
Summary

Equality bodies have been innovative in refocusing their work in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Equinet has emphasised how an effective equality infrastructure at European and national levels provides a key framework for an inclusive response to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic recovery required.
**FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

*Equality bodies* identify they will need to continue work on challenging and seeking to mitigate unequal impacts of Covid-19 and the policy responses to Covid-19.

Equality bodies emphasise structural discrimination and inequality as a growing priority focus in their work over the next period. This would have a particular focus on education, care provision, healthcare, digitalisation of public services, and access to justice, involving multiground issue-based initiatives, including a focus on groups holding multiple protected characteristics.

There is a challenge noted by equality bodies to plan for and pursue their interventions in relation to the economic recovery phase, engaging with the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs), the European Semester, and the Recovery and Resilience facility.

Gender based violence is noted as a continuing priority by those equality bodies with a relevant mandate.

There is an opportunity noted by equality bodies to develop and communicate new narratives on equality as enabling an effective response to crisis and to do so in a manner that responds to the negative discourses that have emerged by engaging greater public support for and involvement in equality and non-discrimination issues.

*At a policy level*, a shift in perspective is needed from an emergency mindset to one that allows time to plan, predict, and take equality and diversity issues into account. There is a need to:

- further detail the content and drive the implementation of the equality dimensions established in EU policy for an economic recovery and economic resilience, such as the enabling conditions attached to the ESIFs, the horizontal equality
principle established for the ESIFs, and the fairness objectives and targets set under the Recovery and Resilience Facility;
- strengthen equal treatment legislation through expanding the grounds covered, in particular with a ground of socio-economic status, and introducing positive duties requiring proactive approaches to equality;
- reinforce the role and competences of equality bodies as foreseen in several EU policy strategies;
- successfully conclude the EU’s accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.
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**POLICY FOUNDATIONS**

The emerging EU policy context responding to the Covid-19 pandemic provides foundations for this future perspective. This includes policy for economic recovery and to progress the

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European Green New Deal, alongside a concern to build a ‘Union of equality’, strengthening fairness in society, and reinforcing the equality infrastructure.

President von der Leyen in her **State of Union Address** identified an aim to ‘emerge stronger by creating opportunities for the world of tomorrow and not just building contingencies for the world of yesterday’ and established the centrality of building a ‘Union of equality’ in this.

The first pillar of the Next Generation EU recovery instrument provides for the *Recovery and Resilience Facility*, one of the main tools for the recovery, which is to support three strands of endeavour across the EU: green transition; digital transition and productivity; and fairness. Fairness is deemed to include preventing growing
inequalities and contributing to social and economic cohesion.

Regulations governing the *European Structural and Investment Funds* for 2021-2027 require Member States to fulfil enabling conditions, including implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN CRPD alongside strategic policy frameworks for gender equality, social inclusion, and Roma integration.

The *anti-racism action plan*, includes commitments to strengthening the equality infrastructure with a focus on:

- a comprehensive system of protection against discrimination;
- assessment of existing legal framework;
- legislative framework on Artificial Intelligence to address discrimination risks;
- potential legislation to strengthen the role of equality bodies;
- and encouraging Member States to promote legal duties to integrate equality considerations into the day-to-day business of public authorities.

The Equinet database on equality body initiatives in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic has tracked the refocusing of the work of equality bodies at national level, generating the learning that has shaped the future perspectives set out above.

This work evidences a disproportionate impact from the Covid-19 pandemic and the responses to it, on specific groups, including: older people; people with a minority racial or ethnic background including, in particular, Roma; women and girls; people with disabilities; children; and LGBTI+ groups. Socio-economic disadvantage emerges as an underpinning vulnerability for all groups.

Lockdowns have exposed women and girls to increased levels of domestic violence. Measures taken have led to
isolation for older people. People with disabilities with personal assistants have faced problems to maintain their independence. Living conditions do not allow a capacity to socially distance for: asylum seekers in detention centres, homeless people, Roma people on unofficial settlements, incarcerated persons, and older people or people with disabilities in residential care. Re-organised education systems based on online distance learning have created barriers for young people without the necessary resources. Police controls and police abuse targeting some groups, in particular Roma and other Black and minority ethnic groups, have been a serious issue. Access to health information has been at issue for groups, including deaf people, people who do not speak the first language of the country, people with intellectual disabilities, and people experiencing digital exclusion.