by public authorities. This process of outsourcing of services, which generally affects Italian welfare, poses very real problems and challenges concerning the way services are delivered: from the health care of foreign citizens to the prevention of environmental damage. This pushes organisations towards greater **‘professionalisation’** in terms of organising staff and/or volunteers, training on rights, planning, fundraising and relations with institutions. Such a change may entail a profound revision of an organisation’s *raison d’être*. Voluntary commitment and the **solidaristic logic** that underpins it risk being weakened by a **competitive logic between CSOs** and by a rift between small and large organisations, with the former being less equipped to deal with change.

⁶ D’Amico M. (2014), *Designing in Europe. Techniques and tools for accessing and managing European Union funding*, Trento, Erikson.

The EU is aware of the fundamental role that associations can play in the protection and promotion of fundamental rights. CSOs are also increasingly interested in developing a European dimension in their activities, taking advantage of European funds and/or participating in European calls for proposals by networking with other organisations. They are eager to learn new models and working methods not only from other organisations, but also from the EU. However, this can be difficult due to **lack of resources and difficulties in accessing programmes**.

One suggestion we make to the EU is to support CSOs more strongly, especially small CSOs operating at the local/regional level, for which EU support could be an impetus to strengthen existing activities or create new ones. To this end, the EU could set up **a special fund to facilitate the transnational activity of CSOs**. In particular, the fund should allow associations to pre-finance the most relevant projects for which a contribution has been requested from national public institutions. This fund would enable organisations, which normally lack the necessary means, to carry out study visits and participate in conferences, seminars and training actions.⁷

In addition, there is a need for the European Commission to continue **monitoring national regulations that may conflict with the principles/rights enshrined in the EU Charter**, offering member states, with the involvement of associations, a space for the exchange of information and good practices on human rights.

The EU institutions and the Member States should ensure that the legal and political environment is not an impediment to CSOs. Indeed, even more important than removing the barrier of access to funding sources is **the dissemination of a political culture**, translated into effective rules, that increases the **participation of CSOs in relevant policy decisions at the local/national/European level**.

Hence, it can be understood how the relationship between the EU, CSOs, public bodies and communities cannot be reduced to an occasional activity: this relationship must be “cultivated”, “sustained”, “nurtured”, increasing the participation and involvement on several levels of all those involved in the protection and promotion of fundamental rights. In other words, the architecture of fundamental rights in the EU risks collapsing or going backwards if it is not supported “from below”, if the role of CSOs is not enhanced by linking their activity to a European dimension.

⁷ Piattoni S. (2005), *Multilevel governance: analytical, empirical and normative challenges*, in ‘Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica’; Papa A. (2015), *The European model of integration and European multilevel governance*, in ‘Studies on European Integration’.