



## **AGM 2021 Voting Document (9 November 2021)**

**DRAFT MINUTES OF**

**THE 15<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF**

**EQUINET**

**EUROPEAN NETWORK OF EQUALITY BODIES**

**Friday 16 October 2020**

Online

## **Attendance**

### **Equinet Members' representatives**

Please refer to the attendance list attached (**Annex 1**)

### **Attending Board Members**

Laurence BOND, Director, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), Ireland

Patrick CHARLIER, Co-Director, Unia (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities), Belgium (Treasurer)

Valérie FONTAINE, Advisor for Partnerships and Public Relations, Defender of Rights, France

Rhoda GARLAND, Executive Director, Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability, Malta

Rainer HILTUNEN, Head of Office, Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, Finland

Sandra KONSTATZKY, Director, Ombud for Equal Treatment, Austria

Miha LOBNIK, Head of Institution, Advocate of the Principle of Equality, Slovenia

Konstantinos BARTZELIOTIS, Senior Investigator / Equal Treatment Department, Greek Ombudsman, Greece

Tena ŠIMONVIĆ EINWALTER, Deputy Ombudswoman, Ombudswoman, Croatia (Chair)

### **Equinet Secretariat**

Sarah Cooke O'Dowd (Communication Officer)

Jone Elizondo-Urrestarazu (Legal and Policy Officer)

Anne Gaspard (Executive Director)

Moana Genevey (Policy Officer)

Yannick Godin (Administration and Finance Officer)

Sophie Hale (Membership and Network Development Officer)

Tamás Kádár (Deputy Director - Head of Policy and Legal team)

Levente Kollar (Communication Consultant)

Julia Konowrocka (Policy and Communication Assistant – Trainee)

## **Quorum**

45 Equinet Members attended the Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2020, giving a total of 45 voting Equinet Members represented at AGM 2020. Consequently, in accordance with the Equinet Statutes, the quorum for a valid Equinet Annual General Meeting was reached (at least half of the whole 49 Members should be represented at an AGM)

### **Decision making threshold**

In line with the Statutes of the organisation, the set validity threshold for the Equinet AGM (Annual General Meeting) is majority. This implies that 50 percent of Equinet Members need to vote positively (at least 25 out of 49, in this case) in order for decisions to be adopted.

# AGENDA

## Equinet Annual General Meeting (AGM)

16 October 2020

*Venue: Online via Zoom Meetings*

8:45 - 9:20	Technical Check-in (open)	
9:20-10:45	<b>Session 1 – Equinet, the European Network of Equality Bodies</b> Chair: Tena Šimonović Einwalter, Chair - Equinet Executive Board	
9:20 - 9:50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome and introduction</li> </ul>	
	<b>Report on Equinet Workplan 2020</b> - Tena Šimonović Einwalter, Equinet Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report on Equinet work and activities</li> <li>• Funding &amp; Finance – Patrick Charlier, Treasurer (Equinet Executive Board)</li> <li>• Update on Equinet Membership</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q&amp;A – Members’ discussion</li> </ul>	
9:50 - 10:10	<b>Introduction of Equinet Work Plan 2021 proposal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction Anne Gaspard, Executive Director and Tamás Kádár, Deputy Director (<i>Head of Legal and Policy</i>)</li> <li>• Q&amp;A – Members’ discussion</li> </ul>	
10.10-10.20	<b>ONLINE VOTING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accounts 2019</li> <li>• Minutes AGM 2019</li> <li>• Proposed Amendment to Work Plan 2021</li> <li>• Work Plan and Budget 2021</li> </ul>
10:20 -10:40	<b>Board Proposal for increase of Equinet Annual Membership Fee</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction by Patrick Charlier - Equinet Board TreasurerProcess, rationale and approach for the Board proposal</li> <li>• Discussion with Members, Q &amp; A</li> </ul>	
10:40 – 10:45	<b>ONLINE VOTING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposal Equinet Membership Fee</li> </ul>
10:45 -11:00	<b>Coffee Break</b> (Voting results will be displayed/announced)	

11:00 - 12:35	<p><b>Session 2 – Forum for discussions</b></p> <p><i>Participants will have the opportunity to discuss in plenary</i></p> <p><b>Chair: Tena Šimonović Einwalter, Chair - Equinet Executive Board</b></p>
11:00 – 12:10	<p><b>2020 an unprecedented year: impact of COVID-19 and European developments</b></p> <p><i>European Commission perspective:</i></p> <p><b>Irena Moozova, Director for Equality, DG Justice and Consumers, European Commission</b></p> <p><i>Selected equality bodies' perspectives:</i></p> <p><b>Adam Bodnar, Commissioner for Human Rights, Poland</b>  <b>Claire Hédon, Defender of Rights, France</b>  <b>Andreas Pottakis, Greek Ombudsman, Greece</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The equality issues linked to the pandemic that are now emerging in their context.</i></li> <li>• <i>The plans for their work in addressing such issues in the future context of living with Covid-19.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Open discussion with Members on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What new challenges are evident from an equality perspective in the current phase of living with Covid-19.</li> <li>• What new plans are being developed by equality bodies for their work in a context of living with Covid-19?</li> </ul> <p><b>Next steps and key learnings</b></p>
12:10 – 12:35	<p><b>Member's presentation of innovative new project</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Project InWeGe (Income, Wealth and Gender):</b> research of gender pay gap and practical web tool.</li> <li>• <b>Side event – Q&amp;A (5 min)</b></li> <li>• <b>(Presenter/Facilitator: Liisa Pakosta, the Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment, Estonia)</b></li> </ul>
12:35 - 12:45	<p><b>Final remarks and closing of the AGM</b></p> <p>Anne Gaspard, Equinet Executive Director</p>

## **SESSION 1 – Equinet, the European Network of Equality Bodies**

*Chair: Tena Šimonović Einwalter, Chair - Equinet Executive Board*

### **Welcome and introduction**

On 16 October 2020, Tena Šimonović Einwalter, Chair of the Equinet Board of Directors (the Board) and Deputy Ombudswoman of Croatia, delivered a welcome address and declared the **fifteenth Equinet Annual General Meeting (AGM)** open at 09:20. The Equinet AGM was held virtually, connected to online platform and secure online voting system, given the pandemic health situation.

### **Report on Equinet Workplan 2020 and activities, Funding & Finance; Update on Equinet Membership**

On behalf of the Equinet Board, Equinet Chair Tena Šimonović Einwalter, gave a comprehensive report on **Equinet activities for 2020**. With the further input of Patrick Charlier (Equinet Treasurer), an **overview of the financial situation for 2020** was introduced to the Members, alongside the future Equinet budget 2021 and the EC funding perspective.

Tena Šimonović Einwalter gave updates on changes in the leadership of some national equality bodies (NEBs) in Europe, welcomed new heads within the membership and shed light on certain situation about finishing mandates and challenges related to the appointment of new heads (e.g Poland, Germany, Serbia).

### **Introduction of Equinet Work plan 2021**

Equinet Executive Director Anne Gaspard and Deputy Director Tamas Kadar gave a comprehensive overview of activities planned within the **Equinet Work Plan 2021 proposal**. The activities and priorities of the Work Plan for next year were elaborated under the leadership of the Equinet Executive Board, in close consultation with Members Equality bodies, Equinet Working Groups and liaising with key partners and stakeholders.

The Ombudsperson of Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Lithuania presented a written amendment according to the AGM rules concerning the section “Engagement with partners” on pages 33 and 34 of the Work Plan. No substantive questions were raised by members.

### **Online Voting:**

As foreseen in the AGM agenda and on the basis of voting documents previously sent to Equinet Members, the Chair invited Equinet Members **to cast their votes on the following documents:**

- Minutes AGM 2019
- Accounts 2019
- Proposed Amendment to Work Plan 2021

- Work Plan and Budget 2021
- The draft Minutes of the Equinet AGM 2019 were adopted unanimously (45 votes in favour) by the General Assembly of Equinet Members.
- The closed Accounts for the year 2019 were adopted unanimously (45 votes in favour) by the General Assembly of Equinet Members.
- The Proposed Amendment to Work Plan 2021 was adopted unanimously (45 votes in favour) by the General Assembly of Equinet Members.
- The Work Plan and Budget 2021 were adopted unanimously (45 votes in favour) by the General Assembly of Equinet Members.

**Board Proposal for increase of Equinet Annual Membership Fee** (see Annex 2)

Patrick Charlier (Equinet Board Treasurer) presented the Board proposal for an increase of the Equinet Annual Membership fees, covering the process, rationale and approach for the Board proposal. The proposal was circulated and submitted for review to the Equinet Members as voting document in good time prior to the Equinet AGM.

**Discussion with Members, Q & A**

No substantive questions were raised. Laurence Bond thanked the Board Treasurer and added that the presentation was very clear and helpful.

**Online Voting:**

As foreseen in the AGM agenda and on the basis of voting documents previously sent to Equinet Members, the Chair invited Equinet Members to cast their votes on the Board Proposal for increase of Equinet Annual Membership Fee.

**The Board Proposal for increase of Equinet Annual Membership Fee was adopted by majority (34 in favour, 4 against, 5 abstain) by the General Assembly of Equinet Members.**

**-- AGM COFFEE BREAK FROM 10:45 -11:00 --**

## SESSION 2 – Forum for discussions

*Chair: Tena Šimonović Einwalter, Chair - Equinet Executive Board*

### **2020 an unprecedented year: impact of COVID-19 and European developments**

European Commission perspective - Irena Moozova, Director for Equality, DG Justice and Consumers

The Director for Equality, Irena Moozova, stated that though nobody could have foreseen what would happen this year, what mattered was that we were together for this event. She highlighted that the Commission would not allow COVID 19 to affect its work on equality, which is more important than ever and gave a few examples of the effects of the pandemic:

- Disproportionate effect on older persons, ethnic minorities, LGBTI people, women and girls.
- Alarming number of Roma people not being able to participate in distance learning
- Ethnic groups used as scapegoats
- Confinement measures put women, children and LGBTI people at higher risk of gender-based violence (GBV)
- Empowering the most disempowered groups should be our priority

She highlighted some of the European Commission's work and efforts in this context:

- Letter to relevant MS highlighting need for specific measures towards vulnerable groups during COVID-19. Strong attention on initiating dialogue through new financial instrument on COVID-19.
- Roma people should be at the core of our attention, adoption of the new EU Framework, new proposal for a Council Recommendation.
- Particularly committed to ensure rights of LGBTI people, new LGBTI Strategy at EU level.
- Fights against stereotypes and biases, strongly confirmed with New EU Action Plan on Racism.
- Monitoring gender dimension of the pandemic. Women have been at the frontline, as health and care workers, among the lowest paid workers but the first to suffer. Ensured that our response to COVID 19 has a clear gender dimension, including in the next MFF (Multi-annual Financial Framework).
- EU needs to strengthen its legal framework, and we welcome Equinet's initiative to put it high on the agenda with their recent inspiring Roundtable on Equality Law. We must ensure that provisions in place are fully implemented on the ground. MS and EBs have given information to the EC on the implementation of the Directives. EC will publish a report in 2021. We will stress the role and functioning of EBs, in line with standards for EBs (appointment rules for independence, issue of funding and staffing of EBs). It will guide us for our future endeavours and may lead to new legislation in 2022.
- Pay Transparency Initiative, exploring role of equality bodies as key enforcers
- Hate crimes and hate speech, strong commitment at political level.
- Some important gaps remain, EC will not give up in adopting the Horizontal Directive, with your strong support.

COVID-19 and EBs: key source of information. This effort will offer fertile ground to continue.

### **Selected equality bodies' perspectives**

Tena Šimonović Einwalter introduced selected equality body perspectives on the impact of the crisis and also informed that Equinet planned to send a letter on the day of the AGM about the situation in Poland concerning the mandate of the Commissioner for Human Rights.

### **Adam Bodnar, Commissioner for Human Rights, Poland**

Thanked Equinet and Equality Bodies' network community for continued support for the last 5 years, and you did not leave room for compromise, which was a sign of your integrity. The involvement in equality issues by the office of the Commissioner for Human Rights in Poland was the subject of political criticism, and the office could count on Equinet support. If the Constitutional Court decides that the current Commissioner cannot continue his function, Adam Bodnar will have to leave the office.

Views and recommendations concerning COVID-19:

- Between March and October, the Commissioner's office received 18,000 new complaints and 4200 concerned COVID-19. On health, education, social foster homes, sanitary inspection etc.
- Important issue: domestic violence, isolation in quarantine heightened the issue. Created a media and social media campaign, called a "personal safety plan".
- Access to education. Fighting with a pandemic means isolation, and more concern for children living in Roma settlements: excluded from education because of lack of access to a computer.
- Support for elderly people, as they are especially affected.
- Need for sufficient number of care workers and health workers to assist during the pandemic.

The pandemic was a stress test for the whole State. If you had structural inequalities, the pandemic showed how they would affect people. The Equinet Recommendation was helpful to submit recommendations to authorities but the trend in Poland is to limit the potential of any body dealing with equality issues. We had another process during the pandemic, electing the President. There is a cultural war in Poland, against LGBTI rights. It is used as a cover-up by the government on negligence regarding the pandemic.

### **Claire Hédon, Defender of Rights, France**

Took office this year after the end of the mandate of Jacques Toubon. Has a double background as a lawyer and a journalist, specialised on health, immigration and extreme poverty. Working on access to rights to the poorest. The Defender of Rights (Défenseur Des Droits DDD) has been fighting to integrate the ground of social precariousness in French anti-discrimination law.

There are two things to observe about COVID-19:

- Disproportionately affects people with protected characteristics: elderly, people with disability, children, marginalised persons. DDD repeatedly denounced poor, precarious and unsanitary conditions of some minority groups. The relationship between mortality and poverty was evidenced in a study by economists.
- A number of measures taken to respond to the sanitary crisis involved a second round of disproportionate effects sometimes on the same groups

Some of the issues seen include the refusal of payment in cash, consequences of post office closures, refusal of access to electricity and water in camps, police tendency to control certificates in certain urban area or targeting certain groups and homeless persons. In France, the grounds of social or economic vulnerability, family situation, health, etc are a leverage to address these discriminations.

The mainstreamed health policy has issues. DDD reminded authorities that any decision taken to extend lockdown based on age or health could be discriminatory. Age alone is not a sufficient and necessary condition to be a risk as such. There have been similar debates in Belgium. In September, a national NGO brought to our attention the situation of all children in on slum being left out of schools for a long time, as a disproportionate reaction to one child of this slum having contracted COVID- 19. This crisis has a magnifying glass effect on certain inequalities and discrimination, which has shed light on blind corners of inequalities. Our work is now, more than ever, to make these corners visible, show their possible intersectionality, and fight for redress.

### **Andreas Pottakis, Greek Ombudsman, Greece**

Greek Ombudsman approach:

- Series of recommendations with view to ensuring additional care would be given to most disadvantaged citizens: elderly, homeless, children, third country nationals (asylum seekers and migrants), people deprived of liberty (especially those in prison and in police stations).
- For the elderly: recommendations on facilitating IT communication with relatives through strict quarantine measures.
- For the children: recommendations on the use of IT, expedite programmes for offering infrastructures for most disadvantaged families with laptop and connection, also reconsider pricing, on appropriate measures for children's quarantine and COVID tests.
- For people with disabilities: recommendation to reconsider a piece of legislation and adjust it to COVID reality. Certification of disability and granting of necessary benefits.
- Compliance on special leaves granted by government, discrimination on same right of leave for both mothers and fathers. Disadvantaged treatment for father due to stereotypes.
- Massive collection of data during pandemic: how will it be put into use or abuse?

### **Open discussion with Members**

Two Guiding Questions:

- What new challenges are evident from an equality perspective in the current phase of living with Covid-19.

- What new plans are being developed by equality bodies for their work in a context of living with Covid-19?

The Chair invited and welcomed contributions by a range of participating Members' representatives sharing the perspective from their national equality body and context.

Laurence Bond, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC):

- We explain that risks faced are linked to some vulnerable groups' identity. Many risks are also socio-economic, linked to weak socio-economic status. It underlines an important intersectionality issue: the relation between identity characteristics and socio-economic risks.

Jan-Peter Loof, Netherlands Institute for Human Rights:

- Hearing individual cases on discrimination which were postponed during the pandemic. Now trying to catch-up on the backlog.
- Lobbying and influence: Netherlands Institute for Human Rights decided to focus its next annual human rights report on recovering from COVID, including human rights in the post-COVID period. All issues will be addressed.
- Particular issue in the Netherlands is the idea of division in society because of COVID (isolation of everyone above 60). This is a really strong discussion in the Netherlands. The Dutch government has been rejecting this division idea along the lines of age. We have a limited scope on age discrimination, limited to labour.
- Seen an increase of xenophobic remarks and scapegoating, as a result of the pandemic

Evelyn Collins, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI):

- Welcome and useful to share each other's perspectives, valuable role of Equinet and the Recommendation for rebuilding after COVID.
- In Northern Ireland, COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities, particularly for pregnant workers, people with disabilities etc.
- ECNI doing a lot of policy work encouraging policymakers to do the right thing. Existing equality framework provides a good framework, but the absence of data is problematic.

Ian Feldman, Moldova, Council for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality:

- Stigmatisation of people infected with COVID.
- Funeral process, separate parts of cemeteries (excessive and not necessary).
- Reverse migration, people coming back to home countries due to losing jobs in non-EU countries.
- COVID and the election.

Melanie Field, Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) of Great Britain:

- The pandemic has highlighted socio-economic inequalities and structural discriminations faced by people with protected characteristics, e.g. taxi workers, public transport workers, health and social care workers.
- Building back better, how can we recover from the virus in a way that tackles structural inequalities.
- We produced a synthesis report about the impact of the virus on young people and children, but also on their employment opportunities.
- Race and equality: addressing structural inequalities, racial prejudice.
- Social care, attitude to older and disabled people.

- New narrative about equality and human rights framework.

### **Next steps and key learnings**

Tena Šimonovic Einwalter, as the Chair of the Equinet Executive Board, closed the session on COVID-19 and thanked members for their contributions to the discussion. She stated that as a European network, Equinet developed a useful COVID-19 online database collecting and showcasing what has been happening across Europe in relation to the impact of the pandemic on equality and equality bodies' work. She expressed that it is now more evident than ever that poverty and discrimination are two sides of the same coin and called on participants to search for a common answer together as this current crisis can be used as an opportunity to support our cause. She concluded that this crisis shows that there is much more work to be done by Equinet members.

### **Member's presentation of innovative new project (by video)**

Project InWeGe (Income, Wealth and Gender): research of gender pay gap and practical web tool - Liisa Pakosta, the Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment, Estonia

Due to a technical issue, the Estonian member's video was not able to be shown. However, they presented briefly on the content of the video, which can be found [here](#), which gives a small overview of their research and the web application tool which allows users to track the gender pay gap across Estonia, allowing them to see how it affects the pensions of the persons. The Estonian member hoped it will empower women in their negotiations in the labour market with reliable data.

### **Final remarks and closing of the AGM**

Anne Gaspard, Equinet Executive Director, addressed closing remarks and thanked everyone for their active engagement during the AGM, noting that exchanged views and ideas were well noted especially on standards for equality bodies and addressing COVID-19, and will be taken into account to guide Equinet's forthcoming work.

Finally, Anne Gaspard expressed appreciation for the support and key cooperation from Equinet's European and international partners, including the European Commission who kindly joined part of the AGM alongside Equinet members. She also warmly thanked the Equinet Team (and in particular Sophie Hale, Equinet Membership and Network Development Officer, who joined early in 2020) for their very hard and professional work preparing and supporting on the day this first Equinet AGM held online with our members across Europe.

*== The fifteenth Annual General Meeting of Equinet was officially closed at 13:00 on 16 October 2020 ==*

**ANNEX 1****EQUINET  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING****16 October 2020  
ONLINE****PARTICIPANTS' LIST****National Equality Bodies (Equinet Members)**

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>ORGANISATION</b>	<b>FIRST NAME</b>	<b>FAMILY NAME</b>
<b>Albania</b>	Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination	Blerina	Kokaj (Pirani)
<b>Albania</b>	Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination	Brunilda	Menalla
<b>Albania</b>	Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination	Robert	Gajda
<b>Austria</b>	Office of the Austrian Disability Ombudsman (Behindertenanwaltschaft)	Magdalena	Hahn
<b>Austria</b>	Ombud for Equal Treatment	Sandra	Konstatzky
<b>Belgium</b>	Instituut voor de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen	Liesbet	Stevens
<b>Belgium</b>	Unia	Patrick	Charlier
<b>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</b>	The Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Jasminka	Džumhur
<b>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</b>	The Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Neven	Pecelj
<b>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</b>	The Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Nives	Jukić
<b>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</b>	The Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Predrag	Raosavljević
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Commission for Protection against Discrimination	Todor	Kanchevski
<b>Croatia</b>	Office of the Ombudsman	Ana	Tekić
<b>Croatia</b>	Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities	Darijo	Jurišić

<b>Croatia</b>	Gender Equality Ombudsperson Croatia	Nebojša	Paunović
<b>Croatia</b>	Office of the Ombudsman	Tena	Šimonović Einwalter
<b>Cyprus</b>	OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATION AND THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (OMBUDSMAN)	Maria	Stylianou Lottides
<b>Czechia</b>	Office of the Public Defender of Rights	Veronika	Bazalova
<b>Estonia</b>	The Commissioner of Equality and Equal Treatment's Office	Art-Peeter	Roosve
<b>Estonia</b>	The Commissioner of Equality and Equal Treatment's Office	Kristel	Hook-Fasser
<b>Estonia</b>	The Commissioner of Equality and Equal Treatment's Office	Triin	Piip
<b>Finland</b>	Ombudsman for Equality	Jukka	Maarianvaara
<b>Finland</b>	Non-Discrimination Ombudsman	Kristina	Stenman
<b>Finland</b>	Non-Discrimination Ombudsman	Rainer	Hiltunen
<b>France</b>	Defenseur des droits	Claire	Hédon
<b>France</b>	Defenseur des droits	Néphèli	Yatropoulos
<b>France</b>	Défenseur des droits	Valérie	Fontaine
<b>Georgia</b>	Public Defender of Georgia	Ekaterine	Skhiladze
<b>Georgia</b>	Public Defender of Georgia	Ketevan	Shubashvili
<b>Germany</b>	Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency	Niklas	Hofmann
<b>Greece</b>	Greek Ombudsman	Andreas	Pottakis
<b>Greece</b>	Greek Ombudsman	Kalliopi	Lykovardi
<b>Greece</b>	THE GREEK OMBUDSMAN	KONSTANTINOS	BARTZELIOTIS
<b>Hungary</b>	Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights	Gábor	Schmidt dr
<b>Hungary</b>	Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights	Judit	Menyhart

<b>Hungary</b>	Equal Treatment Authority/Egyenlő Bánásmód Hatóság	Katalin	Gregor
<b>Hungary</b>	Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights	Tamás	Antal Heizer
<b>Ireland</b>	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission	Laurence	Bond
<b>Kosovo*</b>	Ombudsperson Institution of Kosovo	Marija	Radulovic
<b>Latvia</b>	Ombudsman's Office of the Republic of Latvia	Liena	Eisaka
<b>Lithuania</b>	Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson	Agneta	Skardžiuvienė
<b>Lithuania</b>	Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson	Laima	Vengalė-Dits
<b>Luxembourg</b>	CET - Centre pour l'égalité de traitement	Patrick	HURST
<b>Malta</b>	Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability	Rhoda	Garland
<b>Malta</b>	National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE)	Stephanie	Magro Gazzano
<b>Moldova</b>	Council for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality	Ian	Feldman
<b>Netherlands</b>	Netherlands Institute for Human Rights	Jan-Peter	Loof
<b>Norway</b>	Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud	Mona	Larsen-Asp
<b>Poland</b>	Commissioner for Human Rights	Adam	Bodnar
<b>Poland</b>	Commissioner for Human Rights	Magdalena	Kuruś
<b>Portugal</b>	Comissão para a Igualdade no Trabalho e no Emprego - CITE	Anita	Sares
<b>Portugal</b>	High Commission for Migration	Laurinda	dos Santos
<b>Portugal</b>	Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality	Teresa	Clode
<b>Romania</b>	National Council for Combatting Discrimination	Csaba Ferenc	Asztalos
<b>Serbia</b>	Commissioner for Protection of Equality	Jelena	Kotevic
<b>Slovakia</b>	Slovak National Centre for Human Rights	Beata	Babacova
<b>Slovenia</b>	Advocate of the Principle of Equality	Bostjan	Vernik Setinc

<b>Slovenia</b>	Advocate of the Principle of Equality	Miha	Lobnik
<b>Spain</b>	Institute of Women and for Equal Opportunities	Ana	LITE MATEO
<b>Spain</b>	Council for the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination	ROSARIO	MASEDA
<b>Sweden</b>	Swedish Equality Ombudsman	Carl	Ekström
<b>United Kingdom - NI</b>	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	Evelyn	Collins
<b>United Kingdom - GB</b>	Equality and Human Rights Commission of Great Britain	Laura	Mingins
<b>United Kingdom - GB</b>	Equality and Human Rights Commission of Great Britain	Melanie	Field

<b>External Participants</b>		
<b>FIRST NAME</b>	<b>FAMILY NAME</b>	<b>ORGANISATION</b>
Irena	Moozova	European Commission
Dorothea	Staes	European Commission
Niall	Crowley	Expert Adviser - WG Policy Formation

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



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## What is the role of the Membership fees?

Equinet's main source of funding comes from an annual grant from the European Commission. Currently, Equinet needs to **raise around 60,000€ (5%) annually** in membership fees in order to meet its **co-funding requirement** for the annual EC grant (currently around 1,200,000€ or 95% of total annual budget). This means, at the current rate of fee collection (around 70,000€/year), that Equinet can set aside annually around 10,000€ as financial reserves. These reserves were used to erase the debt build up that was accumulated before 2017.

Please bear in mind that in the last few years Equinet has been in an **exceptional situation** regarding its co-funding requirements (5%) for the core EC operating grant funding. Other organisations generally must come up with a 20% co-funding rate. Before 2015, Equinet was also requested to come up with a 20% co-funding rate, which led to financial challenges and the buildup of debt. Should there be an unfavorable change at EC level regarding our co-funding requirements, available reserves will need to be used.

The Equinet reserve fund currently sits at 31,208.73€.

## Rationale for raising additional reserves

Reserves can become essential in ensuring the further consolidation and/or expansion of Equinet and its operations:

- Indeed, the funds could be instrumental in obtaining **additional project-based grants** from other sources, as they generally have **higher co-funding requirements** (15-20%). One recent example is the EEA Norway Grant where extra resources would have been necessary in order to match co-funding requirements. Equinet's Grant bid was unsuccessful.
- Reserves can also be used to **directly finance activities** that are not covered under our different sources of funding. This also becomes important in view of the distinction recently made clear by the EC between EU-based Members (eligible for funding under our EC Grant) and non EU-based Members (non-eligible for funding).
- Reserves can also serve as a **"buffer" fund** to be tapped into in case of adversarial financial occurrences, like corrections and reimbursements following a financial audit.
- Under Belgian law (Equinet is incorporated in Belgium), non-profits are encouraged to set up a **social reserve fund** (not compulsory). This fund, mandatory for commercial ventures, ensures that employees get the full legal severance package in case the association folds. The fund should ideally cover 3 months of salary payment for the staff of the association. In Equinet's case, that would amount to roughly 162,000€. Funds allocated to this reserve may not be (at least easily) reassigned to any other end.

In order to strengthen the Equinet Network and its operational centre (the Secretariat) and to consolidate its financial structure, it is the conviction of the Equinet Board that further reserves need to be raised over time.

Therefore, the Equinet Board is proposing a revision of the current system, to be put to the vote of the General Assembly of Equinet Members at AGM 2020.