



EQUINET
European Network
of Equality Bodies



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TOGETHER FOR EQUALITY:

HIGHLIGHTS 2021



TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO	5
KEY DEVELOPMENTS	7
<i>STANDARDS FOR EQUALITY BODIES – THE LINCHPIN IN THE QUEST FOR A UNION OF EQUALITY</i>	8
<i>EQUALITY BODIES TACKLING RACISM AND RELATED INTOLERANCE</i>	10
<i>CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK IN EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION</i>	15
INNOVATING IN EQUALITY	20
OUR OPERATIONS	25
OUR PEOPLE	27
ACTIVITIES	33
PUBLICATIONS	36

FOREWORD





FOREWORD

2021 has been one of the busiest years of Equinet to date. The European Commission's push for a Union of Equality, supported by an increasing number of equality initiatives, means that the work of equality bodies is ever more prominent, and the role of Equinet to transfer knowledge between the national and European levels has never been more important.

Over the past year, we have provided convincing arguments for the relevance of legislation on standards for strong, effective, and independent equality bodies to enforce non-discrimination and rights in practice. Our expert advice has fed into the analysis of the Racial Equality Directive and the human rights implications of Artificial Intelligence, pointing out where gaps in anti-discrimination legislation may exist, how we could expand the list of protected grounds within non-discrimination legislation, as well as proposing solutions to the issue of institutional racism.

We have worked to strengthen and support equality bodies in a broad range of areas. For example, Equinet gave them space to share and brainstorm on how to tackle the challenges they faced with the evolving context of COVID-19 and resulting issues arising from the potential introduction of mandatory vaccinations. Identifying obstacles to securing equality compliant healthcare service provision, better protect right holders in this field, and to promote egalitarian access

to healthcare services broadened the discussion on healthcare. Developing members' competences in the field of equality mainstreaming using equality duties and equality impact assessments was another first for the Network, as was the opportunity to explore how equality and non-discrimination are conceived and implemented at the local level within municipalities and cities across Europe. Our members also received training on how to build persuasive arguments to promote their work, and tackle online hate speech.

The power of community was highlighted in a number of different ways last year. Equinet continued to build bridges with important partners, from civil society organisations to international human rights organisations, to identify how to tackle a range of inequalities together, build our understanding of how to engage with different equality and human rights mechanisms, and to raise awareness about the work of equality bodies. We are very grateful to all partners for their support, engagement and inspiration.

All of this was done within the context of uncertainty and fatigue resulting from the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our events were held predominantly online, which democratized access to them, but limited the possibility of networking opportunities that we hope to recover (at least partly) in 2022. Despite the complicated context, Equinet's member equality bodies' rose to the challenge to continue their engagement, leadership and ownership of the Network. We thank the Executive

Board in particular for their guidance, and look forward to the work of the new Board elected for the upcoming two years. Members' expertise, combined with that of our dedicated team in the Equinet Secretariat, provide the foundations for all our achievements. Sincere thanks are due to the Secretariat staff for their continuous hard work, enthusiasm and professionalism.

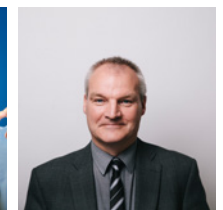
Finally, Equinet is very grateful to the European Commission, for its invaluable support through the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme and for its ongoing commitment to enable the potential of Equinet and support stronger national equality bodies. We also thank the Open Society Foundation for its support to our work to build the capacity of members on artificial intelligence. We look forward to pursuing and consolidating our close cooperation with all our members and partners in the coming year, working together to achieve strong and binding legislation on standards for equality bodies, which will help to achieve equality for all in Europe.



Anne Gaspard
Co-Director



Tamás Kádár
Co-Director



Laurence Bond
Chair of Executive Board



WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

OUR VISION AND PURPOSE

We believe in an equal Europe: where equality is a reality for everyone, diversity is valued, and all forms of discrimination have been eliminated.

Equinet is the European Network of Equality Bodies, a membership organisation bringing together 47 equality bodies from across Europe. Equinet promotes equality in Europe by supporting and enabling the work of national equality bodies. It supports equality bodies to be independent and effective as valuable catalysts for more equal societies.

Equality bodies are champions for the core EU value of equality and defenders of the right to non-discrimination. They 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. They are legally required to do so in relation to one, some, or all of the grounds of discrimination covered by European Union (EU) law – gender, race and ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and disability.

OUR APPROACH



Support

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



Networking

Equinet encourages and facilitates 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

Equinet carries out legal and policy research to inform European policy and legislative developments and provides relevant knowledge to those interested in equality and non-discrimination in Europe.



Expert Advice

Equinet contributes 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

Equinet promotes equality as a European value and seeks to advance diversity and solidarity in Europe.



OUR STRATEGIC AIMS 2019-2022

Strengthen and support equality bodies to achieve equality for all

Equinet, as a network, seeks to support the crucial role of equality bodies. We do so by facilitating the development of expert and institutional capacities of our Members, promoting the full implementation of European legislation and standards for equality bodies at national level, and providing opportunities for good practice exchange and peer-to-peer support.

Act as the expert voice of equality bodies to advance equality in Europe

As a network, we convey to the European level the practical experience of equality bodies in promoting equality and combatting discrimination on the ground. With a bottom-up and evidence-based approach, we raise awareness on the importance of equality and diversity and strengthen the appreciation and fulfilment of these across Europe. We act as the expert voice of equality bodies, maintaining deep and sustained relationships with European and international partners to promote equality and advance equal treatment legislation.

Sustain a resilient, engaged and innovative Network

Equinet is a network of and for its Members. Sustained network resilience is essential for the successful delivery of the first two objectives. Therefore, we strive to provide a supportive and collaborative environment for the substantial contribution and benefit of Members through knowledge-sharing, peer-exchange and support. Active membership engagement is a vital prerequisite for ensuring the development, innovation and strengthening of the Network to achieve its mission of promoting equality for all more effectively.



For equality bodies, the value of Equinet lies in the knowledge sharing, the support from peers, best practices, increasing their credibility in their national contexts and the policy/advocacy work done by Equinet as a long-term solution to the structural challenges they face in terms of mandate and independence among others. Even for equality bodies that don't experience national threats, they acknowledged that it was comforting to see that the network is offering support in this way and taking these concerns seriously.

- External Evaluation of Equinet 2021, based on interviews with members



KEY DEVELOPMENTS



1. STANDARDS FOR EQUALITY BODIES – THE LINCHPIN IN THE QUEST FOR A UNION OF EQUALITY



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

1. STANDARDS FOR EQUALITY BODIES – THE LINCHPIN IN THE QUEST FOR A UNION OF EQUALITY

While the EU Directives require all EU Member States and candidate countries to designate equality bodies, they say very little about what guarantees, resources and powers these institutions should have and how they should operate. Equinet has been continuously pointing to this as an obstacle to equality bodies living up to their full potential. This has been highlighted in the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) [recommendation on standards](#) for equality bodies in 2017, as well as the European Commission [Recommendation on standards for equality bodies](#) in 2018. However, none of these documents are currently legally binding on Member States.

In the past year or so, we have had a major breakthrough in the recognition of equality bodies and acknowledging the need for legally binding standards to regulate their status and functioning. It started with the [EU's anti-racism action plan](#) raising the possibility of proposing EU-level legislation to strengthen the role and independence of equality bodies, followed by a similar commitment in the [LGBTIQ+](#), [Roma](#) and [Disability](#) Equality Strategies.

On 19 March 2021, the European Commission published their [Report on the application of the Race and Employment Equality Directives](#) (with an additional [Staff working document dedicated to equality bodies](#)). This report underlined the important role of equality bodies and reiterated the commitment by the European

Commission to introduce legally binding standards for their independence, mandate, powers, resources and accessibility. The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) also published an [Opinion on the implementation of the two directives](#), with a specific focus on equality bodies and explicitly recommending new legislation to strengthen equality bodies.

Against this backdrop, in April 2021 Equinet published a [paper on our ambition for EU legislation on equality bodies](#). We recommended taking into account the diversity of equality bodies, ensuring a comprehensive mandate, adequate powers, full independence, sufficient resources as well as a robust monitoring system to ensure correct implementation. We also requested the close involvement of equality bodies and Equinet in the process.

Over the summer we contributed to the public consultation on the Roadmap prepared by the Commission for this legislative initiative. In the meantime, members of Equinet's Project on Standards for Equality Bodies also had two annual meetings, among others, giving them a chance to discuss the legislative initiative on standards with the European Commission. In the framework of the Project, a small group of five equality bodies also volunteered to pilot the use of indicators on [mandate](#) and [independence](#) that the Project developed in 2019-20.

At the beginning of 2022 we are closer than ever to realizing our ambition of securing legally binding EU standards for equality bodies, even if much of the legislative process and the negotiations between the co-legislators are still ahead of us.

Equinet continues, and even reinforces, work in this field that will be, ultimately, to the benefit of all those who experienced discrimination or are at risk of discrimination.



2. EQUALITY BODIES TACKLING RACISM AND RELATED INTOLERANCE





KEY DEVELOPMENTS

2. EQUALITY BODIES TACKLING RACISM AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

In 2021, Equinet continued work relating to awareness raising to tackle racism and related intolerance that racialised communities suffer, as well as bridge-building to build upon the power of community to tackle these issues.

a. Overcoming challenges faced by equality bodies in the national implementation of the Race Equality Directive

2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the EU’s Race Equality Directive as the first ‘new generation’ European equality law. It was also the first legislative instrument to require Member States to designate equality bodies at the national level. The **Anti-Racism Plan** presented in 2020 announced that, in 2021, the Commission would report on the application of the Directive and would follow up with any possible legislation by 2022. Consequently, in 2021, the European Commission published a **report on the application of Council Directive 2000/43/EC**. Equinet published a **“Equinet Brief: Assessing Gaps in the Racial Equality Directive”**, that draws from previous existing Equinet studies that have explored the challenges faced by equality bodies at the national level in relation to the implementation of Council Directive 2000/43/EC (Racial

Equality Directive). Within the document, areas of concern for equality bodies are highlighted through the exploration of legislative gaps within the Directive.

Members’ Success Stories

During a football match in Cyprus, a black player was verbally abused with racial comments by players of the opposite team and other persons. The Office of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights launched an own-initiative examination into the incident, stressing the responsibility of the State in protecting victims and applying preventive and combative measures regarding racial incidents. The resulting report was submitted, along with recommendations, to the police and the Cyprus Football Association. As a consequence, a police investigation was launched and the case was submitted to the Attorney General who brought it before the Court for the criminal prosecution against those involved. (Office of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman), Cyprus, “Equinet calendar 2022”)



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KEY DEVELOPMENTS

2. EQUALITY BODIES TACKLING RACISM AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

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b. Tackling institutional racism: Realising the potential of equality bodies

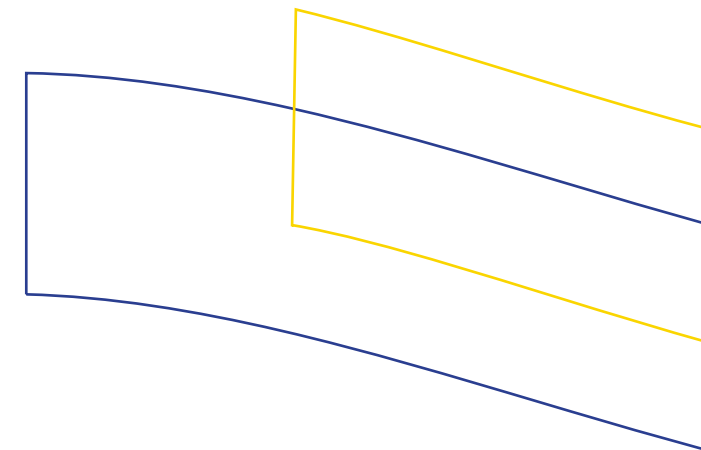
In 2020, the worldwide protests following the death of George Floyd highlighted that racism is not only a sum of individual hateful acts. Racism is rather a structural phenomenon, which also manifests through institutional structures such as law enforcement, schools, social services, healthcare providers, etc. Equality bodies can foster individual change by assisting individual victims of racism, but they also have the tools to instigate organisational and social change by tackling institutional racism. For instance, equality bodies have published research on intersectional data collection, they have led awareness-raising campaigns against institutional racism, and they have pursued strategic litigation on cases of ethnic profiling.

In 2021, the Working Group on Policy Formation explored the full potential of equality bodies for addressing institutional racism, which led to a Perspective on the topic. Equinet also organised a conference on equality bodies tackling institutional racism, in close collaboration with the European Commission Coordinator on Anti-Racism, Michaela Moua. Enlightened by meaningful contribution from various experts and key stakeholders, the conference discussed the concept of institutional racism, the role and potential of equality bodies to tackle it and the way forward at the EU level, following the adoption of the Anti-Racism Plan.

Members' Success Stories

The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman in Finland published a research report on 'Racism and discrimination - everyday experiences for People of African descent in Finland' that identified discrimination at the individual level and the institutional level. Institutional racism was established in several fields, in particular education, employment, security services and law enforcement. Recommendations are made in relation to addressing structures identified as reflecting institutional racism. It is of concern that the online survey that fed into the research generated hostile responses including seeking to skew the results. Also that those involved in the research became a target for widespread harassment. Nevertheless, the research secured valuable media coverage for the issue

of institutional racism. The equality body intends for it to serve as key background context in the development of the national action plan against racism. (Equinet 2022, "Tackling institutional racism: Realising the potential of equality bodies", p.10)



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KEY DEVELOPMENTS

2. EQUALITY BODIES TACKLING RACISM AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

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c. Together towards Roma equality: implementing the EU Roma Strategic Framework

In February 2021, Equinet organised an online roundtable to discuss and identify ways to improve cooperation in light of the 2020 **EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation**, which puts a strong emphasis on the involvement of equality bodies. During the event, national equality bodies, national authorities, European institutions and civil society organisations from across Europe gathered to pinpoint the best ways to cooperate to further Roma equality and to identify the roles equality bodies can and should play. The presentations and conversations held during the roundtable are summarized in this **synthesis report**.

Members' Success Stories

In Austria, the Ombud for Equal Treatment uses casework outcomes to stimulate debate on Roma issues. The cases are published in the equality body reports, newsletter, and on the website. In one case, a person of Hungarian Roma background was regularly harassed by his colleagues and his supervisors and was required to do harder work than his colleagues. The case was settled, and the company paid the applicant compensation of 6,000 euros, which served to raise awareness of antigypsyism in a large private sector company. (Equinet 2020, "Roma and Traveller Inclusion: Towards a new EU Framework Learning from the Work of Equality Bodies", p.20)



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KEY DEVELOPMENTS

2. EQUALITY BODIES TACKLING RACISM AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

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d. Building bridges to tackle anti-Muslim hatred

The discrimination and hatred experienced by Muslim people consistently represents a high proportion of religious discrimination cases in the work of many equality bodies. Equinet has actively addressed this issue over the years, and in January 2021, we organised an **online workshop**, together with the European Commission's coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred, to continue this work and engage with Muslim and pro-Muslim civil society organisations. The increasing populist discourse and hostility to Muslims and the wide use of counter-terrorism laws in Europe provided a specific and difficult backdrop to the discussions. Participants discussed the benefits of cooperation between equality bodies and civil society, identified methods to enhance such links and, among others, pointed to the fields of strategic litigation, communication and mutual learning as important priorities.

Members' Success Stories

Fatima applied for a position with a public transport operator in Brussels. Even though she met all the technical competences for the job, she was denied the position twice because she wears a headscarf. Fatima reached out to Unia (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities), who took her case to court. The court ruled this a case of direct discrimination on the basis of religion and indirect discrimination on the basis of gender. Fatima received compensation of more than 50,000 euros. In the ruling, the judge took into account the mix of power relations and discrimination that women wearing headscarves face. The judge also stated that the employer can no longer base its recruitment policy on the principle of exclusive neutrality, prohibiting all staff from wearing any sign referring to a religious, political or philosophical belief. (Unia, Belgium, "Equinet calendar 2022")



3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK IN EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK IN EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

a. Addressing gaps in EU antidiscrimination legislation at the national level

Together with ARDI (European Parliament Anti-racism and Diversity Intergroup), the Spanish Alliance for an Equal Treatment Law and Fundación de Secretariado Gitano, Equinet organised an online discussion in September 2021 about **Filling the gaps in equality legislation in the EU Member States**. The event brought together relevant legal experts and policy makers to discuss the necessary steps that Member States could take to address gaps, focusing on areas such as intersectional discrimination, redress and sanctions, or standards for Equality Bodies.

b. Pay transparency: the role for equality bodies

In March 2021, the European Commission issued a **proposal for Directive on Pay Transparency**. This proposed legislation allocates new roles for equality bodies regarding pay transparency and equal pay. Equality bodies could all be granted access to courts for cases of pay discrimination, including for collective

complaints. They could also have primary access to information on individual pay levels and the gender pay gap, and even engage in seeking remedy with employers. The proposal also strengthens the links between equality bodies and labour authorities, and plans to create a mandate of “monitoring body” which could be allocated to equality bodies, depending on their national context.

Equinet has been following closely the developments on this new legislative proposal and has engaged with various stakeholders including the rapporteur for the Directive at the European Parliament. A taskforce on pay transparency was also created within the Working Group on Gender Equality. The taskforce is focusing on mapping the current powers of equality bodies regarding pay transparency, while reflecting on the future role of equality bodies in this field.

Members' Success Stories

The mandate of the Equality Ombudsman in Sweden includes the power to monitor employers' compliance with their obligation to undertake pay surveys. “Monitoring” in this context means having the responsibility to independently review and assess whether the relevant duty bearer's activities fulfil the requirements ensuing from the Discrimination Act. To this end, the Equality Ombudsman has the power to request the relevant information from

employers. While a decision of the Equality Ombudsman which concludes that a duty bearer has not met its obligations in the Act is not legally binding, the Ombudsman has the possibility to also make an application to the Board against Discrimination for an order to be issued directing the employers to undertake the necessary actions. Such an order is binding for the employer and is to be combined with a conditional financial penalty in the case of non-compliance.



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KEY DEVELOPMENTS

3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK IN EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

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c. Engaging with the equality strategies: LGBTIQ and Disability

The current college of European Commissioners delivered a promise to create a Union of Equality. They have published several strategies to shed light on their priorities in different areas. To continue our engagement with these, the March high-level roundtable ‘[Stronger Together: Implementing the EC LGBTIQ Strategy](#)’ highlighted the key role equality bodies can play to defend LGBTIQ persons against discrimination, harassment and violence in Europe. For instance, equality bodies have been involved in cases for freedom of movement of rainbow families and against local “anti-LGBT” resolutions. The role of equality bodies within the EC LGBTIQ Strategy was also discussed in a panel discussion gathering high-level stakeholders from the European and national level. This discussion reaffirmed that, when given a strong mandate, solid guarantees for independence and adequate resources, equality bodies are very effective catalysts for ensuring and promoting LGBTIQ equality.

In April 2021, following the presentation of the 2021-2030 Disability Strategy, Equinet, together with ENNHRI

(European Network of Human Rights Institutions) organised [a webinar](#) to inform member equality bodies and NHRIs about the content of the Disability Strategy and their potential role in its implementation. This joint webinar followed the [Equinet Summary of the Disability Strategy](#). The summary aimed at capturing the main initiatives of the strategy from the point of view of equality bodies and elaborated on their role in drafting the strategy, as well as in supporting and translating the strategy to the national context.

Members’ Success Stories

The Office of the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights has worked tirelessly to combat “anti-LGBT resolutions” in Poland, including lodging complaints against municipalities for declaring such zones in the first place. For an in-depth understanding of the legal actions and challenges they faced, as well as the origin of the term “LGBT-free zones”, read this [behind-the-scenes blog post](#).



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KEY DEVELOPMENTS

3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK IN EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

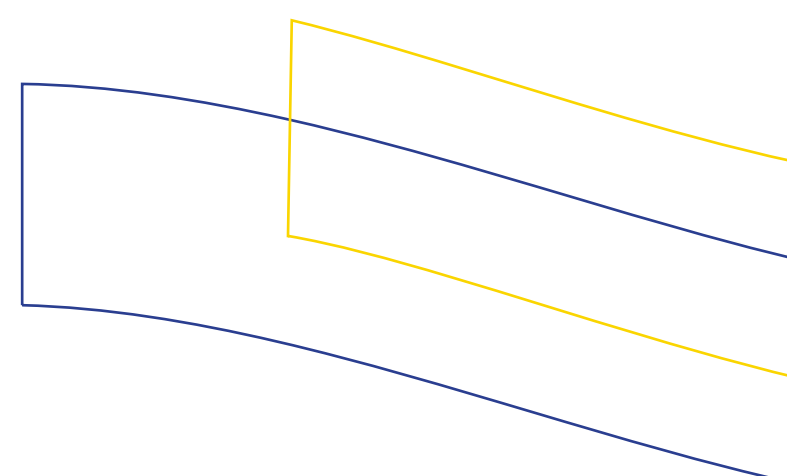
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d. Expanding the List of Protected Grounds within Non-Discrimination Law in the EU

Equinet’s commissioned report “Expanding the List of Protected Grounds within Anti-Discrimination Law in the EU” provides a timely and topical contribution to the broader discussion of how to strengthen equality law in the EU. The report explores the expansion of the list of protected grounds as one way to enhance the effectiveness of equality law. Addressing both equality bodies and national and European policy makers, the report provides specific arguments and practical recommendations that equality bodies could use when engaging in public debates on whether and how to add various grounds (beyond the six grounds enshrined in Article 19 of the TFEU), open-ended clauses as well as the use of additive/cumulative and intersectional discrimination. The report has a special focus on the grounds of socio-economic status, health status, as well as gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.

Members’ Success Stories

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) has been advocating for several years for the recognition of socio-economic status as a ground for discrimination, since, besides the area of housing assistance, there is no possibility to invoke discrimination on any other ground related to socio-economic status in Ireland. IHREC’s work has been instrumental for the development of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2021, which is currently pending before the Irish House of Representatives. The bill proposes ambitious and comprehensive safeguards against discrimination on the ground of socio-economic status by defining the characteristic of socio-economic disadvantage in the following way: “having disadvantaged social status or disadvantaged economic status, or both, that may be indicated by a person’s inclusion, other than on a temporary basis, in a socially or geographically identifiable group that suffers from such disadvantage resulting from one or more of the following poverty, source of income, illiteracy, level of education, address, type of housing or homelessness, employment status, social or regional accent, or from any other similar circumstance.”



INNOVATING IN EQUALITY





INNOVATING IN EQUALITY

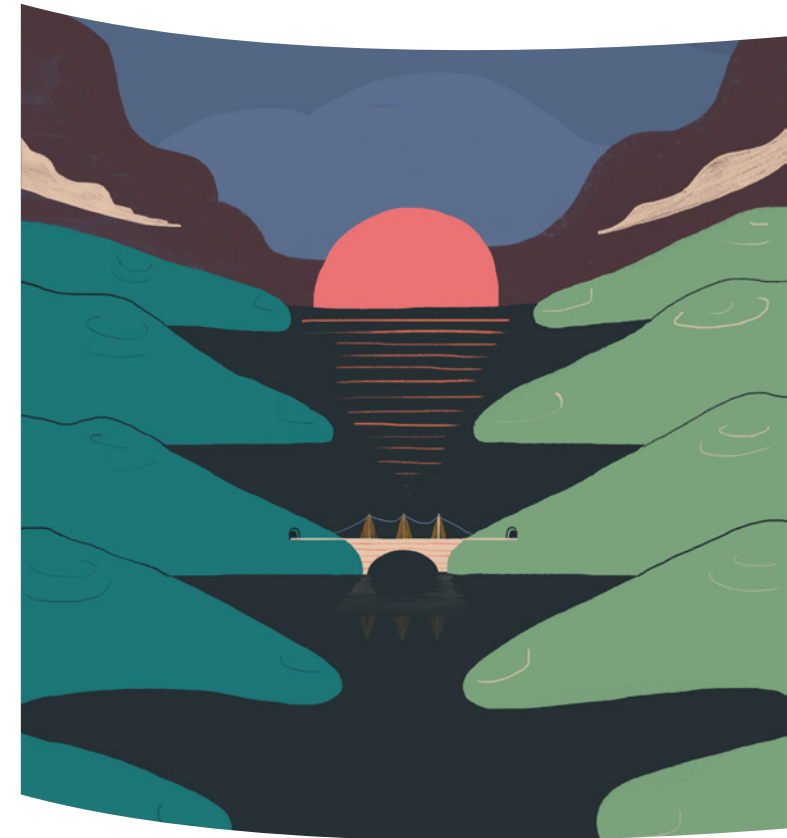
1. STEPPING UP OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUTH

Working with young people is not innovative in and of itself. Equinet and its members have been engaging with youth organisations through a range of activities over the years, but in 2021, we made a convincing case as to why and how we should develop a strategic approach to step up our engagement with and empower young people on equality and non-discrimination issues. Building on one of the most-attended capacity building events of the year (a workshop with young people from across Europe, organised on 1-2 March in cooperation with the European Youth Forum), Equinet's Working Group on Communication Practices and Strategies developed a Handbook for equality body staff working in outreach, communication, and cooperation. The Handbook aims to enable equality bodies to develop new protection and promotion actions, to exchange with their colleagues in other institutions, and to draw on the energy of young people to innovate.

Members' Success Stories

The JADE programme in France is offered each year to "Young Ambassadors of Rights", aged between 16 and 25 years old. Trained and supervised by the Defender of Rights, the JADE (young ambassadors) carry out a 9-month civic

service mission with the institution to raise awareness of children and young people on their rights. The programme was created in 2007 and since 2014, one part of the programme has been dedicated to equality. To inform as many young people as possible, these young ambassadors intervene in various and varied places: schools, structures of child social assistance and juvenile judicial protection, leisure facilities, hospitals, association helping young migrants. They develop their own tools to organise debates with children and young people, and participate in the evaluation and the development of the JADE programme.





INNOVATING IN EQUALITY

2. EQUALITY MAINSTREAMING

In 2021, Equinet established a new group for equality bodies, the Cluster on Equality Mainstreaming, to discuss and increase the use of equality duties and equality impact assessments, exchange good practices, and to raise the recognition of equality bodies as experts on mainstreaming equality. The first year of the Cluster's work resulted in two main outputs. First, the Cluster organised a high-level **Equinet Conference on Promoting Equality Mainstreaming in Policymaking** where European equality bodies discussed with relevant actors how they can cooperate and better promote equality mainstreaming. Second, the Cluster produced a **Compendium of Good Practices on Equality Mainstreaming: The Use of Equality Duties and Equality Impact Assessments** which collected the experience and expertise of national equality bodies on supporting the use of these mainstreaming tools.

Members' Success Stories

The Czech Public Defender of Rights (PDR), after receiving a number of complaints from parents, issued two recommendations (Recommendations of the Public Defender of Rights on equal access to preschool education and Recommendation of the Public Defender of Rights concerning equal access to compulsory school education) targeting both schools and municipalities regarding equal access to preschool and access to compulsory school education. It targeted the criteria used by headteachers

to select students when the applications for enrolment are higher than the number of available open school places since the PDR had noted that some of these criteria were directly or indirectly discriminatory. While the PDR's recommendations are not binding, the Czech School Inspectorate incorporated them into its inspection activities. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports amended the decree on elementary education, adding more details and specifications on enrolment procedure, and adjusted its guidelines. If the Inspectorate finds that these guidelines are not respected, it will impose a sanction on the school.

3. RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT EQUALITY IN HEALTHCARE PROVISION

2020 and the COVID pandemic raised our concerns about healthcare more than ever before. As a consequence, Equinet prepared the perspective **'Equality, Diversity, and Non-Discrimination in Healthcare'** focusing for the first time exclusively in the field of healthcare provision. The perspective pointed to obstacles faced by equality bodies in the field of healthcare. These barriers are for instance linked to the design of national healthcare systems, which often face an overall lack of resources

and an uneven geographical spread of services, directly affecting access for the most marginalised groups. On the basis of these findings, Equinet organised a four session **webinar series** in June 2021. The objectives were to give space to key healthcare actors and equality bodies to share their concerns and find ways to collaborate and overcome identified obstacles to securing equality compliant healthcare service provision, better protect right holders in this field, and to promote egalitarian access to healthcare services.

Members' Success Stories

*The Swedish Equality Ombudsman has secured a **major win** in a case concerning discrimination in healthcare services. The District Court of Gothenburg held that a regional health care provider had discriminated a Muslim man of African origin for reasons linked to his ethnic origin. The man (himself a medical doctor) passed away as a result of receiving insufficient healthcare services when his symptoms were dismissed as "faking unconsciousness" and "cultural fainting". The ruling followed a six-day trial in what is to date the largest discrimination case ever in Sweden, and the Ombudsman received full compensation for its litigation costs.*



INNOVATING IN EQUALITY

4. LOCAL LEVEL IMPACT

In October, Equinet organised an online conference “**Building Equal Cities: promoting Equality and addressing Discrimination at the Local Level**” to explore how equality and non-discrimination are conceived and implemented at the local level within municipalities and cities across Europe. The conference created an opportunity for national equality bodies to discuss with relevant actors how they can better cooperate to promote equality and tackle discrimination at the local level together. Participants mentioned a number of good practices as well as revealing multiple paths for practical engagement. The presentations, conversations, and exchanges have been summarized in this **report**.

Members' Success Stories

In Croatia, the equality body in cooperation with the European Commission has conducted several mappings of Roma communities at the local level, which have contributed to an improved assessment of their needs and eventually, a fitter response in terms of integration policies and practices carried out by the Croatian and European institutions.

5. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A NEW FRONTIER FOR EXPANDING THE PROTECTION OF EQUALITY

2021 saw the development of Equinet’s first training on AI for equality bodies, which builds upon key findings and recommendations of **Equinet’s 2020 AI Report**. To ensure sustainability and transferability of the learning, Equinet launched an **online learning platform** to build the capacity of equality bodies on AI. The platform includes a collection of video modules from the training, a library with learning materials, and an online forum for peer-to-peer exchange between equality bodies.

Alongside its capacity-building activities, Equinet also ensured that the role and powers of equality bodies are adequately taken into consideration in future European legislative initiatives on AI, which aim to address the human rights implications of AI. In that context, Equinet contributed with **submissions** to the European Commission’s consultation on the Proposal for a future regulation on AI and the public consultation by the Council of Europe Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI) on regulating AI in the context of human rights, democracy and rule of law. Equinet’s submissions together with extended supporting points were sent to Equinet members as an answer guide for the CoE consultation in order to facilitate participation of equality bodies in this and future consultations on regulating the human rights implications of AI.

Members' Success Stories

In Slovenia, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, issued several recommendations regarding the draft National Programme on AI, which were all considered and included in the programme. For instance, the Advocate recommended that educational and awareness-raising activities for companies and the public sector regarding legal and ethical aspects of AI development and use should explicitly include topics on AI compliance with human rights and equality law. The Advocate has taken an active public stance that educating developers and deployers of AI systems on the equality dimension is crucial to link the so-called “ecosystems of excellence and trust” in EU’s White Paper on AI.

In this context, the head of the Slovenian equality body and member of the Executive Board of Equinet, Miha Lobnik, seized the opportunity of the 2021 Slovenia presidency of the Council of the European Union to speak at a high-level Conference “Regulation of Artificial Intelligence – Ethical And Fundamental Rights Aspects”, which among other influential law and policy makers, included European Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders and the justice ministers of the trio presidency of the Council of the EU (Slovenian Minister of Justice Marjan Dikaučič, Portuguese Minister of Justice Francisca van Dunem, and German Minister of Justice Christine Lambrecht). Through his contribution at the conference, Miha Lobnik sent a clear message about the distinct added value of equality bodies in ensuring that AI technology used to determine people’s rights is compliant with equality law.

INNOVATING IN EQUALITY

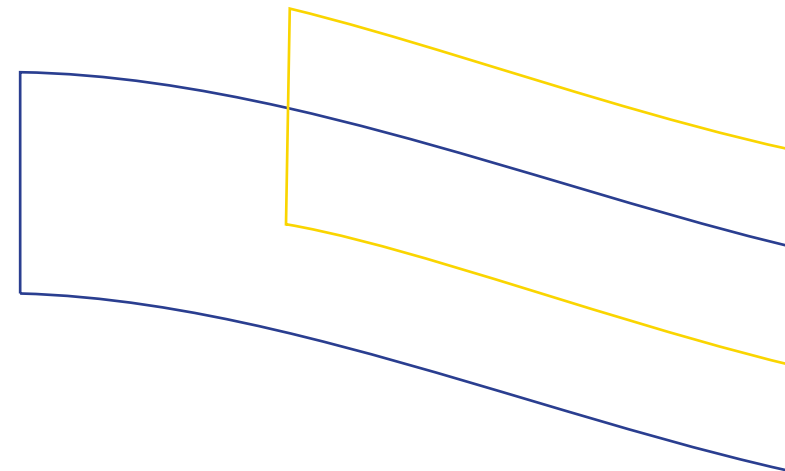
6. FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS FORUM 2021

Equinet and its members were present in large numbers at the 2021 Fundamental Rights Forum, which took place on 11-12 October 2021, with sessions live-streamed from Vienna, Strasbourg, Geneva, Warsaw, Ljubljana, Oslo. During the Forum, the Equinet Secretariat co-organised three sessions. The first was on the equality aspects of the European Social Charter (with ENNHRI and the Council of Europe). The other two, organised with ENNHRI, were on the power of both community and narrative to illustrate how we can better work together and communicate to tackle equality or human rights challenges and encourage people to act. Furthermore, Equinet members highlighted their work in areas as varied as measuring diversity and equality in the workplace, recognising and assessing discrimination and tackling antigypsyism.

Equinet spoke at the launch of the revamped 10 Keys for effectively communicating human rights. Re-edited together with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe, OSCE-ODIHR, ENNHRI & European Commission DG Justice, these short keys give concrete guidance on the most important points to keep in mind when communicating.

Members' Success Stories

The Danish Institute for Human Rights ran a social media campaign entitled “#busesforeveryone”. Following research into the area, they identified that five out of six public bus companies in Denmark cannot ensure independent travel for passengers in a wheelchair. In the campaign, the testimonies of persons with disabilities who have experienced such inaccessibility took centre stage: those of Aina Boss Budde resonated with audiences in particular. The example demonstrates the value of having people with lived experience of discrimination as campaign messengers and supporting them to speak freely. The results are authentic and relatable human stories that can be as powerful as facts and figures.



10 keys to effectively communicating human rights



Outline your Objectives



Activate your Audiences



Voice shared Values



Create Coalitions



Mobilise your Messengers



Harness Hope



Shape your Story



Pick your Platform



Lead through Language



Tailor your Timing

OUR OPERATIONS

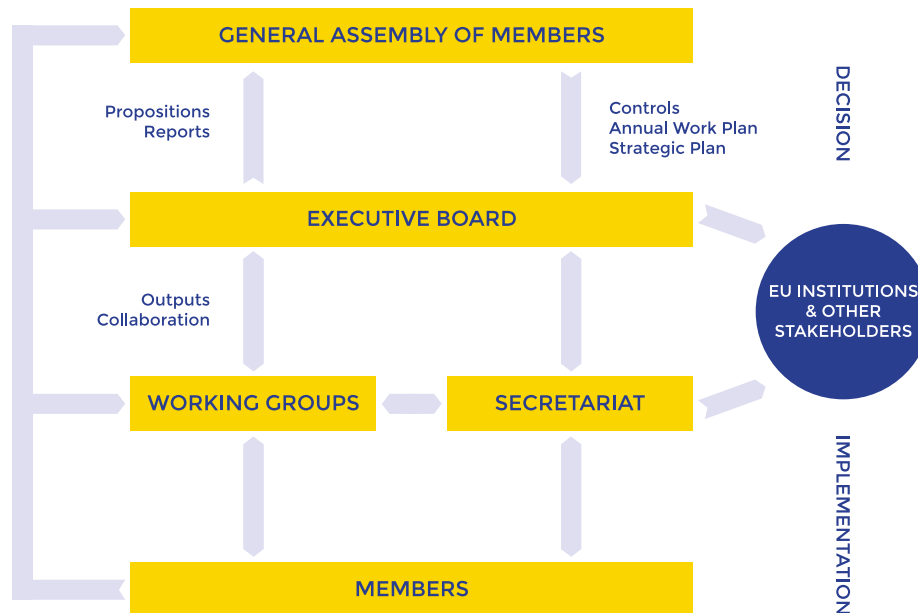




OUR OPERATIONS

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The main decisions concerning the general steering of Equinet are taken by the General Assembly of Members (GA) that is made up of all the current Members of the Network and is convened at least once a year for an Annual General Meeting (AGM).



WORK PLAN 2022

At the AGM, we adopted our **Work Plan for 2022**, which will see the Network work on a broad range of topics, linked to the following broad headings:

- Standards for equality bodies
- EU equality strategies
- Artificial intelligence
- Data collection
- Business & Equality
- Developing equality law and the role of equality bodies
- Climate change

OUR PEOPLE





OUR PEOPLE

EQUINET MEMBERS

ALBANIA

Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination
www.kmd.al

AUSTRIA

Austrian Disability Ombudsman
www.behindertenanwalt.gv.at

AUSTRIA

Ombud for Equal Treatment
www.gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft.gv.at

BELGIUM

Institute for the Equality of Women and Men
www.igvm-iefh.belgium.be

BELGIUM

Unia (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities)
www.unia.be

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina
www.ombudsmen.gov.ba

BULGARIA

Commission for Protection against Discrimination
www.kzd-nondiscrimination.com

CROATIA

Office of the Ombudsman
www.ombudsman.hr

CROATIA

Ombudsperson for Gender Equality
www.prs.hr

CROATIA

Ombudswoman for Persons with Disabilities
www.posi.hr

CYPRUS

Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman)
www.ombudsman.gov.cy

CZECH REPUBLIC

Public Defender of Rights
www.ochrance.cz

DENMARK

Danish Institute for Human Rights
www.humanrights.dk

ESTONIA

Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner
www.volink.ee

FINLAND

Non-Discrimination Ombudsman
www.syrjinta.fi

FINLAND

Ombudsman for Equality
www.tasa-arvo.fi

FRANCE

Defender of Rights
www.defenseurdesdroits.fr

GEORGIA

Public Defender of Georgia (Ombudsman)
www.ombudsman.ge

GERMANY

Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency
www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de

GREECE

Greek Ombudsman
www.synigoros.gr

HUNGARY

Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights
www.ajbh.hu

IRELAND

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
www.ihrec.ie

ITALY

National Office against Racial Discrimination - UNAR
www.unar.it

KOSOVO*

Ombudsperson Institution
www.oik-rks.org

LATVIA

Office of the Ombudsman
www.tiesibsargs.lv

LITHUANIA

Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson
www.lygybe.lt

LUXEMBURG

Centre for Equal Treatment
www.cet.lu

MALTA

Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
www.crpdp.org.mt

MALTA

National Commission for the Promotion of Equality
www.equality.gov.mt

MOLDOVA

Council on Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality
www.egalitate.md

MONTENEGRO

Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (Ombudsman)
www.ombudsman.co.me

NETHERLANDS

Netherlands Institute for Human Rights
www.mensenrechten.nl

NORTH MACEDONIA

Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination
www.kszd.mk

NORWAY

Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud
www.ldo.no

POLAND

Commissioner for Human Rights
www.rpo.gov.pl

PORTUGAL

Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality
www.cig.gov.pt

PORTUGAL

Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment
www.cite.gov.pt

PORTUGAL

High Commission for Migration
www.acm.gov.pt

ROMANIA

National Council for Combating Discrimination
www.cncd.ro

SERBIA

Commissioner for Protection of Equality
www.ravnopravnost.gov.rs

SLOVAKIA

Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
www.snsnp.sk

SLOVENIA

Advocate of the Principle of Equality
www.zagovornik.si

SPAIN

Council for the Elimination of Ethnic or Racial Discrimination
www.igualdadynodiscriminacion.igualdad.gob.es

SPAIN

Institute of Women
www.inmujer.es

SWEDEN

Equality Ombudsman
www.do.se

UNITED KINGDOM - GREAT BRITAIN

Equality and Human Rights Commission
www.equalityhumanrights.com

UNITED KINGDOM - NORTHERN IRELAND

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
www.equalityni.org



EXECUTIVE BOARD

2021 - 2023



Laurence Bond (Chair)

Director, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, Ireland



Lars Arrhenius

Ombudsman, The Equality Ombudsman, Sweden



Valérie Fontaine (Board Conciliator)

Advisor for Partnerships & Public Relations, Defender of Rights, France



Robert Gajda

Commissioner, Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, Albania



Rhoda Garland (Treasurer)

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



Rainer Hiltunen

Head of Office, Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, Finland



Miha Lobnik

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



Silvia Porubánová

Executive Director, National Centre for Human Rights, Slovakia



Tena Šimonović Einwalter

Ombudswoman, Office of the Ombudswoman, Croatia

2019 - 2021

- **Tena Šimonović Einwalter (Chair)**, Deputy Ombudswoman, Office of the Ombudswoman, Croatia
- **Konstantinos Bartzeliotis**, Senior Investigator, Greek Ombudsman, Greece
- **Laurence Bond**, Director, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, Ireland
- **Patrick Charlier (Treasurer)**, Co-Director, Unia (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities), Belgium
- **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 (Board Conciliator)**, Director, Ombud for Equal Treatment, Austria
- **Miha Lobnik**, Head, Advocate of the Principle of Equality, Slovenia



WORKING GROUPS

The Equinet Working Groups are essential parts of the inner functioning of the Network. Composed of staff experts from member organisations, they are the central platforms for effective cooperation and sharing of expertise amongst member equality bodies and their staff, alongside the Equinet training events and seminars. Each group is headed by a Moderator from a national equality body who, assisted by the Equinet Secretariat, is responsible for the organisation and the implementation of the work as planned in the annual Work Plans.

The Working Groups in 2021 were:

- **Communication Strategies and Practices**
Moderators: Mintautė Jurkutė, Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Lithuania; Ana Tretinjak, Office of the Ombudswoman, Croatia
- **Equality Law in Practice**
Moderator: Veronika Bazalová, Office of the Public Defender of Rights, Czech Republic
- **Gender Equality**
Moderator: Nathalie Schlenzka, Federal Anti-discrimination Agency, Germany
- **Policy Formation**
Moderator: Samo Novak, Advocate of the Principle of Equality, Slovenia
- **Research and Data Collection**
Moderator: Bogdan Banjac, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Serbia





SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat assists the Executive Board in implementing the annual work plan of the organisation. It is responsible for organising and managing the daily activities of the Network and assists individual Members and stakeholders with their requests. It supports and coordinates the work of the Equinet thematic Working Groups. The Secretariat regularly reports on the status of its activities to the Executive Board throughout the year.

In 2021 the Secretariat team included:



Anne Gaspard

Executive Director (since February 2022:
Co-Director Network Strategic Engagement)



Tamás Kádár

Deputy Director / Head of Legal and
Policy Team (since February 2022:
Co-Director Operations, Policy & Legal)



Sarah Cooke O'Dowd

Head of Communication and
Membership



Yannick Godin

Administration & Finance Officer



Sophie Hale

Membership and Network
Development Officer



Moana Genevey

Policy officer (Gender Equality)

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SECRETARIAT

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Jone Elizondo-Urrestarazu

Legal and Policy Officer



Milla Vidina

Policy Officer (part-time)



Julia Konowrocka

Policy Officer (part-time, November 2020-June 2021)



Daris J. Lewis Recio

Legal and Policy Officer (since June 2021; Legal and Policy Assistant from November 2020 – May 2021)



Hilary Atayi

Legal and Policy Assistant (June – December 2021)



Franziska Stambke

Communication Assistant (November 2020 – May 2021)



Teresa Pedreira

Communication Assistant (June 2021 – January 2022) (since February 2022: Communication Officer)



Albi Veizi

Administration and Membership Assistant (June 2021– February 2022)



Therese Keil

Artificial Intelligence Assistant (August 2021- February 2022)

ACTIVITIES





ACTIVITIES

ALL ACTIVITIES WERE HELD ONLINE,
UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED.

CONFERENCES

- **Building Equal Cities: Promoting Equality and Addressing Discrimination at the Local Level**, 25-26 October
- **Promoting Equality Mainstreaming in Policymaking**, 19 November
- **Tackling Institutional Racism: The Potential of Equality Bodies**, 9 December

ROUNDTABLES

- **Together Towards Roma Equality: Implementing the EU Roma Strategic Framework**, 22 February
- **Stronger Together: An Equinet Roundtable on Implementing the EC LGBTIQ Strategy**, 31 March

SEMINAR

- **Virtual Seminar on the Role of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU in the Work of Equality Bodies and National Human Rights Institutions**, co-organised with FRA and ENNHRI, 20-22 October.

WEBINARS

- **Briefing call: The human rights violations created by the draft additional protocol to the Oviedo Convention**, organised by EDF and MHE with the support of ENNHRI and Equinet, 10 February
- **Webinar on the Disability Strategy 2021-2030**, co-organised with ENNHRI, 29 April
- **Webinar Series: Equality, Diversity, and Non-discrimination in Healthcare**, 22, 24, 28, and 30 June
- **Filling the gaps in Equality Legislation in the EU Member States**, co-organised with ARDI, Fundación Secretariado Gitano and the Spanish Alliance for an Equal Treatment Law, 1 September



WORKSHOPS

- **Working Together to Tackle Discrimination and Intolerance Against Muslims**, co-organised with the European Commission coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred, 25-26 January
- **Tackling Age Discrimination: Stepping Up our Engagement with Youth**, co-organised with the European Youth Forum, 1-2 March

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TRAINING SESSIONS

- **Equality Bodies & Freedom of Movement of EU Workers**, 17 March
- **Artificial Intelligence Training**, 22 and 30 April
- **Persuasive Writing 101 & Tackling Hate Speech Online**, 1-2 December (Brussels and online)

COOPERATION PLATFORM COE-FRA-ENNHRI –EQUINET ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

- **Special Webinars for National Equality Bodies and National Human Rights Institutions on Engaging with the European Committee of Social Rights**, co-organised with the Council of Europe and ENNHRI, 22 and 24 February.
- **Against Ageism and Towards Active Social Citizenship for Older Persons**. Co-organised with the Council of Europe, ENNHRI and FRA, 27 September

PROJECT

- **Standards for Equality Bodies**, 25 May and 5 November

CLUSTER

- **Equality Mainstreaming**, 26 March and 13 September

AD-HOC MEETINGS

- **Covid-19 Vaccine discussion with members**, 24 March and 8 December

WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

- **Communication Strategies and Practices**, 11 May and 3 December (Brussels and online)
- **Equality Law in practice**, 17 May and 29 November
- **Gender Equality**, 12 May and 23 November
- **Policy Formation**, 4 March and 5 October
- **Research and Data Collection**, 5 May and 25 November

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

- **Extraordinary Session to Adopt Work Plan**, 27 September
- **General Session**, New Board Elections, 9 November

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

- **Board Meeting Extraordinary Session**, 27 January
- **Board Meeting I**, 10 March
- **Board Meeting for Work Plan Development**, 2 June
- **Board Meeting II**, 14 June
- **Board Meeting III**, 21 September (Brussels & online)
- **Board Meeting IV**, 4 November
- **Board Meeting V**, 14 December

PUBLICATIONS





PUBLICATIONS

COMPENDIUM



Compendium of Good Practices on Equality Mainstreaming: The Use of Equality Duties and Equality Impact Assessments

DISCUSSION PAPER



Reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities



Legislating for stronger, more effective equality bodies: Key elements for and expectations from future EU legislation on equality bodies



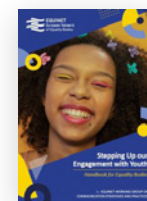
Freedom of Movement in the EU: Equality Bodies Tackling Discrimination of Union Workers

FACTSHEET

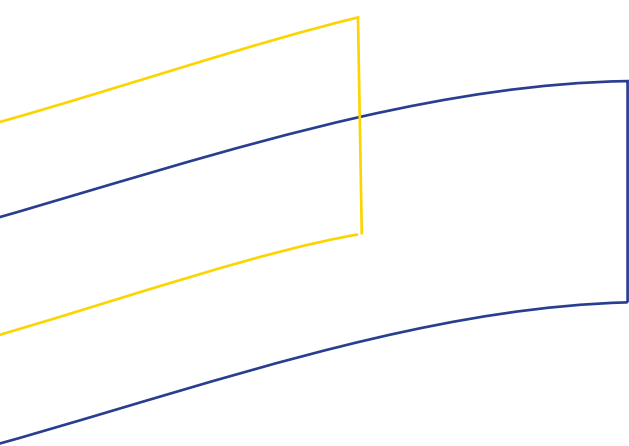


The Role of Equality Bodies during the COVID-19 Pandemic

HANDBOOK



Stepping Up our Engagement with Youth: Handbook for Equality Bodies



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PERSPECTIVE



Equality in the Time of Covid-19:
Learning from Equality Body Initiatives



Equality, diversity and non-discrimination
in healthcare: Learning from the work of
equality bodies



Tackling institutional racism. Realising
the potential of equality bodies

POLICY BRIEF



Assessing Gaps in the Racial Equality
Directive

REPORT



Collection and use of complaints data by
equality bodies



Expanding the list of protected grounds
within anti-discrimination law in the EU





EQUINET

European Network of Equality Bodies

EQUINET
EUROPEAN NETWORK OF EQUALITY BODIES

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