

The European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights is considered by many experts to be the most modern international agreement on Human Rights currently in force. The text was proclaimed as far back as 2000, but since last December it enjoys binding legal status thanks to the Lisbon Treaty.

The chairman of the European parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, **Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar**, MEP (S&D, ES) has called the charter a genuine bill of rights for the European polity, stating that it therefore lends important new depth to democracy in the EU. But controversy still surrounds the question of how the charter will bring better protection in practical terms as opposed to simply theoretical ones.

CEDAG is making a substantial contribution to this debate with its current project in the field of fundamental rights of young migrants. The project Young Citizens in Action is now well underway, and at the end of its 18 month run it will produce a policy toolkit of use throughout the EU Member States. It is based on a series of parallel workshops **Belgium, Lithuania and Slovenia** designed to investigate barriers – perceived and real – to the integration of young migrants in their host societies. The project therefore draws together aspects of both fundamental rights and of intercultural understanding.

This is done through active discussions with these young people of what their fundamental rights are and how they can demand their enforcement. The discussions are enlivened and illustrated with the participants' real life experiences. A strong element of creativity is brought into play, with poets, musicians and other artists participating – alongside legal specialists – to help the young migrants communicate the results of the workshop to a wide audience.

The culmination of all this work will be a final seminar bringing together organisers and participants of workshops from across the EU, feeding into a practical toolkit of analysis and policy recommendations. This should be a starting point for other related projects to add to the communal stock of knowledge and understanding, with the aim of improving awareness of migrants' fundamental rights, and ultimately improving integration and social cohesion across Europe.

Workshops have already taken place in Lithuania, and interesting outcomes have been reported back to the other partners. Perhaps the most important of these is the confirmation that in practical terms, it is not yet clear how the EU Charter can be used by citizens – mechanisms are not yet in place for citizens to easily demand these rights to be upheld. The feeling in Lithuania was that, as things stand currently, the European Convention on Human Rights, which is upheld

by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, offers a much more concrete framework for guaranteeing rights.

The Lithuanian experiences have fed in to the event organised in Belgium which will start next week. Here the migrant groups involved specifically cover both EU citizens – the Polish community in Brussels – and non EU citizens, in the city's sizeable Brazilian community. In this latter group, the thorny question of **irregular migrants** is expected to arise.

This kind of project further demonstrates how relevant the expertise of civil society organizations is for understanding social and political problems common to all Member States of the EU. The Young Citizens in Action project is an opportunity to assess and understand certain important aspects of the migrant experience, which experience must be taken into account when evaluating European society as a whole.

For more information about the project, and its contribution to the debates on fundamental rights, intercultural dialogue and migration policy, contact the CEDAG secretariat.