

Executive Summary

Europe 2020

The European Council adopted the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in 2010. It is constructed around five headline targets and involves seven flagship initiatives that drive its implementation. The European semester is the annual European policy cycle developed to implement the Europe 2020 strategy and to ensure coordination across the Member States. The European Structural and Investment Funds are expected to support initiatives at Member State level that enable their contribution to achieving the headline targets of the strategy.

This discussion paper seeks to document and inform the contribution of equality bodies to achieving the headline targets of the Europe 2020 strategy, enable Equinet to support the contribution of equality bodies, and inform Equinet's contribution to the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy.

Survey of Equality Bodies

The level of engagement by equality bodies in both the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Structural and Investment Funds is limited. Of the 41 equality bodies surveyed by Equinet, 23 from 21 Member States responded. Only six of the 23 responders (26%) reported involvement in the preparation, implementation or monitoring of the National Reform Programme and only nine (39%) in the preparation, implementation or monitoring of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

A number of barriers to engagement were identified. The dominant barrier was the lack of openness on the part of Member State authorities to engagement by equality bodies. The limited level of resources of equality bodies was another barrier, as was the bodies' mandate or their interpretation of this mandate.

Equality bodies, whether or not they have been directly engaged with the Europe 2020 strategy, were still able to identify a significant contribution on their part to achieving the headline targets. This contribution starts from their casework on equal treatment legislation, which includes the provision of guidance to employers, educational establishments and providers of training, as well as active labour market measures. Research and survey work by equality bodies has provided a base of evidence on the situation and experience of the groups covered by equal treatment legislation, and on the labour market. Equality bodies have also made policy recommendations based on their work in the policy fields related to the Europe 2020 strategy.

For those few equality bodies directly engaged in the Europe 2020 strategy and with the European Structural and Investment Funds at Member State level, this engagement is seen as an opportunity to ensure that equality and non-discrimination standards are met, and that policy and programmes in these fields promote equality for, combat discrimination against, and accommodate the diverse needs of groups experiencing inequality. Some equality bodies see this engagement as an opportunity to advance the mainstreaming of gender equality and equality on all anti-discrimination grounds.

These equality bodies share an understanding that inclusive growth needs to be based on the elimination of discrimination, an adjustment for diversity, and the achievement of equality if it is to become a reality. There is a shared clarity that the employment targets

of the Europe 2020 strategy will not be met in a context of discrimination and inequality in the labour market.

There is an appetite among the surveyed bodies for greater engagement with the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Structural and Investment Funds. Nine reported that they intend to engage with the mid-term review process of the Europe 2020 strategy, 16 said that they see themselves engaging with the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, and 13 are looking to get involved with the European Structural and Investment Funds at Member State level.

Future Perspectives

The first point of engagement for equality bodies is to contribute to the preparation of the National Reform Programme and participate in the committees established for this purpose. The second is to take a place in the structures established to monitor the application of the European Structural and Investment Funds. The third is to engage with the process for the annual Country-Specific Recommendations produced by the European Commission and Council. Equality bodies could also seek to engage with the Annual Growth Survey.

Equality bodies themselves have established a fifth point of engagement in building the capacity of public bodies and public officials to promote equality, combat discrimination and make adjustments for diversity, and to implement equality mainstreaming in policy-making and implementation. The Charter of Fundamental Rights offers a sixth but untested additional point of engagement: for the Charter to serve as a lever for change to be called on by equality bodies when needed.

Equality bodies should develop an agenda and set of policy positions, based on their work, to inform their involvement in these policy areas. This agenda could reflect and build on the contribution they are already making to the Europe 2020 strategy targets. They should seek to be members of the formal structures established in relation to the National Reform Programme and the programmes for the European Structural and Investment Funds.

Equality bodies could also support the introduction and implementation of equality and non-discrimination mainstreaming into the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of National Reform Programmes. They could network with others engaging with the Europe 2020 strategy and European Structural and Investment Funds. In the longer term, they need to develop a capacity to engage with the process of making and implementing Country-Specific Recommendations for their Member States.

Equinet could take steps to build the capacity of equality bodies to engage effectively with the National Reform Programme and monitor structures for the European Structural and Investment Funds. It could support joint work by and networking among equality bodies engaging with the Europe 2020 strategy. It could develop a flow of communication on the Europe 2020 strategy, developments over the European Semester, and the activities of equality bodies. Finally, it could serve as a platform for dialogue between the European institutions and equality bodies on the Europe 2020 strategy.

Equinet could assist with exploring the potential of the Charter on Fundamental Rights to serve as a lever for equality body engagement. It could support the inclusion of a focus on the contribution of equality bodies to the Europe 2020 strategy, and to the

equality and non-discrimination mainstreaming project developed by the Discrimination Unit in DG Justice for Europe 2020.

National Authorities could identify equality, diversity and non-discrimination as core values within, and equality bodies as a resource towards their implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy and their deployment of the European Structural and Investment Funds. They could invite equality bodies to participate in the structures established for their National Reform Programme and for monitoring the European Structural and Investment Funds. Finally, they could also develop equality and non-discrimination mainstreaming practices within the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their National Reform Programme.

The European institutions, and in particular the Commission, could champion a focus on equality, diversity and non-discrimination in the Europe 2020 strategy, and the inclusion of equality stakeholders, including equality bodies, in its implementation. Achieving equality and eliminating discrimination could be established as a horizontal goal to be advanced through the Annual Growth Survey, all targets set, flagship initiatives established, guidelines published, and Country-Specific Recommendations made. A specific goal with associated targets could be established to achieve equality for, and enable the social and economic participation of, members of groups experiencing inequality across all the grounds of discrimination.

Steps could be taken to ensure that Country-Specific Recommendations include a focus on equality and non-discrimination issues. The Annual Growth Survey could include and track an additional policy priority to achieve equality across all discrimination grounds. The Guidelines established for National Reform Programmes could include a focus on equality and non-discrimination in both economic and employment policy. They could also require the participation of equality bodies in the structures for planning, implementing, and evaluating the National Reform Programmes.

The Commission could continue to track, and take action on the mainstreaming of equality and non-discrimination in planning for investing in and monitoring the European Structural and Investment Funds at Member State level, including equality bodies in any associated structures. The new Rights, Equality and Citizenship funding programme could include funding for projects enabling and testing the engagement of equality bodies in the National Reform Programme processes at Member State level.