

## Equinet Executive Board Meeting III 17 September 2015 Brussels, Belgium

**Venue:** Equinet Secretariat, 138 Rue Royale, 1000 Brussels

### ATTENDANCE

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<p><u>Board Members</u></p> <p>Anna Błaszczak (AB) Evelyn Collins (ECo) Mari-Liis Sepper (MLS) Nepheli Yatropoulos (NY) Istvan Haller (IH) Kosana Beker (KB)</p>	<p><u>Equinet Secretariat</u></p> <p>Anne Gaspard (AG), Executive Director Yannick Godin (YG), Administration &amp; Finance Officer Tamás Kádár (TK), Senior Policy Officer Sarah Cooke O'Dowd (SOD), Communication Officer Jessica Machacova (JM), Project Officer Moana Genevey (MG), Policy and Communication Trainee</p>

**Chair of the meeting:** Evelyn Collins (ECo)

**Apologies:**

*Board Member* - Tena Simonovic-Einwalter (TSE)

Board Advisor – Niall Crowley (NC)

*Treasurer* - Therese Spiteri (TS)

**Minutes:** Moana Genevey (MG)

## MINUTES

### OPENING OF THE EQUINET BOARD MEETING

The Chair opened the Board meeting at 9.00 by reviewing the items on the agenda and by inviting any initial announcements or information to share.

**AB** reported that Adam Bodnar started his mandate as the new Ombudsman (Human Rights Defender) in Poland at the beginning of September. Adam Bodnar is an expert on discrimination issues and has tasked one of his deputies (Sylwia Spurek) to focus specifically on non-discrimination work. He was a speaker at the recent Equinet Seminar on the Charter of Fundamental Rights in June 2015

**KB** announced that a new Commissioner for the Protection of Equality (Brankica Jankovic) was also appointed in Serbia and that the office is expecting to move to new premises.

**MLS** confirmed that her term as Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner in Estonia is coming to an end at the start of October 2015. A new Commissioner (Liisa Pakosta) has been appointed who will take post from October and will attend the Equinet AGM in her new capacity.

**NY** reported that a wide anti-racism Campaign was successfully launched in September in France by the Defender of Rights, with as main objective to provide information on where to turn to in cases of discrimination.

**IH** explained that the mandates of some Steering Board members of the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD) in Romania ended recently.

**EC** reported that 11 new Commissioners have been appointed to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland recently. .

### MINUTES OF LAST BOARD MEETING 30 APRIL 2015

Board Members reviewed the Draft Minutes of the last Board meeting of 30 April 2015. One minor reformulation amendment at the end of page 2 was suggested and agreed.

**DECISION:** The Draft Minutes of the Equinet Board meeting of 30 April 2015 as amended (page 2) are approved and can be uploaded on the Equinet Members Section of the website.

### RECENT EQUINET MEETINGS

The Seminar on the Charter of Fundamental Rights (June 2015, Brussels) was well attended and positively received by members.

The Work-Life Balance Seminar (July 2015, Tallinn) was a very timely topic. The presence and insight of the European Commission speaker from DG Justice was most relevant in a context where the European Commission announced on the very day of the seminar the withdrawal of the Maternity Leave Directive and the possible launch of a new Roadmap on Work-Life Balance.

The Equinet Training focusing on EU funds (September 2015, Sofia) had excellent feedback. It was the first time that such a training session was introduced and it proved to be of significant relevance to the work of our members.

## **DRAFT EQUINET WORK PLAN 2016**

The Board welcomed the latest version of the Equinet Draft Work Plan 2016, and particularly valued the proposed training on social media, and the focus on the situation of Roma and Travellers, on gender and education as well as on reasonable accommodation.

**SOD** pointed to some minor adjustments to be introduced relating to communication items, notably the media library which would become a project library, and the numbers of newsletters.

Small refinements to be made in the related work plan budget were highlighted and agreed. The potential use of teleconferencing to make savings if necessary for Working Groups was also raised.

**AG** reported the interest expressed by a few member equality bodies to host Equinet events in 2016, including as possible hosts the Czech Republic for Gender and Education Seminar and Hungary for the legal Seminar relating to Roma and Travellers.

Regarding the proposed publication on positive duties, **NY** underlined that Equinet needs to ensure this research would give due consideration to and build on already existing sources, focusing on collecting concrete examples and as possible seek to demonstrate the economic benefit of such practice.

**DECISION:** The board unanimously approved the Draft Equinet Work Plan 2016 with the small changes agreed to be introduced.

Finally, the Board had a discussion on the use of indicators aiming to measure the impact of Equinet work, as foreseen as part of Monitoring and Evaluation processes in the annual Work Plan and Strategic Plan, with a particular view to clarify some *difficult to define or measure* indicators.

**DECISION:** the indicator 'innovations' to be considered to be any new activities over the life of the Strategic Plan. The wording 'innovation' should be reworded as 'Innovative methodologies used by Equinet' (for 2015 for instance, the Training on EU funds should be counted as innovation).

## **EQUINET GOVERNANCE**

### **I) New Membership Applications**

Following formal submissions received and screened by the Secretariat, the Board was invited to discuss and decide on the application of two potential new member organisations: (1) the Ombudswoman for Persons with Disabilities in Croatia and (2) the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms in Montenegro. Following a thorough review of the mandates and related national legislation submitted as part of the respective membership applications, the Board concluded that these organisations fulfil the role of national equality bodies in their respective jurisdiction, thereby meeting the criteria for Equinet Membership.

**DECISION:** Both Membership applications were unanimously approved by the Board and will be presented to the Members for AGM ratification as required for effective membership.

### **II) Draft Agenda for the Equinet AGM (9 October)**

The draft AGM Agenda was introduced and discussed. It was agreed to ensure a short presentation of Equinet Accounts 2014 under the Equinet Board Report to the General Assembly.

**DECISION:** The Board approved the final draft AGM Agenda for further planning and dissemination to the Members.

## **STRATEGIC ISSUES**

### **I) Equinet Cluster on Standards for NEBs**

The Equinet Cluster had provided a very fruitful platform for exchanges on this priority topic during the year, including an engaged second meeting (16 Sept) very well attended by many high-level representatives from Equality Bodies. Whilst discussions highlighted some differences amongst some Members, they also demonstrated general support for ambitious outcomes of this work. Good progress was achieved towards the further development of an Equinet paper on Standards for Equality Bodies. This important work will be considered further with all Members at the AGM and taken forward subsequently by the new Equinet Board in 2016.

### **II) Meeting with EC Commissioner Vera Jourová (August 2015)**

On 27 August, Equinet (**ECo**, **AG** and **JM**) was invited to meet with Vera Jourová, EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. **AG** underlined this important step in the further official recognition of the importance of the work of Equinet and national equality bodies, with a first meeting of such high level representatives of the European Commission. The discussions were positive and fruitful, notably with the personal invitation to Equinet Chair to be a Rapporteur at the EC Colloquium for Fundamental Rights (1-2 Oct) and the commitment of the Commissioner to pursue exchanges with Equinet through planning meetings on a

regular basis. This would include follow-up discussions with her Cabinet on the topic of Work-Life balance and the two proposed Directives (Women on Board and Equal Treatment).

### **III) EC Fundamental Rights Colloquium (Oct 2015)**

The Equinet Perspective on Religion and Belief will be brought to the Colloquium and disseminated on this occasion, highlighting the important work of equality bodies not only through legal actions against Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, but also through awareness-raising work.

### **IV) EC Equal Treatment Directive**

**TK** conveyed a general sense of discouragement regarding the adoption of the Directive on the NGOs side. The text has been subject to some worrying changes (for instance possible dilution of the age discrimination provision). Equinet should review the new draft and develop a position on the red lines that should not be crossed for continued support of the network to the Directive proposal to be pursued.

## **EQUINET COMMUNICATIONS**

**SOD** introduced the planned Equinet promotional documents agreed to be produced this year. The *Equinet Highlights* publication is similar to an annual report, over a longer period (18 months) and is linked graphically to the *Equinet brochure*. The Board suggested to review the title for the brochure, proposing 'Together for equality'.

The Board approved the concept and content proposal of the Brochure and mandated the Equinet Secretariat / SOD to proceed with the finalisation of its title and production.

## **EQUINET 2015 WORK PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION**

### **I) Publication on Sanctions**

**MG** explained that the typology of the draft report is not very clear, that it lacked a clear structure at times and that the case law of the ECHR is not cited. **ECo** suggested that the evidence base of the report is not particularly strong (due to a low number of answers collected) and proposed that statements should not be attributed to individuals in the final report. Board Members were invited to send their further written comments to the draft report to the Secretariat/TK for the researcher.

**DECISION:** The dissemination of the final version of this important report will be implemented later in the year. It will be presented by the researcher at the October AGM as a working document.

### **II) Seminar on Religion and Belief (Nov 2015, London)**

**JM** introduced the proposed objectives and content of the programme for this Seminar. She pointed to the ongoing challenge of identifying a suitable venue in

London (meeting key accessibility requirements and within Equinet budgetary limitations). **NY** suggested inviting a sociologist expert as a speaker for the seminar.

### **III) Conference on the Directive on Freedom of Movement**

The goal is to position equality bodies as key actors regarding the Directive, facilitating sharing of experiences and discussions on the challenges (to be) faced. ILO could be interested in the discussion and it is planned to involve social partners, as well as specific structures that are mentioned in the Directive, and which equality bodies may have to collaborate with (Youth Europe, SOLVIT, EURES, Enterprise Europe Network and the Point of Single Contact). There will be a close cooperation for the further planning of this conference with the French Defender of Rights hosting the event in Paris.

### **IV) Updates on Equinet Working Groups**

The WG on Communications will hold its next meeting in Berlin (hosted by FADA) on 2 November. The meeting will be organised around two sessions, one on the impact of communications on legal changes and the other on how to handle hate speech from politicians. The WG on Gender Equality will meet on 17 November also in Berlin and will seek to include an exchange with Transgender Europe on this occasion. The WG on Equality Law will meet in Bratislava and discuss the Directive on Freedom of movement, as well as on the monitoring of the ECHR case law. The WG on Policy Formation will meet on 14 October in Strasbourg, on the day preceding the meeting of the cooperation platform CoE-FRA-Equinet-ENNHRI on ECOSOC rights.

### **V) Cluster on Strategic Litigation**

A concept note has been circulated for Equinet members that had expressed an interest in this Cluster. It is recommended that priority to participate in the cluster initiative and related meeting should be given to NEBs able to provide strategic litigation services.

## **EQUINET FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

**YG** commented on the financial management report and current estimated situation under Equinet grant 2015, pointing that the situation under many headings is still to be clarified, with much *work in progress*. Equinet will be recruiting a new trainee to assist in the area of Administration and Finance.

**AG** introduced the updated Equinet structure and organigramme for the Equinet Secretariat, including new responsibilities of TK as Head of Legal & Policy. **AG** and **ECo** informed the Board on the successful outcomes of the process for the selection and recruitment of a new Policy Officer focusing on gender equality work. The selected applicant, Katrine Steinfeld, will join the team and start work in January 2016.

## STAKEHOLDERS INITIATIVES

### I) FRA-CoE-Equinet-ENNHRI Cooperation Platforms

TK indicated that the next cooperation Platform meetings are those organised by the Council of Europe and focusing on Economic and Social Rights (15 October), and on Roma issues (3-4 December). At the moment, these platforms are mostly about information sharing and defining roles and tasks (who does what).

### II) FRA Stakeholders Meeting (November 2015)

Some NEBs have been invited to this large meeting organised by the FRA, bringing together a wide range of Stakeholders in the field of fundamental rights. The FRA will also hold a pre-meeting specifically for NEBs, NHRIs and Ombuds on the day before the main event. Equinet will also be given the opportunity to hold a short meeting and exchange with its Members present on that day.

## ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Concern was expressed about the position of UNAR and its leadership, following its statement about a Parliamentarian's comments on migrants. It was agreed to seek further information regarding the precise position and situation of UNAR in Italy, and revert to the Board in due course for consideration of possible action.

This was the last Meeting of the Equinet Board under its Mandate 2013-2015 before new AGM Board Elections. ECo warmly thanked all Board Members for their commitment and support to Equinet strategic work in the past two years. The Board also acknowledged and thanked the Board Advisor (NC) for his very valuable strategic support to Equinet work over the course of the mandate and expressed particular gratitude to the full team of the Equinet Secretariat for their hard work and dedication.

= The Board meeting was closed at 15.30 pm by the Chair **ECo** =