

# Tackling age discrimination: Stepping Up our Engagement with Youth

## WORKSHOP SUMMARY

On 1-2 March, Equinet, European Network of Equality Bodies, with the cooperation of the European Youth Forum, hosted an [online Workshop on tackling age discrimination through improved engagement with youth organisations](#). This online event brought together youth civil society representatives and equality bodies to identify best ways to cooperate around our common goal of furthering equality in society, in particular by building links between youth organisations and national equality bodies to fight discrimination together. During the two days, we focused on:

- Discussing communication work, focusing on opportunities and obstacles related to inequality of and discrimination against young people in an intersectional way;
- Identifying best practices for improved promotion of equality.

Presentations given throughout the first day reflected on the role of equality bodies in tackling discrimination against young people, provided an overview of how age-based discrimination impacts on young people's access to rights and highlighted the importance of young people's involvement in achieving equality in practice, as well as outlining some inspiring examples of cooperation between equality bodies and youth. [See the presentations here](#).

## Ways to Cooperate

One of the main objectives of the seminar was to explore ways to strengthen collaboration, especially on communication, in order to better promote equality and tackle age-based and multiple discrimination. In small group discussions, **participants shared their learnings on how to put that cooperation in place.**

- **Equality bodies should mainstream youth engagement across different aspects of their work, including them in their strategic and work plans.** This could be done through an intersectional lens: for example, if strategic and work plans include a focus on grounds of discrimination other than age, a mention of investigating how these affect young people specifically could be made. Moreover, equality bodies' annual reports could include a section on youth rights, or on how different grounds of discrimination affect young people. These issues could also be proactively addressed during relevant public policy discussions. Equality bodies could systematically assess the impact on youth of all their recommendations and actions.
- Communicating on age from an **intersectional** point of view, like they did at AGE-Platform Europe through their [Ageing Equally campaign](#), means that we can **address different aspects of young people's lives**. They have many characteristics that make them unique, so don't only talk to young people about age discrimination!



- Equality bodies and youth organisations have shared areas of work/expertise. **Youth organisations do not have to become experts on all aspects of non-discrimination.** They can focus on their own strengths and look for synergies with the work of the national equality body, bringing in the equality body to their events when they want a non-discrimination angle explained. Equally, many of the activities and projects carried out by youth organisations might be relevant for the work of equality bodies, which could be taken into account when putting together work plans, in order to include and cooperate with equality bodies more systematically.
- **Equality bodies need to be visible and easily accessible to young people.** For example, regional offices of equality bodies can establish close, regular cooperation with regional youth organisations to really understand the issues on the ground. Creating a contact point for youth organisations would also make it easier for them to reach out to the relevant equality body.
- **Equality bodies can support young people with capacity building and educational activities to increase their awareness about their rights and redress mechanisms in case of violations.** Developing education programmes like [Educadroits](#) in France is a very useful way of informing young people about their rights & getting them to know about the work of equality bodies. Youth organisations can also support equality bodies with their expertise in non formal education methods.
- Greater efforts should be made to **work with and empower young people within equality bodies.** This can happen in different ways, including: involving young people in programme-development; relying on young people and youth organisations as co-organisers or speakers in events, based on their areas of expertise. When involving young people and youth organisations as partners, it is important to remember that work should be appropriately compensated/remunerated. Trainees working in equality bodies should be encouraged to share their perspective, which should be given as much weight as other colleagues in the team.
- **Youth organisations can approach young people in a way that works!** Equality bodies are often limited to speak in a certain, more formal, way, and it's not always that accessible. Equality bodies can become more approachable by working with youth organisations to create more informal discussion spaces, in clubs, schools or universities, and establishing contacts with students.
- Equality bodies should consider how they can best **reach out to young people via a broad range of communication channels.** Young people can support you with their suggestions, feedback or leadership in this area. For example, you might consider working with online influencers on Instagram or TikTok, or include young people on decisions about what topics to address, how to moderate discussions etc.
- Working together, to **co-create relevant awareness raising materials,** for example, would be an interesting way forward. The language used should be inclusive, youth-friendly and accessible. Ideally, when working on a common issue, such as the [IHREC & NYCI did on CERD](#), the communication teams from the equality body and the youth organisation involved should work together from the beginning to develop shared communication tools.

- When working with young people online, it is very important to pay attention to creating a **safe space for the young people** you work with, and that there is a comprehensive approach to dealing with hate speech.

## Challenges/Obstacles to Cooperation

When asked to rank the **main obstacles to cooperation**, the main points highlighted were a lack of:

1. **Resources** (human, financial, knowledge)
2. Knowledge about **redress mechanisms**
3. **Awareness of rights**

**THESE ARE THE MAIN OBSTACLES RELATED TO COMMON COOPERATION THAT WERE MENTIONED YESTERDAY. PLEASE CHOOSE FROM THE LIST MAX 3 AS A PRIORITY:**



Other challenges were highlighted during these discussions, explaining why some equality bodies don't yet work with or have limited engagement with youth organisations in their countries.

- Defining the **specificities of age-based discrimination** is hard. Also, some organisations face an internal struggle in how to go about **addressing discrimination against young people when it is not named as such**.
- Young people feel more comfortable reaching out to youth organisations rather than institutions such as equality bodies, in whom they have less **trust** and who they don't necessarily know about or know how to contact. Equality bodies are not always **accessible** to young people due to overcomplicated bureaucratic procedures for example.
- Equality bodies do not receive that many **cases** on age-based discrimination, so hard to justify the focus on that. However young people seem to have brought a lot of complaints linked to Covid-19, so maybe this will change?
- Some specific discrimination grounds exclude youth.

- Despite extensive cooperation, the **results will not always be as visible** as one would like, so might not be considered worth follow up on by the heads of the organisations.
- **Shifting priorities and high turn-over of staff** among youth organisations can lead to a lack of sustained cooperation.
- Amongst youth organisations, there isn't always a clear focus on discrimination as such, so the **equality bodies are not sure who to reach out to**.
- There are **too many youth organisations** to engage with, so while an equality body may engage with some, it will be hard to cover them all.
- **Young people are not always aware of their rights**, which makes cooperation difficult (but necessary!)
- Youth organisation from outside the EU (Iceland) reports **lack of communication and knowledge of what is going on within the EU**.

## Ways Forward

Based on discussions on the first day, as well as a follow up to the [list of actions](#) developed during the 2018 [seminar organised by Equinet together with the European Youth Forum \(YFJ\)](#), on day 2, participants were asked how to proactively cooperate in the future. The top three options were:

1. developing **youth ambassador/mentoring programmes**;
2. **mainstreaming the youth perspective in equality bodies' work**;
3. **creating space for knowledge sharing**.



**Other suggestions for cooperation** that were proposed include:

- Getting the Youth Forum to **write a blog post** for Equinet on youth discrimination, perhaps linked to Covid-19.
- **Strategic litigation**, with equality bodies taking on cases regarding youth discrimination.

- **Working together towards large events** such as the [Fundamental Rights Forum](#) in October 2021, or the Conference on the Future of Europe to have conversations with young people and equality bodies on discrimination and how to tackle it.
- Finding **funding opportunities**, such as ESF+ or the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (REC) for youth organisations to become more active in cooperating with equality bodies.
- Using **existing channels to reach out to youth organisations**, such as the national ministry for youth or the [Council of Europe's Youth Department](#).
- **National roundtable initiatives** between youth organisations and equality bodies to find more long-term cooperation possibilities.
- Ideally through the European Commission, establish some sort of **paid internship programme at European level** to foster cooperation between equality bodies and youth organisations.
- Equality bodies must **make work on youth a strategic decision** and develop a work plan to implement that. This could be done for a limited period, with priority topics, and focused partners to start with.
- Create a **youth committee** to consult young people on priority issues. Include a diverse range of voices (LGBTIQ youth, young women, Roma youth, diverse ethnic origins or other minorities, youth with disabilities etc).
- Do the research! Make a list of youth organisations and individuals that you could work with and see how you can go about including them in your work. Then hold **national roundtable discussions** to map out how national equality bodies and youth organisations can help each other.
- Equality bodies could provide **training** for representatives of youth organisations on discrimination and human rights (train the trainer). Furthermore, youth facilitators can be brought in to facilitate events/trainings etc for equality bodies.
- **Improve accessibility**: There should be a dedicated staff member responsible for contact with youth. Simplify complaint procedures and consider bringing them online. Secure funding for youth organisations that want to work with equality bodies.
- Equality bodies should **consult with youth organisations ahead of their strategic planning cycle**.
- Equality bodies must be more **visible on social media channels** and engage more in conversation with youth where they are. Consider also youth festivals for example.

Concretely, on **improving communication** between equality bodies and young people:

- Social Media (See the example from FADA in Germany - [#SpeakAboutIt](#))
  - Consult young people on what works, what doesn't, what messages or platforms (such as Instagram or tiktok) to use. This will help you not to be boring and provide the right messages in the right way.
  - Be proactive and interactive on social media, and consider recruiting digital or social media expertise in-house. Get young people on your team!
  - Use all the features on social media (polls, stories, questions etc) as this is likely to attract a bigger audience and provide more opportunities for interaction.
  - On a very basic level, share each other's posts on social media.



- Consider social media takeovers in both directions
  - Give youth a voice on your channels for a day;
  - The equality body could consider a take over of the youth orgs' account, or that of an influencer
- Campaigns:
  - Develop awareness-raising campaigns specifically targeted at youth. **Youth friendly materials** should be developed to explain what discrimination means and how the complaint procedure works
- Website:
  - Make your website accessible and user-friendly

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All [presentations given throughout the Workshop are available online](#). This workshop feeds into **finalising the Handbook on Stepping up Engagement with Youth** currently being drafted by Equinet's Working Group on Communication and is due to be released in May.