



Introducing Curated #6: EMA students' reflections on conversations about 'rights in motion'

Chiara Altafin*

Abstract: Welcome to our sixth Curated series, which provides a space to reflect on conversations developed in the context of the Fundamental Rights Forum 2024 in relation to various issues concerning some pressing human rights challenges of our time and the significance of preparedness to overcome them.

We chose the topic of our sixth Curated series to provide a space for current students of the European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation ([EMA](#)), who participated in the [Fundamental Rights Forum](#) 2024, to reflect on its focused and action-oriented discussions around three thematic [strands](#), namely (1) protecting democracy and civic space in Europe, (2) shaping a socially and environmentally sustainable Europe, and (3) ensuring rights-compliant digitalisation.

The six blog posts are written by EMA students who participated in person in the 4th edition of the Forum organised by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights ([FRA](#)) and entitled 'Rights in Motion: Embracing the Human Rights for Europe's Future'. Precisely, sponsored with [Right Livelihood](#) funding, eight EMA

*Chiara Altafin is the editor-in-chief of the GC [Human Rights Preparedness](#) Blog. She works as [Research Manager](#) at the GC Headquarters in Venice and leads various research-based activities and projects. She is currently leading the 6th edition of the [GC Policy Observatory](#) revolving around a research project on the digitalisation of education systems and its impact on human rights, with particular attention to the right to education. She has been a teaching fellow for the European Master's in Human Rights and Democratisation ([EMA](#)) since September 2015. She contributed as lecturer and trainer at the 2024 [Venice School for Human Rights Defenders](#).

students were involved as assistant note-takers at human rights tables, at three plenary discussions linked to the three thematic strands of the conference as well as at the two closing panels of the forum. They did a great job supporting the official rapporteur David Griffiths. Three of them presented their notes on the main stage at the closing session.

Overall, the two-day forum was an inspiring get-together of important traditional and non-traditional human rights actors committed to initiate coalitions, to think about and present solutions through high-level panel debates and talks, and to facilitate transfer of knowledge, skills, promising practices, and roadmaps for action through workshops, masterclasses, and pop-up chats. Conceived as a dynamic space to connect, reflect, and act in relation to the pressing human rights challenges for Europe, the FRA Forum 2024 brought together a diverse range of stakeholders' perspectives, seeking to hear voices from EU institutions, other international and regional intergovernmental organisations, human rights bodies, governments, academia, civil society, youth, business representatives, as well as the artistic and sports communities.

Every Monday over the coming weeks of June and July there will be a post addressing relevant issues discussed at the FRA Forum 2024 and seen through the lenses of EMA students who had the great opportunity to engage directly with thinkers, makers, creators, and doers.

The first post puts emphasis on the concept of 'open doors' mentioned during the opening ceremony to highlight the forum's disposition to include all sorts of ideas, empowering voices and understanding better the critical human rights challenges for Europe. Among these, insightful considerations are highlighted in relation to election significance and impact, civic space promotion and protection, as well as digitalisation and AI impact. Attention is *inter alia* drawn to the importance of how to communicate human rights challenges and possible simplified messages, the relevance of being pragmatic with the approach undertaken, the ability to defend human rights and democratic values from populist movements, and the need to look for new allies in non-obvious places. Appreciation for the cross-generational perspective undertaken at the forum is also made, particularly for the inclusion of young voices.

Nonetheless, the second post stresses that children do not have the same channels to speak and the same audiences that listen to them, but they also deserve to get a child-friendly seat at the table, to express their different, valuable perspective, and to have the space for being heard while remaining protected. It is therefore recommended that generations of the future can have access to the room of the next forum edition in ways that make their participation sustainable to take away the same hopeful feeling that the author's experienced at the FRA Forum 2024.

In exploring the intersection between new technologies and activism, the third post highlights challenges such as data protection, algorithmic bias, and misinformation, and the importance of making an ethical and responsible use to safeguard and advance human rights. Despite ongoing risks, it is also argued that new technologies can be powerful tools for activists, enabling collective mobilisation, documentation of abuses, and accountability of perpetrators. These issues were partially discussed

at the FRA Forum 2024, with particular emphasis on the need for strong support systems for human rights defenders facing increasing risks, along with the need for collaboration between civil society, tech companies, and policymakers to protect civic spaces and promote media literacy. In addressing how technology has reshaped the landscape of human rights advocacy, as an activist with experience working in Russia, the author focuses on relevant examples from the related region to illustrate the struggles faced by activists in an authoritarian context.

The fourth post stresses the need for a human rights vision to address technological challenges like AI. In discussing AI risks, related regulatory intricacies, and the necessity of meaningfully including marginalised groups while considering the adverse effects of AI on human rights, the FRA Forum 2024 was in fact featured, despite divergent views, by the emergence of a collective common ground calling for a digital future rooted in dignity and justice. It is argued the need to ensure that powerful, technological advancements are firmly entrenched in a human rights normative framework.

The subsequent post draws attention to Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) as a pressing concern, which is exacerbated by the emergence of accessible AI tools generating hyper-realistic content, endangering children, impeding investigations, and undermining legal certainty. In urging for a child-centric and rights-based approach to address it, the author acknowledges that this approach is aligned with and further explores insights from the FRA Forum panel on 'digitalisation and security'. Since the upswing of AI CSAM went unaddressed at the panel, the post explores its technological underpinnings, various manifestations, and impacts on rights-compliant digitalisation. In doing so, it highlights some insights from the forum conversations, such as: the urgent need for clarity of laws and standards governing AI and human rights, along with clear state obligations; the importance of accountability in AI development and deployment through a collaborative approach defining the responsibilities of various stakeholders; and the imperative of recognising the harms inflicted by technology and advocating for enhanced evidential frameworks.

Changing perspective, the last post considers that the European Union is at a crucial crossroads where its efforts towards climate change and social justice intersect, highlighting insights into the vision of the forum participants for achieving a sustainable and fairer future for all. In particular, attention is drawn on: including marginalised communities and revealing disparities; empowering underrepresented communities and promoting social integration while focusing on grassroots-level inequities; realising human rights as the cornerstone of climate action, with accessible legal structures and strong safeguarding of defenders, as well as participatory activities, youth dialogues, and innovative citizens engagement tools; applying inclusive solutions to bridge policy gaps; considering ethical implications when valuing the role of technology in climate solutions; and applying a collaborative approach to steer towards sustainable solutions amidst the issues of climate change and inequality.

The contributors to this new Curated section include Anna Rucińska and Julia Zasada, Chiara Mongiello, Nadeshda Arontschik, Vladimir Cortes, Cézanne Van den Bergh, and Lisa Richertz.