

# Fundamental Rights Workshop

---





# WORKSHOP

## Understanding Fundamental Rights and Challenging Far-Right Narratives

### AIMS

- › Students will learn to recognize and name fundamental rights – and identify when and how those rights are being violated.
- › They will gain a clear and accessible understanding of how different legal systems (national, EU, and international) work together to protect rights.
- › Students will critically explore how far-right narratives challenge democratic values, erode the rule of law, and disproportionately harm migrants and marginalized communities.
- › Throughout the workshop, students will be encouraged to see themselves not just as learners, but as active participants in defending rights and promoting justice in their own communities.

### MATERIAL NEEDED

- › Pens and pencils
- › Post-it notes
- › Printed Materials made for the workshop
- › Projector or any devices connected to wifi

### DURATION

60 to 80 minutes

### INTRODUCTION

As political rhetoric and policy shift to the right, fundamental rights are increasingly under threat across Europe. This workshop is designed to introduce students to the legal frameworks that govern and protect these rights, with a particular focus on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR).

Through interactive activities and real-life case studies, with many centred on migration experiences, participants will explore how these rights apply in practice and how legal systems can be used to defend them. The workshop also critically examines the rise of far-right ideologies and the narratives that undermine inclusion, democratic principles, and the rule of law – often at the expense of migrants, racialised people, and other marginalized groups.

Beyond building legal knowledge, this workshop invites students to reflect on their own positionality and the power they hold in shaping more just and inclusive communities. It encourages them to see rights not as abstract concepts, but as tools that can be activated through awareness, solidarity, and everyday action.

By the end of the session, participants will be equipped not only with a foundational understanding of rights protection in Europe, but also with a deeper sense of agency – as individuals and as part of a collective – empowered to recognize injustice, respond to it, and help uphold fundamental rights and democratic values in their communities and beyond.



## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE WORKSHOP

DURATION		MODULE	METHODS / TOOLS	DESCRIPTION
SHORT	LONG			
10 min	10 min	Introduction	Ice breakers and open round	Students will engage with the topic using the Four Corners method to reflect on their beliefs and assumptions about fundamental rights. By physically positioning themselves in response to statements, they will critically explore different perspectives and begin to deepen their understanding of rights and their own views.
20 min	30min	Understand how rights are protected across legal systems	Info cards / video	Students will understand the three main legal systems protecting rights in Europe – national laws, the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR), and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). They will learn how these systems overlap, their limits, and who they serve. The module encourages reflection on access to justice and empowers students to see legal knowledge as a tool to challenge injustice and protect rights.
20 min	30 min	Grasping what is at stake: rights and realities	Case-based analysis	Students will critically engage with real examples of far-right discourse, identify how they threaten fundamental rights and democratic values, and reflect on possible responses – individually or collectively.
10 min	10 min	Wrap-up & presentation		Students will present their group work to the class and engage in collective reflection, fostering shared learning and deeper understanding by connecting insights across different groups and topics.



## **TRAINER'S INTENTIONS:**

### **GROUNDING THE WORKSHOP IN AGENCY**

As the facilitator of this workshop, enter the space with the following reflections in mind:

- This workshop is not just about transferring legal knowledge – it is about creating space for participants to recognize their own **agency and positionality**, including the privileges and vulnerabilities that come with it. It aims to foster awareness of how each of us is differently situated within systems of power, especially those that marginalize, exclude, or criminalize certain groups, and how that positioning shapes both our experiences of rights and our capacity to act in solidarity with others. Make room for both experiences without hierarchy.
- The goal is not to “teach” people what to think, but to create a space where they can connect what they learn to their lived realities and to the possibility of action, no matter how small.

### **ICEBREAKER: INTRODUCTION TO FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS (“FOUR CORNERS”)**

**Duration:** 10 minutes

**Method:** Four corners discussion

**Goal:** Participants get comfortable with the topic, understand basic rights language and the trainer gains insight into their starting point.

**Trainer Instructions:** Use the four corners method to open a discussion and engage participants in thinking critically about fundamental rights. Read each of the following statements aloud. For each statement, participants move to a corner of the room labelled: Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree.

#### **Statements:**

1. “I can name at least three of my fundamental rights.”
2. “Borders keep people safe.”
3. “Access to healthcare should depend on someone’s legal status.”
4. “I know what rights migrants have in my country.”

### **NOTES FOR THE TRAINER**

After each statement, invite 1–2 volunteers to share why they stood where they did:

- Remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers – this is about surfacing assumptions, not testing knowledge.
- Acknowledge how background, lived experience, and social location might shape someone’s answers. You can gently model this by naming your own positionality (“As someone with [x] background, I notice I interpret this statement differently.”)
- Normalize discomfort or uncertainty. Offer language such as: “It is okay if you’re unsure or conflicted – this space is made for us to challenge ourselves and grow together”



*For the short version of the workshop the duration is 20 minutes and we will limit our focus to the National & European levels – specifically the national and EU systems – without covering the international layer.*

## MODULE 1:

### HOW RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED ACROSS LEGAL SYSTEMS

**Duration:** 30 minutes

This module introduces participants to the different legal systems that protect fundamental rights in Europe. It explores how the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR)** operates alongside national constitutions, EU legal frameworks, and international mechanisms like the **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**. Participants will come to understand that there is not a single legal route when rights are violated. Instead, several **overlapping systems of protection** exist – and these systems can reinforce one another when one level falls short. The aim is for participants to walk away with a clearer picture of **where and how rights can be claimed** in Europe, and what legal mechanisms are available to pursue justice.

#### NOTES FOR THE TRAINER

- Avoid overly technical or legalistic language. Ask participants: “Who here has ever tried to get help when they felt something was not fair? What did you do, or what stopped you?” This invites everyday knowledge before diving into abstract systems.
- Acknowledge that **access to legal protection is shaped by power**: not everyone experiences these systems as safe or effective. You can say: “We are not just learning the structures – we are also thinking critically about who they serve and who they leave behind.”
- Emphasize that knowledge is a **form of power redistribution**. Invite participants to see this session not just as learning “about the law,” but learning how to **challenge injustice more effectively**.



### Three Overlapping Systems:

#### A Layered Approach to Protection

When we talk about human rights in Europe, we are not talking about one single system – we are talking about **three layers of protection**: national, EU, and international. You can think of these layers like **safety nets stacked on top of each other**. If one net fails to catch you, another might.

*Let's break them down:*

#### 1. National Level – The First Line of Protection

Every European country has its own constitution and laws that protect fundamental rights. This is usually the **first place** someone would turn if their rights were violated, whether due to discrimination, unfair treatment by authorities, or denial of housing, education, or healthcare. Courts at this level are responsible for most everyday cases.

► You can imagine this as the **closest safety net to the ground**: it should catch the majority of rights violations.

#### NOTE FOR THE TRAINER

Add as an example for this section the national system relevant to the country where the workshop is being held.

#### 2. EU Level – The Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR)

Moving up a level, we reach the **European Union**. The **CFR** is a legally binding document that protects rights related to **dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights, and justice**. It became binding in 2009 and applies to **EU institutions and member states – but only when they are implementing EU law**.

So, if a country is applying EU legislation, for example, on migration, border control, or asylum, for example, the Charter applies. But if the issue is entirely outside the scope of EU law, the Charter will not offer protection.

► Think of the CFR as a net that only opens **within the boundaries of EU law**. Step outside these boundaries, and you will need another net.

→ Show the 7-minute video on the CFR's history and legal nature:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fceik3nGkxM&t=1s>



### What Makes the CFR Unique?

The Charter attempts to unify diverse national traditions under **six core pillars**. These pillars do not just reflect legal rights – they express shared values and aspirations for justice in Europe.

- **Dignity:** Respecting the inherent worth of every human being, ensuring that everyone is treated with honor and humanity.
- **Freedoms:** Protecting individual liberty, including freedom of thought, expression, and peaceful assembly, so people can live openly and make their own choices.
- **Equality:** Promoting fairness and equal treatment for all, regardless of background, identity, or status, and embracing diversity in society.
- **Solidarity:** Encouraging social support and shared responsibility, fostering community care and protection for the vulnerable.
- **Citizens' Rights:** Recognizing the importance of participation and belonging within the EU, ensuring that people can engage in democratic processes and receive fair administration.
- **Justice:** Upholding fairness and accountability in legal processes, ensuring everyone has access to justice and that punishments are fair and proportionate.

Importantly, the **Charter is not only for EU citizens**. Many of its provisions are especially relevant for **migrants, refugees, undocumented people, and racialised communities** – those most often excluded from justice, healthcare, housing, or fair treatment.

These examples help us understand how the Charter is supposed to function, and highlight the **gap between rights on paper and rights in practice**. Knowing how the Charter works is not just about legal literacy; it is about **understanding power and accountability in Europe today**.

### 3. International Level – The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

Beyond the EU lies the **Council of Europe**, which includes 46 countries – far more than the EU. One of its most important legal tools is the **ECHR**, which protects key civil and political rights: the right to life, freedom from torture, freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, and more.

Anyone in a Council of Europe country can bring a case to the **European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)** – but only **after all national legal options have been exhausted**.

► This is the **widest safety net**. It is there regardless of EU membership, as long as your country is part of the Council of Europe.

### NOTES FOR THE TRAINER

- Clarify that the long process of exhausting national remedies before reaching the ECHR often **privileges those with time, money, or institutional support**.
- Ask: “If someone is undocumented or racialised, how realistic is it to navigate this system? What alternatives exist?” Invite participants to co-imagine more accessible pathways.

*For the short version limit the focus to the national and EU systems without covering the international layer.*



*This activity is not included in the short version of the workshop, as it focuses on the international level.*

### Short activity: Drag & Match the Rights Systems

So, what is the difference between the CFR and the ECHR?

You will see a set of statements below. Your task is to **drag each statement** to the correct column:

**CFR** = Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU

**ECHR** = European Convention on Human Rights

Each statement belongs to **one** of these two systems.

You can imagine the **CFR and the ECHR as two sets of rules in two overlapping games**. One is played inside the EU (the CFR), and the other covers the whole stadium of Europe (the ECHR).

Write down the statements on moderation cards and ask participants to cluster them without revealing the right answer immediately.

#### Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR)

- Belongs to the **EU**
- Applies **only when EU law is used**
- Enforced by the **CJEU**
- Includes more **social and economic rights**
- Binding only **within EU law frameworks**

#### European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

- Belongs to the **Council of Europe**
- Applies **in all situations** in Council of Europe countries
- Enforced by the **ECHR**
- Focuses on **civil and political rights**
- Binding **regardless of EU law**

This system may seem complex, but it offers **multiple paths to justice**. If one route does not work – say, your national court rules against you – you might still have options at the EU or at an international level. And for migrants, refugees, or racialized communities – who are often more vulnerable to rights violations – **knowing how these protections overlap is a key tool for resistance and accountability**. Rights aren't just promises on paper – they're tools that can be used to claim dignity and justice across borders.

#### NOTE FOR THE TRAINER

Encourage questions from the group and respond based on the roadmap you presented. Let participants know that in the next module, they will continue to build practical understanding of how these systems work and what options are available when rights are violated.



## MODULE 2

### GRASPING WHAT IS AT STAKE: RIGHTS AND REALITIES

#### Duration

30 minutes for the long version and 15 minutes for the short version

Participants critically engage with real examples of far-right discourse, identify how they threaten fundamental rights and democratic values, and reflect on possible responses – individually or collectively.

Needed materials are pre-selected card sets for each group (each set includes one real-life scenario and one visual item, such as an image, slogan, or headline that echoes far-right discourse)

#### NOTES FOR TRAINER

Please select visual materials that resonate with the political and social context of the country where the workshop is taking place. This ensures relevance and increases emotional engagement and critical reflection among participants.

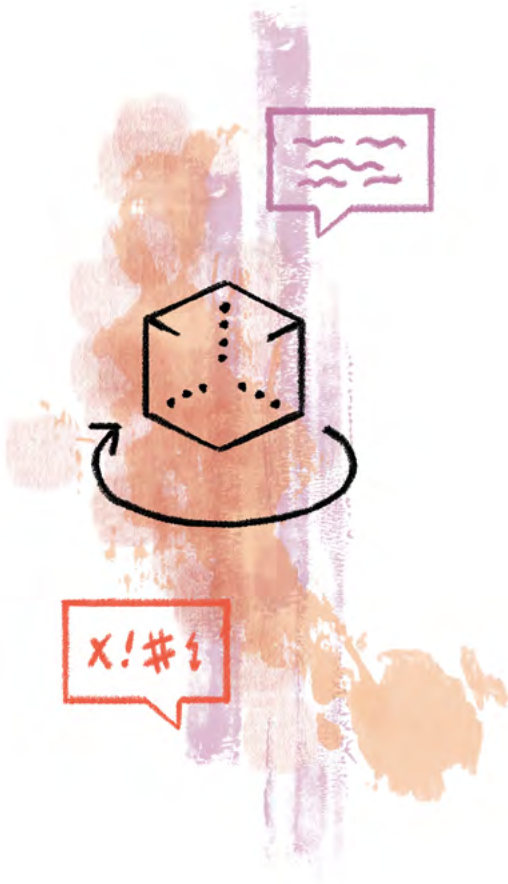
- Before distributing card sets, **restate the purpose**: “These are real, often painful examples – not because we want to dwell on harm, but because we need to name it clearly to build resistance.”
- **Important disclaimer**: Explain that we are using these real-life materials not to amplify harmful messages, but to critically understand which rights are being violated or challenged, and how we might respond.
- Encourage participants to **draw from personal or community experiences**. Remind them that academic knowledge is not the only valid lens – they can reflect from the standpoint of friends, family, or frontline organizing.

This session is designed to help participants move from understanding rights in theory (Module 1) to recognising how those rights are threatened in our everyday life – particularly through far-right narratives.

#### Instructions for Participants

“Now we are going to work in small groups with real-life materials. Each group will receive a set of cards: one card describes a scenario involving rights being violated, and the other shows a visual item – like a media headline, protest slogan, or campaign image that echoes far-right narratives.”

“Together, your group will reflect on the material and prepare to briefly present your thoughts to the whole group. You will be answering four questions.”



## Guiding Questions

1. Which fundamental rights or pillars are under threat in this case?

2. Who is directly affected and who stands to benefit from this

3. What emotions does this situation evoke in you?

4. What can be done, at your level or collectively, to counter this?

### Presentation & Collective Reflection

After 15 to 30 minutes of group work, each group shares their reflections. The trainer supports and steers the discussion, making links across groups and prompting deeper analysis where useful or references to the Charter.

Encourage participants to not just name what is wrong, but also to begin envisioning action, however small:

- Speaking out online or offline
- Supporting someone affected
- Educating peers or challenging false claims
- Organising or joining a collective effort

The facilitator can write down these proposed actions on a flipchart or board to create a **visible map of resistance** and solidarity ideas to keep in the classroom.



### NOTES FOR THE TRAINER

- End the session by reminding participants that they already hold power and are part of the story. You might say: “You already have a role. You already matter. And what you do next, however small, is part of the answer.”
- Encourage participants to see that agency does not require perfection, expertise, or institutional power – it starts from awareness, intention, and community. Whether they speak up in class, support a friend, challenge a harmful narrative, or join a local effort, they are shaping the world around them.

This reminder helps ground the session in possibility – especially for those who may have felt disempowered or excluded by the systems discussed.

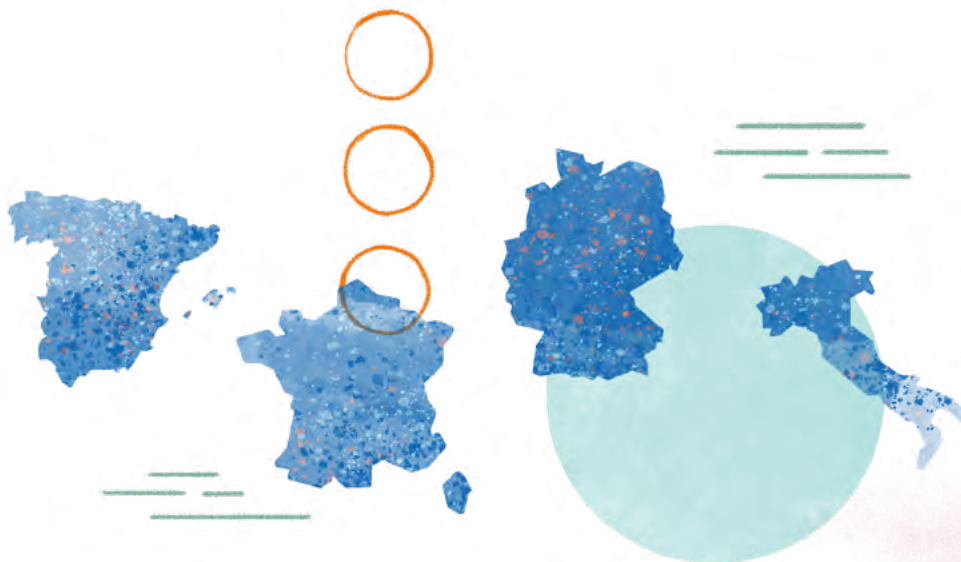
### Suggested Closing Remarks (trainer)

“What we have looked at today are not just isolated events – they are part of wider strategies that aim to erode democratic values and normalize the exclusion of migrants, racialised people, queer communities, and many others. But we are not passive observers.

Knowing your rights is the first step. Recognising when they are being violated is the second. But the most powerful thing we can do is act, even in small ways, because that is how culture shifts. That is how solidarity becomes real.”



# UNDERSTANDING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS & CHALLENGING FAR-RIGHTS NARRATIVES



## **National Level**

Every country in Europe has its own constitution and laws that protect people's rights. This is the first place someone would go if their rights are violated – whether it's a case of discrimination, unfair treatment by authorities, or denial of access to housing or education. Courts at this level are meant to handle most issues. Imagine this as the first safety net: it's close to the ground, and ideally, it works well for most people.



## EU level

Now, let's move up a level to the European Union. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (CFR) is a legal document that protects rights like dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights, and justice. It became legally binding in 2009 and must be respected by EU institutions and member states – but only when they're applying EU law. So, if a country is implementing an EU rule about migration, asylum, or border control, the Charter applies. But if the issue falls completely outside EU law, the Charter might not help.

Think of the Charter as a net that only opens when you're within the boundaries of EU law. If you step outside those boundaries, you fall through –and you'll need the next net.

## What Makes the CFR Unique?

### Six pillars of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the EU

The Charter attempts to unify diverse national traditions under **six core pillars**. These pillars don't just reflect legal rights – they express shared values and aspirations for justice in Europe.

● <b>Dignity:</b>	● <b>Freedom:</b>	● <b>Equality:</b>	● <b>Solidarity:</b>	● <b>Citizens' Rights:</b>	● <b>Justice:</b>
Respecting the inherent worth of every human being, ensuring that everyone is treated with honor and humanity.	Protecting individual liberty, including freedom of thought, expression, and peaceful assembly, so people can live openly and make their own choices.	Promoting fairness and equal treatment for all, regardless of background, identity, or status, and embracing diversity in society.	Encouraging social support and shared responsibility, fostering community care and protection for the vulnerable.	Recognizing the importance of participation and belonging within the EU, ensuring that people can engage in democratic processes and receive fair administration.	Upholding fairness and accountability in legal processes, ensuring everyone has access to justice and that punishments are fair and proportionate.

Importantly, the **Charter is not only for EU citizens**. Many of its provisions are especially relevant for **migrants, refugees, undocumented people, and racialised communities** – those most often excluded from justice, healthcare, housing, or fair treatment. These examples help us understand how the Charter is supposed to function – and highlight the **gap between rights on paper and rights in practice**. Knowing how the Charter works is not just about legal literacy; it's about **understanding power and accountability in Europe today**.



## International level

Beyond the EU is the Council of Europe – a broader political body that includes 46 countries, not just EU members. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is one of its most important legal tools. It protects core civil and political rights: the right to life, freedom from torture, freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, and more. Anyone in a Council of Europe country can appeal to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) if their national legal system fails them. But only after they've gone through all possible national procedures.

Think of the ECHR as the widest safety net – it's always there, regardless of EU membership or national systems, as long as your country belongs to the Council of Europe.

## So what's the difference between CFR and ECHR?

**Using the information you've gathered from the video and the info cards, drag and place the statements under the correct rights system: the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (CFR) or the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This exercise will help you visualize and understand how each system protects different rights, how they differ, and how they work together to safeguard people's rights across Europe.**

You can imagine the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as two sets of rules in two overlapping games. One is played inside the EU (the CFR), and the other covers the whole stadium of Europe (the ECHR).

These systems might seem complex – but they offer multiple paths to justice. If one route doesn't work (for example, if your national court rules against you), you might still have options at the EU or international level.

For migrants, refugees, or racialized communities – who are often more vulnerable to rights violations – knowing how these protections overlap is a key tool for resistance and accountability. Rights aren't just promises on paper – they're tools to claim dignity and justice across borders.

## What's the difference between CFR and ECHR?

	CFR	ECHR
Who created it?		
Where do they apply?		
Who enforces them?		
What kind of rights do they focus on?		
Are they always binding?		

## Answers that the students should drag on

**Belongs to the EU**

**Belongs to the Council  
of Europe**

**Applies only when EU  
law is used**

**Applies in all situations  
in CoE countries**

**Enforced by the Court  
of Justice of the EU**



**Enforced by the  
European Court on HR**

**Focuses on civil and  
political rights**

**Binding only within EU  
frameworks**

**Includes more social  
and economic rights**

**Binding regardless of  
EU law**

## Solution

	CFR	ECHR
Who created it?	<b>Belongs to the EU</b>	<b>Belongs to the Council of Europe</b>
Where do they apply?	<b>Applies only when EU law is used</b>	<b>Applies in all situations in CoE countries</b>
Who enforces them?	<b>Enforced by the Court of Justice of the EU</b>	<b>Enforced by the European Court on HR</b>
What kind of rights do they focus on?	<b>Includes more social and economic rights</b>	<b>Focuses on civil and political rights</b>
Are they always binding?	<b>Binding only within EU frameworks</b>	<b>Binding regardless of EU law</b>

## Grasping what's at stake: rights and realities

You will work in small groups. On the screen, you'll see the list of fundamental rights and pillars.

1. Read the two scenarios your group is given.
2. Identify which fundamental pillars are being violated or challenged in each story and write them down.
3. Prepare a short group presentation, responding to these four questions in this order:
  - Which pillar(s) is/are under threat?
  - Who is affected?
  - What emotion does this evoke?
  - What are possible responses – both individual and collective – at our scale?

## Six pillars of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the EU (1)

### I. Dignity

- › Human Dignity
- › Life
- › Integrity of the person
- › Torture and inhuman degrading treatment or punishment
- › Slavery and forced labour

### II. Freedoms

- › Liberty and security
- › Private and family life
- › Personal data
- › Marry and found family
- › Thought conscience and religion
- › Expression and information
- › Assembly and association
- › Arts and sciences
- › Education
- › Choose occupation and engage in work
- › Conduct a business
- › Property
- › Asylum
- › Removal, expulsion or extradition

### III. Equality

- › Equality before the law
- › Non-discrimination
- › Cultural, religious and linguistic diversity
- › Equality: men and women
- › The child
- › Elderly
- › Integration of persons with disabilities

## Six pillars of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the EU (2)

### IV. Solidarity

- › Workers right to information and consultation
- › Collective bargaining and action
- › Access to placement services
- › Unjustified dismissal
- › Fair and just working conditions
- › Prohibition of child labour and protection of young people at work
- › Family and professional life
- › Social security and assistance
- › Health care
- › Access to services of general economic interest
- › Environmental protection
- › Consumer protection

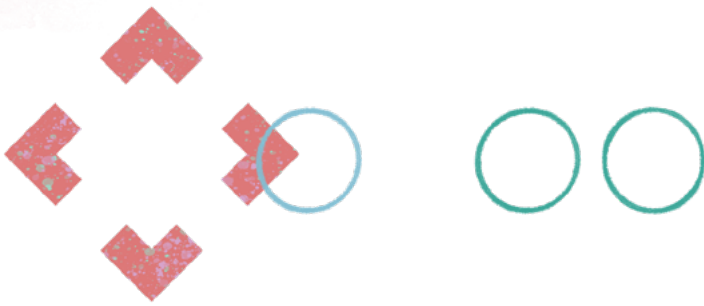
### V. Citizens' rights

- › Vote and stand as candidate to EP
- › Vote stand as candidate at municipal elections
- › Good administration
- › Access to documents
- › Petition
- › Movement and residence
- › Diplomatic and consular protection

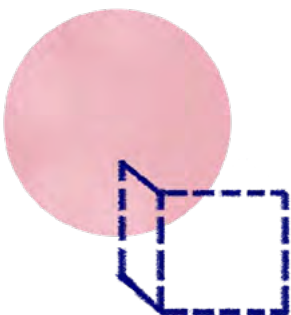
### VI. Justice

- › Effective remedy and fair trial
- › Presumption of innocence and right of defence
- › Legality and proportionality of criminal offences and penalties

**A group of people are pushed back  
at the border without being allowed  
to ask for asylum.**



**A migrant worker is paid  
below minimum wage and denied  
healthcare access.**



**A child is separated from  
their parents  
during deportation procedures.**



**A Black teenager born in  
Europe is stopped and searched  
by police regularly**



**Pictures that resonate with your the context  
of the country you are doing the workshop in:**



# IMPRINT

## **Publisher**

Schwarzkopf-Stiftung Junges Europa  
Sophienstraße 28/29  
10178 Berlin  
[www.schwarzkopf-stiftung.de](http://www.schwarzkopf-stiftung.de)

## **V. i. S. d. P.**

Lena Strehmann

## **Editors**

Nora Korte  
Sean Mackenney

## **Author**

Yasmine Djidel

## **Layout & illustrations**

Friederike Schlenz  
[www.friederike-schlenz.de](http://www.friederike-schlenz.de)

## **Year of publication**

2025

## **Copyright**

Text and illustrations are protected by copyright.  
The publications do not represent any particular opinion on behalf of the funding partners. The author(s) bear(s) all responsibility for substantive claims made in the text.  
This educational material is licensed as CC BY-NC-SA.

This publication was developed as part of the Fellowships “Security, Fundamental Rights and Solidarity and Resilience” of the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe and as part of the FOCUS Project.

This project has been developed in the context of Understanding Europe, a project by the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe.



The fellowship is funded by the FOCUS project, which aims to raise awareness of Fundamental Rights in Europe and is supported by the European Commission.



Other funders of the Understanding Europe Fellowship 2025:



Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

