



WORK PLAN 2022



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INTRODUCTION

Securing a future for Europe built on the fundamental values of equality and non-discrimination.

2022 will be a crucial year for Equinet, its equality body members and equality in general. The Covid-19 crisis has underscored the need for strong, independent equality bodies capable of upholding the principle of equality and non-discrimination and ensuring no one is left behind in efforts to recover from the many challenges that transformed the socio-political landscape in Europe over the past two years. As 2021 progressed, new pressing concerns related to equality and non-discrimination arose, including unequal access to healthcare for certain groups, and many ethical and practical questions related to vaccination programmes. Equality bodies played a key role in advising governments, public authorities, private actors, and the public about their rights and responsibilities during this pivotal phase of the pandemic response. Meanwhile, Equinet supported equality bodies in navigating these new challenges by acting as a forum for peer exchange and continued shared learning among as the situation rapidly developed.

Now, 2022 offers the unique opportunity to strengthen the protection of equality across Europe. Recently, we have witnessed a breakthrough in the recognition of the need for effective standards for equality bodies, reflecting their growing role as champions for equality in Europe. This has led to the exciting possibility of proposing new EU-level legislation to strengthen the role and independence of equality bodies in 2022. Equinet has already provided substantive input to inform the legislative process, expressing our ambition for strong and effective standards. Moreover, Equinet's Project on Standards for Equality Bodies has been a driver for our engagement, and during 2022, it will continue to provide a platform for peer exchange and for contributing to the development of effective legislation on standards which reflects our members' needs. Equality bodies have also seen an expansion in their responsibilities on a wide range of areas, including on gender equality. Therefore, in 2022, Equinet will hold a flagship conference showcasing the evolution and benefits of gender-based responsibilities being allocated to equality bodies, while discussing how to ensure this growing role can be carried out effectively.

Equinet will consolidate its knowledge and position in 2022 on a variety of topics, ensuring that the experience and expertise of equality bodies is shared and can inform policymaking at European and national level. Equinet will continue its innovative work on the impacts of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on equality and non-discrimination, ensuring that equality bodies are recognised as key actors and are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to face the challenges brought by these new technologies. 2022 will also see the continuation of Equinet's work on equality mainstreaming, after a multi-annual Cluster of equality bodies was set up last year to focus on the topic. In its second year, the Cluster will focus on the role of equality bodies in supporting equality planning by public authorities and private sector actors to inform and generate discussions with and action by policymakers at EU and Member State level. In 2022, Equinet will also hold a roundtable event to build on its research into the need and usefulness of expanding the list of protected grounds in anti-discrimination law in the EU and at national level, such as through the inclusion of 'socio-economic status' and 'health status'.

In 2022, Equinet has planned an ambitious programme of capacity building activities to support equality body staff and help our members to be champions for equality in their countries. One such activity is a series of mini workshops focused on building the capacities of equality bodies regarding EU funds and how to engage effectively with them, both as monitoring bodies and as beneficiaries. Equinet will also provide practical training and guidelines for equality body staff on how to develop their online presence and digital communication skills so they can better promote equality and empower citizens to report discrimination. Another Equinet training event will focus on the added

value of using the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights in discrimination cases while another workshop will focus on the key role of equality bodies in generating and using equality data and research in casework.

It is significant that many of the activities in this Work Plan are classed as horizontal issues. To work towards an equal Europe, we need to make sure discriminated groups are not considered mutually exclusive. As equality bodies can have diverse mandates, covering different grounds, it is important to take into account the ways they intersect in order to support policy and legal improvements suited for the specific needs of groups of victims of multiple, intersecting grounds of discrimination. Therefore, in 2022, this Workplan has moved away from the ground-based approach that was previously used, and has instead adopted a broader, thematic-based approach, which reflects Equinet's continuing commitment to apply the lens of intersectionality throughout its work.

As we embark upon this challenging but exciting period and look towards a future in which equality bodies are supported and strengthened through new legally binding legislation at EU level, we continue to remain focused on the values we hold dear as a Network – respect, equality and justice. Together we can achieve equality for all and secure a better future for the next generations.

Tena Šimonović Einwalter

Chair of Equinet Board



Anne Gaspard

Equinet Executive Director



EQUINET STRATEGIC PLAN 2019 - 2022

The Equinet Strategic Plan 2019 - 2022 builds upon our past achievements, and gives expression to our ambition during that period, considering the changing societal, political and policy environment in relation to the equality and equal treatment sector in Europe.

For the next year, Equinet has defined a set of action areas under the Strategic Plan objectives, as follows:

A. STRENGTHEN AND SUPPORT EQUALITY BODIES TO ACHIEVE EQUALITY FOR ALL

1. Supporting the understanding, implementation and monitoring of European standards for equality bodies at European and Member State level;
2. Strengthening institutional capacity of equality bodies by offering guidance and opportunities to engage in peer-to-peer support systems;
3. Building the capacity of equality body staff by providing space for peer exchange, learning, information sharing and development of expertise;
4. Building the capacity of equality bodies to increase their visibility by raising awareness about their work, understanding of their role and functions, recognition and appreciation of their potential at European and Member State level.

B. ACT AS THE EXPERT VOICE OF EQUALITY BODIES TO ADVANCE EQUALITY IN EUROPE

1. Identifying, researching and analysing emerging challenges and opportunities in the field of equality and non-discrimination;
2. Conveying the expert voice of equality bodies at European and international level;
3. Being a research and knowledge hub for the work and contribution of equality bodies, while further generating and disseminating knowledge on equality and non-discrimination;
4. Strengthening cooperation with all relevant stakeholders at European level and acting as a focal point for building shared perspectives and generating new thinking on equality and non-discrimination.

C. SUSTAIN A RESILIENT, ENGAGED AND INNOVATIVE NETWORK

1. Remaining relevant to the diversity of our membership and their staff, across the different combinations of functions and/or mandates held by equality bodies;
2. Strengthening our governance through transparency, inclusion, and increased Board capacity;
3. Sustaining active membership communication and engagement through a variety of innovative communication tools;
4. Ensuring sustainability of funding through securing a core grant and seeking diversification;
5. Putting in practice better monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

OUR APPROACH



Support

We provide capacity-building activities with and for equality body staff, as well as offer support to equality bodies in need of solidarity, including because of undue challenges to their independence or effectiveness.



Networking

We encourage and facilitate knowledge exchange, sharing of good practices and peer-to-peer support among equality bodies, as well as with equality stakeholders at European and international level.



Research & Knowledge Hub

We carry out legal and policy research to inform European policy and legislative developments, and provide relevant knowledge to those interested in equality and non-discrimination in Europe.



Expert Advice

We contribute to the European equality agenda by offering expert advice on equality and non-discrimination policy and legislation, based on the experience of equality bodies.



Promotion

We promote equality as a European value and seek to advance diversity and solidarity in Europe

OVERVIEW OF EQUINET ACTIVITIES 2022

Theme	Topic	Output	Ground
Standards for Equality Bodies	Contributing to EU legislation on standards for equality bodies	2 meetings of the Equinet Project on Standards for Equality Bodies	horizontal
		Commissioned report on the usability of Equinet's mandate and independence indicators	
	Rebuilding a fairer Europe after COVID-19	Roundtable	horizontal
	Equality Bodies and gender equality: a growing role	Conference	gender
EU Equality Strategies	European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights use in equality and non-discrimination cases	Training	horizontal
	Investing in Equality: A practical guide into EU funds	Series of mini workshops	horizontal, disability, LGBTIQ+
		Perspective on equality bodies ensuring compliance with EU funds	
	Equality bodies building their capacity regarding psychosocial disabilities and persons with ill-mental health	Webinar series	disability
	Equality bodies protecting the rights of rainbow families on the move	Discussion paper	LGBTIQ+, freedom of movement
		2 meetings of Rainbow Families Taskforce	
	Implementing the Work-Life Balance Directive	2 meetings of the Working group gender equality	gender
		Monitoring & peer-exchange platform	
	Pay transparency	Report	gender
		Seminar	
Contributing to legal & policy developments in combatting online & offline Gender-based violence (GBV)	2 meetings of the Gender-Based Violence Taskforce	gender	
Equality bodies contributing to national equality strategies	Workshop	horizontal, race or ethnic origin	
Equality bodies countering antisemitism	Workshop	race or ethnic origin, religion and belief	

EU Equality Strategies (continued)	Equality bodies tackling discrimination and intolerance against Muslims	Workshop	race or ethnic origin, religion and belief
	Equality bodies tackling racism and discrimination against people of African descent	Workshop	race or ethnic origin
	Equality bodies' role in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan	Roundtable	horizontal
Artificial Intelligence	AI and equality	Capacity building event	horizontal
		2 meetings of taskforce on AI	
Data Collection	Using equality data & research in casework	Workshop Handbook	horizontal
	Engaging with hard-to-reach groups in the context of equality research	Training	
Business and Equality	Role of equality bodies in supporting Equality Plans	Compilation of good practices	horizontal
		2 meetings of Cluster on Equality Mainstreaming	
		Conference	
Developing equality law and the role of equality bodies	Equality bodies getting involved in United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing	Webinar	age
	Improving the online presence of national equality bodies	Training	horizontal
		Guidelines & Good Practice collection	
	Positive action	Online event	horizontal
	Redress in discrimination cases: sanctions and remedies	Commissioned research	horizontal
	Equality bodies working on cases without an identifiable individual victim	Publication	horizontal
		Workshop	
Reasonable accommodation beyond disability	Equinet perspective	horizontal	
Climate Change	Responses to climate change in Europe: exploring the role and potential of equality bodies	Commissioned research, including an equality assessment of the EU Green Deal	horizontal

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENTS GOALS (SDG)

Equinet aims at proposing activities which are in line with the EU funding principles of equality and non-discrimination, and which will contribute to achieving the UN Agenda 2030. Most activities carried out by Equinet and equality bodies in 2022 will help reach SDG 5 on achieving gender equality, in particular, and SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, in general. Our work will also contribute to SDG 16 on improving access to justice and ensuring strong institutions (specifically while working on stronger standards for equality bodies) and SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals, as Equinet will engage and collaborate with many external partners to achieve equality for all.



DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES 2022

Standards for Equality Bodies

Contributing to EU legislation on standards for equality bodies

Context: The past two years saw a breakthrough in the recognition of and standards for equality bodies, with several EU Equality Strategies and the [Commission's report](#) on the application of the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) and the Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC) raising the possibility of proposing EU-level legislation to strengthen the role and independence of equality bodies. This is a recognition that binding legislation on equality bodies would be a major step towards better implementation and enforcement of the EU's equal treatment legislation and effective protection of the rights of all victims of discrimination across Europe.

This process is a unique opportunity and Equinet has already provided substantive input to inform the legislative process, expressing our ambition for strong and effective standards. Equinet's Project on Standards for Equality Bodies has been a driver for our engagement, having developed two sets of indicators for standards (on [mandate](#) and on [independence](#), in 2019 and 2020, respectively). The Project has set out to test the adequacy of these indicators by a group of equality bodies piloting their use in 2021.

Objective: Strong and effective legislative proposal on standards for equality bodies, reflecting members' needs

Target audience: Primary target audience will be the European Commission as the institution empowered to initiate legislation. The activity will also target the European Parliament and Council of the EU as co-legislators to prepare for the next steps in the legislative process.

Expected outputs:

- **1 report by an external expert**, evaluating and summarising the learnings from the piloting of indicators.
- **2 meetings of the Project on Standards for Equality Bodies**, providing a platform for peer exchange and contributing to the development of legislation on standards for equality bodies

Expected outcomes: Strengthened guarantees for the independence, mandate, powers and resources of equality bodies, ultimately benefitting all those at risk of discrimination and inequalities.

Strategic Objective A

Rebuilding a fairer Europe after Covid-19

Context: The Covid-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects for everyone in our societies. Nonetheless, it has been reported, both across the whole continent but also worldwide how it has affected socio-economically disadvantaged people more severely. However, Article 19 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union enshrines a list of protected grounds limited to sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation, and so do the anti-discrimination directives adopted on this basis, in which ‘other grounds’, such as ‘socio-economic status’ and ‘health status’ are not included.

Both Equinet’s perspective [“Equality in the Time of Covid-19: Learning from Equality Body Initiatives”](#), as well as the perspective [“Equality, Diversity, and Non-Discrimination in Healthcare: Learning from the Work of Equality Bodies”](#), point out the importance of these grounds, especially as they intersect with other grounds. Likewise, Recommendation number 8 of Equinet’s [“Recommendation for a fair and equal Europe: Rebuilding our societies after COVID-19”](#) reveals the key importance of these grounds.

Based on these findings, in 2021, an [Equinet - commissioned research](#) was carried out to explore the added value of expanding the list of protected grounds within the EU’s non-discrimination law, with a focus on health status and socio-economic status. Upon completion of the commissioned paper, a dedicated roundtable will serve to launch the research and discuss its results.

Objective: This roundtable aims at sharing the main findings of the research, shedding light on the usefulness of potentially expanding the list of protected grounds under national non-discrimination law in EU member states and identifying ways forward to strengthen equality legislation in a way that confirms equality as a central value and demonstrates an ambition to achieve full, substantive equality in practice.

Target Audience: Equality bodies and external stakeholders, especially EU and national legislators and policy makers.

Expected outputs:

- **A roundtable event** focusing on the need and usefulness of expanding the list of protected grounds in anti-discrimination law in the EU and at the national level to rebuild a better and fairer Europe after the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent crisis.

Expected outcomes: Equality Bodies are better informed about the usefulness of these additional grounds and equipped with practical, evidence-based arguments for promoting the adoption and use of relevant new grounds in their national legislation. Legislators and policy makers, at both the national and European levels, have gained a better understanding of the need to expand the existing list of protected grounds in national and European legislation and of the crucial role of national equality bodies in both guiding and implementing this expansion of the protected grounds.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Equality bodies and gender equality: a growing role

Context: The adoption of the Gender Goods and Services Directive (2004) and the Gender Recast Directive (2006) generalised the set-up of equality bodies promoting gender equality in the EU. The two Directives granted equality bodies the possibility to tackle gender-based discrimination in employment and access to and supply of goods and services, as well as gender-based harassment and sexual harassment, pregnancy and maternity-related discrimination and gender-based pay discrimination.

Since then, the 2010 Self-Employment Directive expanded the mandate of equality bodies to cover gender-based discrimination faced by self-employed workers, while the 2019 Work-Life Balance Directive granted equality bodies a mandate to tackle discrimination related to parenthood, paternity and carers' responsibilities. In 2021, the proposed Directive on Pay Transparency foresees new functions for equality bodies, including representing one or several workers in court for equal pay cases and enhancing their access to pay data. The proposed Directive also establishes a new standard on resources for equality bodies, by proposing to reallocate funds from fines directly to them. Additionally, discussions are ongoing to open the mandate of all equality bodies to cover gender-based violence, as suggested by the European Parliament Research Services in their recent added value assessment.

While EU legislation dedicated to strengthening the role of equality bodies is expected in 2022, their role on gender equality has already been gradually strengthened over the years. It is necessary to reflect on this evolution and to ensure equality bodies can carry out these new functions and responsibilities adequately. Raising standards for equality bodies will allow for a better implementation of EU law on gender equality, and therefore, a better protection against gender-based discrimination all over the EU.

Objective: The conference will showcase the evolution of gender-based responsibilities allocated to equality bodies and the benefits of doing so, while discussing how to ensure this growing role can be carried out effectively.

Target Audience: European and national policymakers.

Expected outputs:

- A **flagship conference** on standards for equality bodies on the ground of gender equality, showcasing the impact, benefits and potential of equality bodies to protect and promote gender equality in the EU

Expected outcomes: This conference will raise awareness of policymakers on the role of equality bodies to promote gender equality in the EU and on how to strengthen them.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic

Objective

B

EU Equality Strategies

European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights use in equality and non-discrimination cases

Context: The Charter of Fundamental Rights is a key human rights instrument in the European Union. On 2 December 2020, the Commission presented a [new Strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) in the EU, positioning human rights defenders, such as Equality Bodies as key allies in the Charter enforcement chain.

Equinet has collaborated with the Fundamental Rights Agency in workshops and seminars focusing on training Equality Body staff as regards the use of the Charter. Building upon previous training events and on support and tools offered by the Commission and by the FRA, this initiative aims at building on previous training events, to share good practices, building on support and tools offered by the Commission and by the FRA and outlining the added value and usefulness of relying on the Charter provisions on top of the well-developed secondary legislation in equality and non-discrimination to ensure that Equality Bodies live to their full potential regarding their role in the enforcement chain of the Charter. For this purpose, this initiative aims to specifically explore the use of the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights in equality and non-discrimination cases to effectively enable Equality Bodies to explore and make the best use of the Charter in their activities, including strategic litigation.

Target Audience: Equality Body legal experts

Expected outputs:

- A **training event** on case law regarding the added value of using the Charter both at the European (Court of Justice of the EU) and the national level.

Expected outcomes: Equinet's work in this field will ensure that equality bodies are better equipped to use the Charter to its best potential in discrimination cases.

Strategic Objective A**Strategic Objective B****Investing in equality – A practical guide on EU funds**

Context: With the adoption of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the EU entered a new funding cycle. In the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds, the European Semester, and the Recovery and Resilience facility, opportunities and responsibilities are arising for equality bodies. While they are foreseen to monitor the equality compliance of some EU funds at national level (and therefore playing an important role in the practical delivery of funds), equality bodies would also have the possibility to apply for EU funds themselves (for instance through the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme). The funds' enabling conditions linked to compliance with the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, gender equality or the UN CRPD are highly relevant from the point of view of equality bodies. The engagement of equality bodies with EU funds holds a promising potential for investing in anti-discrimination in Europe and ensuring equality is practically and financially achieved for all.

However, understanding and working with EU funds requires a certain set of skills and knowledge, since they are such specific and technical instruments. Equality body staff need to be properly informed and trained to unlock their potential to ensure that the EU is effectively investing in equality.

Objective: The Perspective and workshops will build capacities of equality bodies on EU funds and how to engage effectively with them, both as monitoring bodies and as beneficiaries.

Target Audience: Equality body staff working on EU and national policies and financial issues, including members of the Policy Formation Working Group.

Expected outputs:

- A **Perspective** of the Working Group on Policy Formation on equality bodies ensuring compliance with EU funds, collecting experience, good practices and challenges faced by equality bodies on this new role.
- **Series of mini workshops** on funding for equality bodies, which would focus on how they can contribute to ensuring compliance of EU funds with enabling conditions, funding instruments for specific groups (such as Roma people or persons with disabilities) and on how can equality bodies apply for EU funds.

Expected outcomes: Equality bodies are better equipped and well informed on how to monitor the compliance of EU funds and on how to apply for funding themselves.

Strategic Objective A**Strategic Objective B**

Equality bodies building their capacity regarding psychosocial disabilities and persons with mental ill health

Context: COVID-19 disproportionately affected people who were already in a vulnerable situation, including people with psychosocial disabilities as shown in the 2021 perspective “Equality, Diversity, and Non-Discrimination in Healthcare: Learning from the Work of Equality Bodies” and the webinar series organised based on the perspective. Further, the pandemic affected the mental health of many people, including persons with caring responsibilities, women, single parents, etc. due to stress, uncertainty, tension, and rising anxiety.

People with psychosocial disabilities face several very concrete barriers and challenges in their daily life, starting even with the identification of their disability, which can often go undiagnosed because it can be episodic or not discernible at first glance. In addition to common risks and challenges, people with mental ill-health and psychosocial disabilities can also face a disruption of essential support and services, that enable them, to function independently and with dignity, and, consequently, they are at increased risk of violence and further discrimination. Their situation can also be aggravated if they experience intersectional forms of discrimination. For instance, women with psychosocial disabilities are at higher risk of experiencing sexual violence and harassment.

Following the UNCRPD, the EU’s Disability Strategy published in 2021 and recommendations from persons with disabilities themselves, this initiative aims at, in close collaboration with disabled persons’ organizations (DPOs) such as ENIL, MHE or EDF to inform Equality Bodies working in the area of disability, to better understand the problems they face, the support that equality bodies could give and to build bridges between equality bodies and these communities. With the assistance of the experts in this field, DPOs, this initiative aims at having short, targeted sessions to better inform members and build their capacities relating to topics agreed upon with partners that are key to better understand and support persons with psychosocial disabilities and mental ill-health.

Target Audience: Disability experts in Equality Bodies.

Expected outputs:

- A series of short **online webinars** for capacity building organised in close collaboration with DPOs.

Expected outcomes: The capacity of Equality Bodies will be expanded through the expertise shared to be better allies and support persons with psychosocial disabilities.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Equality bodies protecting the rights of rainbow families on the move

Context: Due to differences in national legislations across Europe, family relationships may not always be recognised when rainbow families cross the EU's internal borders. On November 2020, the European Commission presented its first-ever EU Strategy for LGBTIQ equality, setting out a series of targeted actions towards LGBTIQ equality across Europe. Among the key actions outlined in the Strategy, the Commission committed to bring forward a legislative initiative on the mutual recognition of parenthood and explore possible measures to support the mutual recognition of same-gender partnerships between Member States to better protect rainbow families.

This upcoming initiative builds on a landmark judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union, recognising that the term spouse includes same-sex spouses under EU freedom of movement laws. The Romanian equality body's involvement in the case demonstrates that despite the limitations of EU equality law, equality bodies can play an important role in ensuring freedom of movement for rainbow families. It is now crucial to discuss the role for equality bodies in implementing the *Coman Case* and protecting the rights of rainbow families through various activities, including strategic litigation.

The goal will be to raise awareness on how equality bodies can ensure LGBTIQ+ families are respected and treated equally under the principle of freedom of movement across the European Union, highlight good practices and address the current challenges in this field. Importantly, this paper builds upon the work of a dedicated [Equinet Cluster on Freedom of Movement](#), which gathers the experience of over 15 equality bodies designated as Article 4 bodies under Directive 2014/54/EU, and which concluded its activities in 2021 with the [Equinet Discussion Paper "Freedom of Movement in the EU: Equality Bodies Tackling Discrimination of Union Workers."](#)

Objective: This Equinet discussion paper will strive to inform European policy making and trigger discussions on the protection of the rights of rainbow families under the principle of freedom of movement and collect the experience of equality bodies.

Target Audience: EU-level policymakers

Expected outputs:

- One or two **meetings** of the Equinet Taskforce on Rainbow Families and Freedom of Movement collecting and discussing the work and experience of equality bodies concerning the protection of rainbow families under the principle of freedom of movement
- One **discussion paper** collecting the experience of equality bodies on the rights of rainbow families and relevant good practices, focusing, in particular, on the principle of freedom of movement.

Expected outcomes: Equinet's work in this field will ensure that equality bodies can share their expertise and experience and use these to inform European policy making. This will increase the awareness of EU institutions about the gaps and issues of the EU legal framework and will strengthen this framework.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Implementing the Work-Life Balance Directive

Context: The EU Work-Life Balance Directive entered into force on 1 August 2019. The text introduced paternity leave and carer's leave all over the EU and extended the right to request flexible arrangements. Equality bodies play a central role in this recent piece of legislation, since they are specifically designated to tackle discrimination and unfair dismissals of parents and carers. As the Directive is due to be transposed at national level by August 2022, the role and functions of equality bodies will soon evolve throughout Europe. Their relationship with external actors, such as labour inspectorates and social partners, will also change significantly. Equality bodies need to be aware, well-informed and adequately prepared for this evolution.

Objective: In the framework of the Working Group on Gender Equality, special sessions will be held to ensure peer-learning, exchange and monitoring for equality bodies on the Work-Life Balance Directive

Target Audience: Staff of equality bodies working on gender equality, unfair dismissals and work-life balance.

Expected outputs:

- **2 special sessions** of the Working Group on Gender Equality, dedicated to monitoring the implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive, organised in collaboration with the European Commission
- A **monitoring and peer-exchange platform** for equality bodies on the transposition of the Work-Life Balance Directive in the EU

Expected outcomes: Equality bodies will be well-informed and prepared for their new responsibilities under the Work-Life Balance Directive

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Pay transparency

Context: In March 2021, the European Commission issued a proposal for a Directive on Pay Transparency. This is the first legally binding initiative on equality proposed under the new Commission, and equality bodies are a central piece of this legislative project. Building on the Gender Recast Directive, the Directive envisages equality bodies to be instrumental in effectively applying the principle of equal pay. Some key innovations are proposed, such as the possibility for all equality bodies to bring claims of equal pay in court on behalf of one or several workers. Equality bodies would also be granted additional responsibilities on access to information on equal pay. The Directive also proposes to create "monitoring bodies", granted with key awareness-raising, data collection and monitoring functions which could potentially be attributed to some equality bodies, depending on the equality framework of each Member State.

In general, the framework of protection against gender-pay discrimination significantly varies across the EU. This results in equality bodies having very different roles, mandates and functions on pay transparency at national level. Therefore, the Directive will have different effects and impacts for equality bodies and other key actors (labour inspectorates, trade unions and employers) in each Member State.

While the Directive is a crucial opportunity to raise the common EU standards of equality bodies in the field of equal pay, dialogue and coordination will be key. There is an essential need for coordination and peer exchange among equality bodies, to discuss, define and convey a common voice on the future of pay transparency in the EU. Coordination is also needed with other central actors of the Directive, in particular labour inspectorates and social partners.

Objective: Equinet's work on equal pay will generally aim at increasing the knowledge and understanding of policymakers and equality bodies on the role and needs of equality bodies in the EU regarding pay transparency. The seminar will mainly aim at strengthening the link between equality bodies, labour inspectorates and trade unions, to ensure optimal collaboration between these key actors.

Target Audience: Staff from equality bodies working on equal pay, labour inspectorates and social partners, European policymakers.

Expected outputs:

- A **report** drafted by the Working Group on Gender Equality will aim at mapping the status quo regarding pay transparency in the EU and the role of equality bodies, while providing recommendations for the new EU legislation on Pay Transparency
- 1 **capacity-building seminar** to ensure effective cooperation and complementarity between equality bodies, labour inspectorates and trade unions on pay transparency

Expected outcomes: Equinet and policymakers will have a better understanding of the diversity of needs and roles of equality bodies on pay transparency, and equality bodies will strengthen their cooperation with labour inspectorates, trade unions and employers on equal pay.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Contributing to legal and policy developments on combatting online and offline gender-based violence

Context: In 2021, the European Parliament Research Services issued a recommendation to extend the mandate of all equality bodies in the EU so that they cover gender-based violence. At the end of 2021, the European Commission will propose new legislation on combatting gender-based violence, potentially extending the role of equality bodies on this issue (where only a few equality bodies in Europe are currently mandated to tackle gender-based violence).

Outside of the European Union, other key instruments are also crucial to ensure protection against gender-based violence, online and offline. The Istanbul Convention which provides the highest standard on protection against gender-based violence in Europe is under threat in various countries while still awaiting to be ratified by the European Union. Moreover, the 2019 ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment, a powerful tool to combat sexual and gender-based harassment in the workplace, for which all equality bodies have a mandate, has still not been ratified by any European countries.

There is a need to reflect on the level of protection against online and offline gender-based violence in Europe (including gender-based harassment), and on what the role of equality bodies should be in this framework.

Objective: Within the Working Group on Gender Equality and on the basis of Equinet's 2019 paper on Gender-Based Violence, a Taskforce will aim at reflecting on the role of equality bodies for tackling gender-based violence in Europe and at contributing to relevant legal and policy developments.

Target Audience: Staff of equality bodies working on gender-based violence and European policymakers.

Expected outputs:

- 2 or 3 **meetings of the Gender-Based Violence Taskforce** to discuss and collectively define the role of equality bodies on tackling gender-based violence in Europe

Expected outcomes: Equality bodies will define their potential role in combatting gender-based violence while contributing to European and international developments on this issue.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Equality bodies contributing to national equality strategies

Context: In the past year the EU published several important Equality Strategies. Most of these Strategies advise or require Member States to prepare national strategies or action plans, translating the EU Strategies into plans adapted for the national level needs and challenges. Equality bodies are central to the national equality infrastructure and are, therefore, expected to play a central role in the development, implementation and monitoring of these national strategies. The EU Roma Strategic Framework and the Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation include particularly detailed expectations concerning the role of equality bodies (with the adoption of national strategic frameworks expected by September 2021). The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan similarly underlines the important role of equality bodies and expects all Member States to develop and adopt national action plans by the end of 2022.

For equality bodies to engage effectively with national equality strategies will require significant capacity-building, planning and enhancing the resources of equality bodies. With some strategies in

place already and others under development, 2022 will be a particularly interesting year to discuss the most effective and useful ways for equality bodies to contribute to these.

Objective: Provide a platform for learning, showcasing and exchanging good practices of equality bodies engaging in the development, implementation and monitoring of national equality strategies.

Target audience: Equality body staff working on national equality strategies.

Expected outputs:

- **1 workshop discussing the contribution of equality bodies to national equality strategies.** The workshop could have a specific, but not exclusive, focus on national Roma strategic frameworks and national anti-racism action plans

Expected outcomes: Strengthened and more effective national equality strategies through enhanced involvement and contributions by equality bodies.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Equality bodies countering antisemitism

Context: The European Commission will adopt its first ever Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life in the EU by the end of 2021. As institutions working against inequality and discrimination based on race or ethnic origin (and with a mandate often including religion of belief as well), equality bodies are well placed to contribute to the effective implementation of the strategy. Nonetheless, limitations in their mandate (for instance on hate speech), powers (for instance litigation powers) and resources, as well as external circumstances such as high levels of under-reporting may pose an obstacle to this work.

Objective: Share and discuss good practices as well as challenges and solutions for overcoming them to ensure an effective contribution by equality bodies to combating antisemitism.

Target audience: Equality body staff and NGOs working on the issue of antisemitism.

Expected outputs:

- **1 workshop discussing equality bodies' contribution to the EU's Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life.** The workshop will be organised in consultation with Jewish NGOs and the EU's Coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life.

Expected outcomes: Enhanced trust between equality bodies and Jewish NGOs. Increased attention to and more effective work on antisemitism by equality bodies.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Equality bodies tackling discrimination and intolerance against Muslims

Context: Equinet published a report in early 2018 on ‘Faith in Equality: Religion and Belief in Europe’, bringing powerful evidence of the particularly grave discrimination experienced by Muslims in Europe. We have also established regular engagement with the European Commission’s Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred and relevant civil society partners to identify effective remedies to this discrimination, taking an intersectional approach to allow addressing, for instance, the particular experiences of Muslim women. In 2020 this included a high-level conference co-organised with the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the Commission’s Coordinator, while in 2021 we co-organised a workshop with the Commission’s Coordinator and civil society partners to enhance cooperation between equality bodies and NGOs. The need for a follow-up to this workshop was agreed with partners. The EU’s Anti-Racism Action Plan adopted in 2020 provides an important backdrop to this work.

Objective: Reviewing progress in and results of the cooperation between equality bodies and NGOs since the workshop in January 2021. Sharing good practices and discussing ways forward to enhance such cooperation.

Target audience: Equality body staff and NGOs working on discrimination against Muslims.

Expected outputs:

- **1 workshop bringing together equality bodies and NGOs working to combat discrimination and intolerance against Muslims** to share good practices and discuss ways forward. The workshop will be organised in consultation with the European Commission’s Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred.

Expected outcomes: Enhanced trust, links and collaboration between equality bodies and NGOs working to combat discrimination and intolerance against Muslims.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Equality bodies tackling racism and discrimination against people of African descent

Context: The proven disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on racial and ethnic minorities and the shocking revelations of police brutality against racialised communities, and in particular people of African descent, around the globe following the murder of George Floyd resulted in a powerful global outcry against racism. These developments have shown the extent of institutional and systemic discrimination that still exists in Europe. As a response, the EU adopted in 2020 its Anti-Racism Action

Plan that serves as a backdrop to our work. In 2021, Equinet organised a conference on institutional and structural racism in order to call attention to these issues and the potential of equality bodies in addressing them. Because of their mandates and functions, equality bodies can foster organisational and social change, in addition to assisting individuals who are victims of racism. In 2022, it is necessary to zoom in on the particular expressions of racism experienced by people of African descent and the responses equality bodies can provide to these.

Objective: Discussing the expressions of racism experienced by people of African descent in European societies, the existing obstacles and the solutions and good practices of equality bodies to address them, in cooperation with relevant NGOs.

Target audience: Equality body staff and NGOs working on discrimination against people of African descent.

Expected outputs:

- **1 workshop bringing together equality bodies and NGOs working to combat discrimination and intolerance against people of African descent** to share good practices and discuss ways forward. The workshop will be organised in consultation with the European Commission's Coordinator on Anti-Racism.

Expected outcomes: Enhanced trust between equality bodies and NGOs working to combat discrimination and intolerance against people of African descent. Increased attention to and more effective work by equality bodies on racism against people of African descent.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Equality bodies' role in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) was adopted in 2017 as an 'Interinstitutional Proclamation' of the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission. The Commission refers to the Pillar as 'a compass for a renewed process of upward convergence towards better working and living conditions in the European Union'. It is described as a shared political commitment and responsibility in the Pillar's preamble, but the Commission takes the view that the responsibility for implementing the Pillar lies – to a very large extent – with the Member States. In 2021, the European Commission released a detailed Action Plan for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, which clarifies and elaborates further the responsibility of Member States in implementing the EPSR in their respective national contexts.

The delegation of responsibility for implementing the EPSR to the Member States provides an opportunity for National Equality Bodies to contribute to a successful realization of the Pillar's

principles at the national level. Crucially, the principle of equality is prominently mentioned in both the European Pillar of Social Rights and in its 2021 Action Plan, being emphasizing through multiple references to the principles of gender equality, equal opportunities, and equal treatment.

Objective: Discussing the role of NEB on the implementation of the 2021 Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including identifying specific roles and activities for NEBs through which they could achieve greatest added value to the effective implementation of the EPSR Action Plan at the national level.

Target audience: Equality body staff as well as national and European stakeholders, who are relevant for the implementation and monitoring of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

Expected outputs:

- 1 **online roundtable**, bringing together relevant equality body staff and national and European stakeholders to discuss the relevance of the new EPSR Action Plan for equality bodies and thereby, enable staff of equality bodies and other relevant stakeholders, at both national and European level, to identify suitable and specific roles for equality bodies under this Action Plan.
- A **summary factsheet** on roles of equality bodies under the EPSR Action Plan, which gathers and highlights the key findings of the roundtable.

Expected outcomes: This online roundtable will contribute to a better understanding of the key opportunities and potential issues for equality bodies, as they seek to contribute to the effective implementation of the new EPSR Action Plan at the national level.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Artificial Intelligence

AI and Equality

Context: In 2021, Equinet further developed its engagement with the topic of new technologies, continuing to focus on the role of equality bodies in preventing and responding to the potential negative effects of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled technologies, namely discrimination and the deepening of inequalities. Building on the 2020 publication of Equinet's extensive report on the role of equality bodies in the field of AI, 2021 saw Equinet delivering a set of very well-received online training webinars aimed at raising awareness and building the capacity of equality bodies in responding to the challenges presented by these new technologies. This was complemented by the development of a dedicated Equinet AI website, with the public section containing materials from these training sessions and relevant good practices from Equinet members, whilst the private section has the capacity to act as a hub for future discussions and training for equality bodies on the topic. A second set of training sessions for equality bodies on AI, plus a series of short, 'coffee break' webinars on various AI-related equality challenges, enabled equality bodies to build more in-depth knowledge of the topic and widened the scope of participation to more members.

A key pillar of Equinet's engagement at European level on the topic of AI and a role of equality bodies in that context are Equinet's contributions to the two main European initiatives on regulating AI from a human rights-perspective – the EU's Proposal for a Regulation on AI and the Council of Europe's consultation for the development of a future legally binding instrument on AI, democracy and human rights. Equinet made extensive submissions to both consultations. In addition, the Chairperson of Equinet and Ombudswoman of Croatia, Tena Šimonović Einwalter, addressed members of Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) on the topic of regulating AI and a new role for equality bodies. She also addressed the same topic at one of EU's new leading policy-making forums on AI and EU's future Regulation, namely, the third edition of the European AI Forum.

In 2022, AI will remain a key part of Equinet's work. Equinet will build on its work so far through maintaining relevant, useful information on its dedicated AI website and ensuring that it is being used to its full potential, both by Equinet members as a forum for peer exchange and capacity building, and among stakeholders as a knowledge hub. Equinet will also set up a new task force of interested members to examine AI-related challenges and the role of equality bodies in more detail and enable more regular exchanges between members in a more structured way. This task force will focus on certain fields where there is AI-related discrimination, including in particular the field of employment.

Objective: Facilitate peer exchange and deepen understanding on AI-related discrimination among equality bodies and continue to ensure that they are equipped with relevant, current knowledge and skills to be able to identify, combat and prevent the potential discriminatory effects of AI-enabled technologies.

Target Audience: Staff members of equality bodies (potentially) working on AI-related discrimination.

Expected outputs:

- **Capacity building event**, possibly, a training of trainers on equality and non-discrimination for private and public duty-bearers
- Establishment of a new **taskforce on AI-related discrimination**
- **2 meetings of the taskforce**, providing a platform for peer exchange.

Expected outcomes: Equality body participants will maintain relevant, current knowledge and participants in the taskforce will deepen their understanding of the potential discriminatory effects of AI-enabled technologies and the role equality bodies can take to tackle and prevent them. Through this capacity building event, equality body staff and relevant stakeholders, including public and private duty bearers, will better understand the impact of potential AI-driven discrimination, leading to better solutions and outcomes for victims of discrimination.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Data Collection

Using equality data and research in case work

Context: Equality data and research have the potential to make the Union of Equality a reality. Their wide range of purposes include the realization of fundamental rights across equality grounds and can play a decisive role in proving discrimination.

Equality bodies are key in ensuring the availability and use of equality data (including intersectional data), particularly in legal casework. They have been playing an increasingly relevant role in litigation offering additional expertise in discrimination. Furthermore, they can also provide access to data and evidence through official requests and investigations.

Objective: This workshop aims to increase the capacity of equality bodies' staff to generate and use successful research and data in legal casework across Europe by bringing together equality bodies and partners responsible for research, data collection and legal casework and by focusing on (1) identifying good examples and good practices (2) discussing challenges and (3) underpinning ways forward.

Target Audience: staff members of equality bodies working on data collection and litigation

Expected outputs:

- **Capacity-building workshop**, discussing the role of equality bodies in using equality data and research in casework with the participation of relevant partners such as civil society organizations that have existing experiences on the issue.
- The Working Group on Data Collection and Research will start developing a **Handbook for equality bodies on using data and research in casework**. This will include a **collection of good practice examples from equality bodies** of the Working Group on Research and Data Collection in using collected data and conducted research to support legal casework.

Expected outcomes: This workshop will contribute to a better understanding of the key issues and experiences of equality bodies using equality data and research in casework, thereby increasing the capacity of equality bodies to respond to discrimination.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Engaging with hard-to-reach groups in the context of equality research

Context: The problem of engaging diverse groups is of special concern to the research and data collection field, as these groups are exposed to a higher risk of discrimination. A number of European institutions reports, and recommendations highlighted the need to develop strategies to ensure representativeness of equality data, and to develop an intersectional approach to data collection. This

includes designing innovative ways of gathering data on the experience of groups that may be hard to reach through general sample-based population surveys.

National equality bodies are equipped to play a crucial role in developing a suitable and effective range of outreach strategies to enable engagement with diverse groups. However, they face many hurdles including underreporting and much stronger outreach is needed to capture the experience of hard-to-reach groups and ensure representativeness of equality data.

Building upon the collaboration and support by the European Parliament Research Service and the FRA, this initiative aims at building the capacities of equality bodies relating to the engagement with hard-to-reach groups and to effectively enable equality bodies to carry out or commission suitable surveys which adequately capture the experience of hard-to-reach groups.

Objective: This training aims to increase the capacity of equality bodies' staff to design and carry out or commission successful research and data collection by sharing and discussing good practices as well as challenges and solutions for overcoming them.

Target Audience: National Equality Body experts, including members of the Research and Data Collection Working Group, as well as interested representatives of national equality bodies.

Expected outputs:

- **An online training** to be carried out through collaboration with an external partner

Expected outcomes: This training will ensure that equality bodies are better equipped to apply an inclusive approach in designing and carrying out or commissioning research and data collection.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Business and Equality

Role of equality bodies in supporting equality plans

Context: Equality is a founding value of the European Union and part of the shared constitutional traditions of Member States. Therefore, equality considerations should inform and guide all actions by the European Union, its Member States and public authorities. An important development in this regard was the European Commission's 2019 decision to set up a Task Force on Equality. A further step, beyond mainstreaming equality in the public sector, is to ensure that equality considerations are also taken into account by private actors, such as employers and service providers.

Last year, Equinet set up a multi-annual Cluster of equality bodies focusing on equality mainstreaming to capitalise on equality bodies' considerable experience and expertise in promoting equality mainstreaming and to use this experience to help inform policymaking at European and national level.

In its second year, the Cluster will focus on the role of equality bodies in supporting equality planning at the national level by public bodies, as well as by private sector actors, including diversity charters. The Cluster will also discuss situations when adopting an equality plan is compulsory, including for beneficiaries of EU funding. This follows on from discussions in the Cluster in 2021, where members discussed the use and importance of equality plans to require businesses and public authorities to take into account and proactively respond to equality and diversity implications in all actions of their organisations.

Although equality plans are not specified in EU legislation, their importance as a tool for achieving equality can be seen, for example, in the European Commission's inclusion of the concept in their commitment to lead by example in their internal selection and recruitment processes as outlined in their recent [EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030](#) and in the European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE) [Gender Equality Plan](#) for research organisations and higher education institutions.

Objective: Collect and use the experience and expertise of equality bodies on supporting equality planning by public authorities and private sector actors to inform and generate discussions with and action by policymakers at EU and Member State level.

Target Audience: Policymakers at European and Member State level responsible for equality planning, including the European Commission's Task Force on Equality.

Expected outputs:

- **1 conference** (1 day) during the European Diversity Month on the role of equality bodies in supporting equality planning and the links to Diversity Charters, bringing together 80-100 equality bodies and policymakers (both European and national level).
- **2 meetings of the cluster** on equality mainstreaming, providing a platform for collecting good practices and peer exchanges.
- **Compendium of good practices** in the field of equality planning, informing the work of equality bodies and responsible public authorities and private sector actors.

Expected outcomes:

- Policymakers at European and national level will gain knowledge on the use of and practical benefits of equality planning, leading to an increased promotion and use of this tool/ concept across the public and private sectors.
- Equinet and equality bodies will gain recognition as experts on supporting equality planning in both the private and public sectors.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Developing equality law and the role of equality bodies

Equality bodies getting involved in United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

Context: The UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (UN OEWGA) was established by the UN General Assembly in 2010. Every year the OEWGA brings together Member States, National Human Rights Institutions, NGOs and UN agencies to consider the existing international framework of the human rights of older persons, identify possible gaps in law and in practice, and how best to address them. The principle of non-discrimination is at the heart of the discussions and the working group delegations asserted that developing a specific protection regime for the rights of older persons at the international level would provide coherence to an otherwise fragmented, uneven and incomplete landscape of legal norms.

Equality bodies have a crucial role to play in bringing forward their experience in tackling Ageism and Discrimination. Through their various competences and unique insights into the state of equality and discrimination their ability to develop an intersectional approach to ageism, as well as the main issues and gaps in legislation and the jurisprudence, equality bodies can be particularly valuable to OEWGA.

To highlight the relevance of equality bodies in the context of the OEWGA, in 2019, together with the European Commission, Age Platform Europe, HelpAge International and the World Health Organisation, Equinet co-organised a [side-event](#) at the 10th session of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing. The side event served to take stock and sketch the way towards a new paradigm of older age 50 years after the first conceptualisation of ageism, while also providing existing evidence of equality bodies' fighting ageism across Europe, as identified in the Equinet Report from 2018 '[Fighting Discrimination on the Ground of Age](#)'.

Building upon this previous engagement, in 2022 Equinet will seek to build the capacity of its members to effectively contribute to the work of the UN OEWGA. A specific problem that this webinar will address is the fact that the diverse mandates, institutional structures and capacities of equality bodies, coupled with their focus on EU law, might make it difficult for them to find the best way to contribute to OEWGA. Therefore, the overarching aim of this webinar is to provide Equinet members with the tools to engage more effectively with the UN OEWGA.

Objective: The primary objective of this capacity-building webinar is to provide equality bodies with the tools and knowledge necessary to get involved in the work of the UN OEWGA. The webinar will be organized in cooperation with relevant partners from UN OEWGA and civil society organizations that have existing experiences on the issue.

The specific aims of this webinar are to:

- Enable equality bodies to engage with UN OEWGA, where appropriate, and increase their impact on the promotion of age equality and non-discrimination in Europe and in their respective countries;

- Help bring more visibility to equality bodies in the United Nations system and foster better cooperation between equality bodies and UN experts and representatives.

Target Audience: The webinar will be aimed at equality body staff responsible for working on age discrimination.

Expected outputs:

- A dynamic **one-day webinar** featuring presentations, Q&A sessions and an exchange of best practises from NEBs.

Expected outcomes: National equality bodies are able to engage more effectively with the work of the UN OEWGA, thereby leading to discussions and outputs within the framework of the UN OEWGA, which highlight the centrality of equality in protecting the rights of older persons.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Improving the online presence of national equality bodies

Context: Equality bodies are public organisations assisting victims of discrimination, monitoring and reporting on discrimination issues, and contributing to an awareness of rights and a societal valuing of equality. To support this work, digital media should be an organisation's first thought, not an afterthought. A well-designed online presence will make it easier for victims of discrimination to find the information that they need from the equality body, as well as helping the equality body to disseminate their work to the relevant audiences more effectively.

Objective: This training aims to help staff of equality bodies learn how to develop their online presence, by focusing on (1) optimising their website, (2) their social media positioning and (3) setting up and evaluating relevant measurement indicators.

1. To upgrade their online presence, there would be a focus on Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), getting the most out of Google Analytics, making websites more accessible and user friendly.
2. As regards social media, participants will be given the keys to understanding which target groups are best accessed through the different social media channels, and how to adapt their strategies to create content that matches their chosen platform's format, tone and style.
3. Measuring and evaluating the impact of your online presence will be key to constant improvement.

Target Audience: Staff members of equality bodies working with digital communication (website, social media...)

Expected outputs:

- **2-day training** by external trainers

- **Guidelines** for equality bodies developed by external trainers, including a checklist of dos and don'ts
- **Good practices** collected by members of the Working Group on Communication Strategies and Practices
- A two hour follow up **online meeting**, to share the results (experience, lessons learned, success) of training being put in practice

Expected outcomes: Members improve their digital communication, in order to help them to better promote equality and empower citizens to report discrimination.

Strategic Objective A

Positive action

Context: 2021 has seen us begin the recovery process following the exacerbation of structural and systemic inequalities by the Covid-19 pandemic. Positive action is part of the plethora of measures that European states can make use of to compensate for those structural inequalities.

The important work Equality Bodies are doing in this realm and the difficulties they encounter in developing their capacities in this area, outlined in the Discussion paper on Positive action that the Equality Law Working Group has drafted in 2021, will be the main feature of the Equinet online outreach event.

Objective: To further build the capacity of all members through sharing the main outcomes of the Discussion paper on Positive action drafted by the Equality Law Working Group in 2021 and share the expertise of our members in the area with interested stakeholders.

Target Audience: National Equality Body experts and other interested stakeholders.

Expected outputs:

- **1 online event** on positive action measures.

Expected outcomes: Equality bodies, right-holders and policy makers have increased understanding of positive action and make use of them in an effective manner.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Redress in discrimination cases: sanctions and remedies

Context: Equality and non-discrimination for all is an essential requisite of any democratic society. But equality legislation needs to be effectively implemented and enforced if we are to reach our objectives. Sanctions and remedies in cases of proven discrimination is crucial for this. The EU anti-discrimination Directives contain scarce guidance on such sanctions, which has resulted in the 'effectiveness',

‘proportionality’ and ‘dissuasiveness’ to be interpreted in a very heterogeneous fashion across member states.

The FRA opinion ‘Equality in the EU 20 years on from the initial implementation of the Equality Directives’ in the case of the 2000 Directives (RED and EED), “...calls into question the effectiveness of the measures and institutional arrangements Member States have put in place to enforce non-discrimination legislation, including the rules they have laid down as regards the effectiveness, proportionality and dissuasiveness of sanctions in cases of discrimination”, which coincides with the [Future of Equality Legislation in Europe roundtable discussion conclusion](#) organised by Equinet in that current sanctions “do not guarantee effective redress nor do they act as an effective deterrent”. Further, FRA signals that the problem of underreporting is inextricably linked to the perceived redress for the victim, and should therefore be reinforced by member states.

The [European Commission has noted](#) that “Some national courts tend to establish rather moderate levels of damages, favour non-monetary compensation or offer amounts of compensation at the lower end of the scale. Such tendencies may discourage victims from taking legal action or from asking for pecuniary compensation in court”. The [European Parliament has also noted that](#) “...at this stage few countries are considered to have appropriate sanctions in place.”

Other areas of law have given further and stronger guidance on sanctions, especially regarding the dissuasiveness of such violations, and are regarded as dissuasive such as Data Protection or Consumer related legislation in the EU.

This commissioned research aims, building upon [Equinet previous work](#) in this area, to explore what redress for the victim means and is understood across European countries (supported by recent CJEU case law) and give an understanding of the elements that effective redress should contain. To that end, it should consider parallel damages and underline the requisites to consider a sanction truly dissuasive and effective by also comparing with other EU regulated areas to respect the proportionality principle. The study will conclude with observations aimed at the different enforcement chain actors, including Equality Bodies about ways in which they can contribute to making legal redress and sanctions truly effective.

Target Audience: All actors in the enforcement chain of Equality and anti-discrimination legislation, notably, National Equality Bodies’ legal experts, national and European legislators.

Expected outputs:

- The publication of a study by a commissioned expert on legal redress and sanctions applied in discrimination cases

Expected outcomes: All actors in the enforcement chain of Equality and anti-discrimination legislation, especially legal and policymakers, are better informed about legal redress and sanctions in their area of expertise and have a more comprehensive overview of these areas in analogous legislation and their interpretation.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Equality bodies working on cases without an identifiable individual victim

Context: While the Court of Justice of the European Union already established back in 2008 in the [Feryn case](#) that cases of discrimination could be brought without an identifiable victim, Equality Bodies have noted that this is irregularly applied at the national level. With increased work on AI and Hate speech (where cases often lack an identifiable individual victim), enabling and supporting Equality Bodies and other stakeholders in bringing these cases successfully to Court is outlined as a priority.

Nonetheless, this has not been a much-explored topic by Equality Bodies. The Equality Law working group will focus its 2022 work on this so that equality bodies and other rights defenders are allowed to bring such cases of discrimination. The Equinet study will build on the practical experience of equality bodies and will examine cases in which this kind of claim has been put forward successfully, explore the problematic areas of implementation and find common solutions through their expertise.

Objective: To analyse the practical problems that bringing discrimination cases without an identifiable victim poses from the perspective of National Equality Bodies.

Target Audience: National Equality Bodies legal experts and other interested stakeholders.

Expected outputs:

- **1 Workshop**
- **2 meetings** of the Equality Law Working Group
- Publication of a **study** on discrimination cases without an identifiable victim

Expected outcomes: Expected outcomes: Legal experts from equality bodies will be better equipped to face the practical problems bringing cases of discrimination to Court without an identifiable victim at the national level, in accordance with the CJEU *Feryn* doctrine.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Reasonable accommodation beyond disability

Context: While the concept and application of reasonable accommodation in disability is a well-developed and researched one, also by Equinet (the latest being Discussion Paper '[Reasonable Accommodation for persons with disabilities: Exploring challenges concerning its practical implementation](#)'), the use of this concept beyond the ground of disability remains relatively unexplored.

Equinet's 2019 [Taking Stock report](#) pointed out that "... provisions for reasonable accommodation should be provided for all discrimination grounds, in both employment and service provision. This would ensure an adequate and appropriate response to diversity and enhance the elimination of discrimination and the achievement of full equality in practice".

Building on previous publications, such as the European Network of Legal Experts in the Non-discrimination field 2013 report '[Reasonable accommodation beyond disability in Europe?](#)' this perspective will explore the use of such a concept by equality bodies across Europe.

Objective: The Perspective will highlight the work done by equality bodies as regards the application and development of reasonable accommodation measures beyond disability and build their capacities on this issue.

Target Audience: Equality bodies staff working on reasonable accommodation beyond disability.

Expected outputs:

- **One meeting** of the Working Group on Policy Formation
- A **Perspective** of the Working Group on Policy Formation on reasonable accommodation applied to grounds beyond disability

Expected outcomes: Equality bodies are better equipped and well informed on the application of reasonable accommodation on other grounds than disability.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Climate Change

Responses to climate change in Europe: exploring the role and potential of equality bodies

Context: As climate change is deeply and rapidly transforming our societies, the climate justice movement is also growing. Climate marches, led by young people, urged for immediate and fair actions from policymakers. NGOs representing specific groups, such as women, Roma people, migrants or people from ethnic minorities are underlining that they are already suffering disproportionately from the effects of the climate crisis, and that they will be further affected in the future. This indicates that climate change and responses to climate emergencies is an equality issue.

In the meantime, climate change is becoming a central policy priority at national, European and international level. In 2019, the EU developed an entire legal and policy package dedicated to tackling climate change and mitigating risks: the European Green Deal. The Green Deal aims at transforming the EU energy, transport and technology sector while providing financial support for making EU and national economies more sustainable. But is this action plan equality compliant? And can equality bodies play a role in ensuring that climate actions are protecting the most marginalised groups against discrimination and ensuring substantive equality for all?

A preliminary engagement on this topic from the perspective of equality bodies already took place in 2019 with the release of [Equinet's Perspective "Equality Bodies contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals"](#) and with the participation of [Equinet at the UN High Level Political](#)

[Forum 2019](#). Nevertheless, a more detailed and targeted examination of the roles and implications of the European Green Deal for equality bodies is both necessary and timely.

Objective: This commissioned research will aim at evaluating the current work of equality bodies on climate change and related challenges (such as access to housing and resources, health vulnerabilities and socio-economic inequalities) and their potential for ensuring an equality approach to climate policies, laws and actions. The research will also be partly based on an equality assessment of the European Green Deal.

Target Audience: The research is primarily aimed at equality bodies to explore and highlight their potential role for engaging on climate change. The research is also aimed at national and European policymakers to reflect on the equality aspects of climate policies, in particular the European Green Deal.

Expected outputs:

- A **commissioned research** on climate change and the potential of equality bodies, preferably carried out by young researchers

Expected outcomes: The commissioned research will provide a deeper understanding of the equality implications of climate action, and of the current and potential role played by equality bodies in this field.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

In 2022, in line with the commitment laid out in the Equinet Strategic Plan 2019-2022 to serve its Members as best as it can, Equinet will continue to strengthen its focus on Membership engagement.

Ensuring that Members remain connected with the Network, interested in its activities and engaged with its internal and external debates guarantees that it remains relevant to the Members, meets their expectations and is well-placed to support them with challenges. In order to maintain and further expand the links between Equinet and its Members, different initiatives will be pursued.

Last year, the Membership and Network Development Officer continued to ensure that the health of the Network, the impact of the activities carried out and the needs arising at Members' level in perpetually evolving national and European contexts were communicated back to the Secretariat and the Board, in order to inform and influence the implementation of the work and the future direction of the Network. In 2022, the Officer will continue to act as a main point of contact for all things related to membership, including supporting equality bodies in the context of calls for proposals on equality funding where possible.

In 2021, the Secretariat worked on developing solutions to create a new Members' Forum, an online area that would allow members to keep informed about all Equinet activities and European developments on equality and non-discrimination, as well as to be able to engage with each other in an accessible and interactive manner. In 2022, the work to refine and maintain this online forum will continue, managed primarily by the Membership and Network Development Officer.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective C

COMMUNICATION

Communicating is a crucial aspect in the functioning of an efficient network. It is our ambition to reinforce the communication capacities of the Network and the Secretariat. To this end, we have developed a new communication strategy with both an internal and an external communication focus. Values-based communication is a crucial factor for several of the core missions of the Network, in terms of **internal as well as external communication**. This means:

- Using techniques to make the content and knowledge that are created within the Network as easily transferable and “usable” as possible.
- Ensuring that the flows of information within the Network are optimised, between the Secretariat and Members and directly between Members themselves.
- Communicating the work done and the knowledge created by the Network in an efficient way to relevant audiences, building on our work around values-based communication and positive narratives.
- Ensure that the interests of the Members are defended, promoted in the right places and to the right people.
- Identifying and communicating high-level information: we will reinforce the added-value of the messages that are circulating through the Network and share information with a clear added-value for its intended audiences.
- This centrality of added-value will be extended to the products that are generated by the Network: Generating and disseminating knowledge about equality, developments and innovation in the field, equality legislation and policy, and highlighting in particular the work and contribution of equality bodies.
- Promoting positive narratives developed around values-based messages linked to equality and non-discrimination.

We will continue to prioritise and seek to continuously improve our **communication with members**. We will further work to sustain active membership communication and engagement as well as the sense of belonging to the Network through a variety of innovative communication tools.

Expected outputs:

- Equinet Website
- Members Area
- Equality Blog with expert opinions on key developments in the field of equality

- Newsletters to members and external audiences
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn): each channel will receive optimised content
- Publications
- Webinars

Expected outcomes:

While we expect a direct impact of this reinforced communication focus, we also look past the short-term vision to embrace a longer-term approach in our objectives.

In the short term, we expect the “Equinet experience” to be of better quality for its Members, with positive impact on participation and on the knowledge produced.

In the long run, we expect to reinforce cohesion of the network with Members more engaged at all stages of operation, which will increase the impact of our outputs.

We also expect the message from equality bodies to come across better to other stakeholders, positively impacting the positioning of equality and equality bodies with them.

Strategic Objective A

Strategic Objective B

Strategic Objective C

ENGAGEMENT WITH PARTNERS

Equinet will continue to engage directly with the European Commission, specifically the Equality Directorate in DG Justice as well as other Directorates and DGs responsible for relevant equality and fundamental rights issues. We will strive to build links and cooperation with the Commission’s new Task Force on Equality. Equinet will also engage with relevant high-level expert groups and networks of the European Commission. In particular, Equinet will sustain engagement in its role as Observer to the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and will continue its engagement with the European Commission High Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity and also with the Subgroup on Equality Data, created within the framework of that Group.

Equinet will also strengthen its engagement with relevant actors working on anti-discrimination at European Commission level, particularly the first-ever European Commission anti-racism coordinator, the European Commission’s coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred and the European Commission’s coordinator on combating antisemitism.

Equinet will engage with the European Parliament (EP), in particular with the committees relevant for equality issues, as well as relevant EP thematic Intergroups and Members of the European Parliament interested in the work of equality bodies and in topics relating to equality, non-discrimination and gender equality. Following the success of its [“Online Roundtable: Future of Equality Legislation in Europe”](#) from October 2020, which brought together for the first time on such scale members of the European Parliament and representatives of Equality Bodies, as well as its continuing collaboration

with EP members throughout 2021, in 2022 Equinet plans to further develop and expand its sustained and targeted engagement with members of the EP.

Equinet will strive to continue building links with the General Secretariat and successive Presidencies of the Council of the EU, capitalising also on links that our members have with national governments. During the past years, the active involvement of Equinet in events organized by Presidencies of the Council of the EU, including a meeting of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council configuration (EPSCO), suggests a tendency towards markedly increased engagement with the Council of the EU, a tendency which Equinet will strive to preserve and further build upon during 2022.

Equinet will pursue and further strengthen its engagement and cooperation with relevant European Union agencies, in particular the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the newly established European Labour Authority (ELA).

Equinet will continue its active participation in the thematic Cooperation Platform established with the FRA, the Council of Europe and the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI). The CoE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform covers cooperation in the field of advancing social and economic rights and since its launch in 2015 has enabled the organization of an average two events per year. These meetings of the Collaborative Platform bring together national equality bodies, alongside other national, regional and international human rights actors, in order to build their capacity to find responses to fundamental rights challenges in Europe, with a focus on coordinated action on economic and social rights.

Equinet will pursue its ongoing engagement with ENNHRI through continued close cooperation with its Members and Secretariat. This will include linking with ENNHRI's working group focusing on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as appropriate. In this context, Equinet will pursue close cooperation with the EU Framework for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the CRPD Committee as appropriate.

Equinet will also strengthen its engagement with other relevant organisations at European level, such as the Council of Europe and its bodies, OSCE-ODIHR, UN OHCHR, European Ombudsman, as well as civil society and social partners. At the level of the UN, in 2022, Equinet is planning to strengthen its engagement with the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) by building upon its successful experience at a side event for the tenth session of the OEWGA in 2019. Regarding the Council of Europe, Equinet will further develop and expand its engagement in its newly acquired role as Observer to the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI). In addition, Equinet will continue its close collaboration with relevant bodies within the Council of Europe working on anti-discrimination and artificial intelligence, in specific the Council of Europe Ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI).

Equinet will continue working closely with the Agency for Fundamental Rights of the EU (FRA) and other relevant partners to ensure a sustained focus on and build members' capacity to use the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU in their work.

Equinet takes an active role in the C9 Group, an inter-institutional project team, working on promoting and communicating human rights, consisting of chief communication officers of the following nine organisations: UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Council of Europe,

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), European Commission DG Justice, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). FRA is convening and presiding the general monthly meetings, as well as topic-dedicated sessions with the aim of increasing the impact of the activities and output of the institutional human rights architecture in Europe resulting from more timely, relevant and close cooperation and coordination of the C9 members.

Strategic Objective B

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

In 2022, Equinet expects to have a team of 8 full-time staff or equivalent, as well as a number of traineeships. The budget for 2022 is of similar scale to that of the previous year. 2022 will also mark Equinet's current 4-year Strategic Plan (2019-2022) coming to an end, therefore planning will start on the exciting and ambitious process of developing a new Strategic Plan for the Equinet Network, engaging with its Members and key partners, looking ahead to the next years to come for equality. This process will be led by the Equinet Executive Board (nine Members to be elected for a new Board mandate 2021-2023) and the Secretariat, with external expert support, in close cooperation and consultation with national equality bodies regarding their future needs and ambitions.

With the current size and scope of the Network, a permanent focus on transparency, efficiency, value for money and good financial management overall will be enforced under the supervision of Equinet Management and the Executive Board (in particular the Equinet Treasurer and Chair of the Board). Internal procedures regarding all aspects of managing the Network will be reviewed or established where they are to be kept updated or to be improved.

Given the uncertainties about event organisation going into the new year, special care will be dedicated towards consolidating and further developing the digital capacities of the Equinet Secretariat. Online events such as webinars, training sessions, online conferences or meetings have become part of our daily professional lives and Equinet will ensure to keep up to speed with new developments how best to harness the potential of digital tools to further its objectives in the service of its members. Equinet will also consider learnings on planning and organising hybrid events in the future, as well as considering and planning selected in-person work meetings and events, when might be possible and welcome by its members, in line with public health developments and measures in future.

Strategic Objective C

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

There are many activities carried out within the Equinet Network. All of them have the purpose of improving the knowledge, expertise, efficiency, profile and positioning of Equinet Members. But how do we know whether we are successful? Whether the change that we are trying to make is really happening?

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) is a concept that was born in the field of development aid to help review and improve development programmes. It basically takes a hard look at the situation as it is, the change you are trying to implement and the actions you are taking in order to reach this change and it can tell you whether you are on a good track or not. A series of specific indicators is developed and data is collected as activities are implemented and fed into the framework to monitor progress.

In 2019, the Equinet Secretariat commissioned a consultancy to help it develop a fully-fledged Monitoring & Evaluation Framework. In 2020, the Equinet Secretariat began using this M&E framework in order to better assess the quality and impact of the activities that are implemented by the Network and established a baseline that will be used in the coming years to measure progress and performance. This is a continuous process that will need to be consistently upheld over the years to build comparability and learning. In 2021, the process of data collection and analysis was improved and refined in line with Equinet's needs and in 2022, we will continue to develop and apply these concepts to ensure that our work is as impactful as possible. The data gathered will comply with the requirements of the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Strategic Objective C

PROVISIONAL BUDGET FOR 2022

Cost Centre	Budget 2022	Budget 2021	Diff 2021/2020
Staff Costs	740,000	727,513	12,487
Travel & Accom.	223,406	241,250	-17,844
Secretariat Travel	15,000	33,950	-18,950
Design & Printing	21,100	24,250	-3,150
Dissemination	5,000	12,000	-7,000
External experts *	48,396	5,808	42,588
Events costs	36,488	52,254	-15,766
Study	25,410	15,000	10,410
Book-keeping	13,500	13,200	300
External auditor	4,200	3,900	300
External Evaluator	7,260	8,000	-740
Rent	90,000	90,000	0
Office costs	9,000	10,875	-1,875
Digital capacity	24,740	25,000	-260
Amortisation	1,500	2,000	-500
Total Budget	1,265,000	1,265,000	0

Source of Income	Income	Funding %
EC Grant	1.200.000	94,86%
Membership Fees	65.000	5,14%
Total Income	1.265.000	100,00%

*includes web expert (15.000) and Strategic Plan expert (7.260)