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Introduction

We offer this Work Plan to your attention, as a symbol of the maturing of our 15-year-old network and equality bodies as institutions. Let us start by pointing to two major developments we expect to frame our work in 2023, one of them external, the other internal.

First, our external focus will undoubtedly be on the EU legislation on standards for equality bodies that the European Commission is expected to propose in November 2022 and that we have been requesting, expecting and advocating for in the past decade. With the proposal published, we are an important step closer, but still far from our objective. Therefore, advocating for standards for equality bodies and furnishing evidence to EU legislators of the need for strong standards and ways to monitor compliance with them will be a horizontal priority for Equinet. Once adopted, this legislation will also have a larger-than-life symbolic value, strengthening the whole equality infrastructure in the EU. Moreover, we are also determined to investigate and analyse the best ways in which such EU standards could be used to strengthen the position of equality bodies in non-EU countries.

Second, our internal focus will be on rolling out our new Strategic Plan, guiding our work for the coming four years, until 2026. This new Strategic Plan is the result of extensive consultations within and outside the membership. We were encouraged to see that our members and partners are largely satisfied with the strategic directions of Equinet and did not propose a complete revolution. However, we are determined to enhance our offering, especially in two areas. We will upgrade our membership strategy and work, to ensure an enriching membership experience at Equinet, including by better tailoring activities and engaging all members. We will also strive to adopt a more impact-focused approach to further strengthen effectiveness and accountability.

Beyond these two flagship developments, we will continue to build the capacity and expertise of our members, to contribute to the equality agenda in Europe, and to maintain our position as a Research and Knowledge hub on equality issues. Equinet has a good track record of innovation, bringing new equality issues and solutions to the forefront. To name but a few examples, in 2023 we will continue our focus on the equality implications of Artificial Intelligence, we will organise a conference on sanctions and remedies in discrimination cases, comparing them with other fields of law, and we will also publish research exploring the role and potential of equality bodies in responding to the equality implications of climate change.

As in previous years, our Work Plan has a largely horizontal approach, all the while contributing to grounds-based policy and legislative priorities, particularly at EU level. This is intentional, mirroring the horizontal, multi-ground mandate of many equality bodies and the intersectional approach that this enables. This is a key asset of equality bodies and also helps us to move beyond a 'siloes' approach, tackling discrimination grounds separately, not acknowledging the multiple identities that each and every individual holds. Our ultimate aim remains helping equality bodies promote equality more effectively, prevent and combat discrimination and provide quick and effective access to justice to those who experience discrimination.

We live in times when society and politics are bitterly divided between pro-equality forces and those who, often in the name of tradition, reject even the idea and concept – something that seems to be at odds with our values and constitutional traditions. While this fight can, at times, be disheartening,

equality bodies are at the forefront of it and Equinet, as their Network, is there to support them, together with many allies in institutions and civil society.

Strategic Plan 2023- 2026

To be written and updated once the objectives from the new Strategic Plan 2023-2026 are ready.

Table of activities

Standards for Equality Bodies

Topic 2023	Output	Linked to: Group
Contributing to EU legislation on standards for equality bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with MEPs • Follow and contribute to the legislative process • Work on additional set(s) of indicators • TAIEX meeting on standards for non-EU members 	Project on Standards
Inclusive design in communication: Improving the accessibility of equality bodies' outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training (2 online meetings) • Checklists for each topic area 	Communication WG
Awareness Raising: Developing and maintaining good media relations	Training (in-person)	Communication WG

Developing equality law and the role of equality bodies

Topic 2023	Output	Linked to: Group
How can Equality Bodies support de-institutionalization from an intersectional perspective?	Workshop (in-person)	Age & Disability clusters
Enforcement in anti-discrimination legislation: redress, sanctions and remedies	Conference (in-person)	Research follow up
Equality bodies exploring online and offline harassment	Training (in-person)	Equality Law WG
Strengthening Equality Bodies' capacity on improving the protection of social and economic rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESER Cluster meeting • Seminar within CoE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform • Financial support (mini-grants) for NEBs 	Equality and Socio-Economic Rights Cluster (ESER Cluster) / CoE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on social and economic rights
Equality Bodies making recommendations	Perspective	Policy Formation WG
Equality Bodies work in the field of education	Short paper on equality bodies' work in the field of education	Policy Formation WG

EU Equality Strategies

Topic 2023	Output	Linked to: Group
European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights use in equality and non-discrimination cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued FRA Cooperation Submission to Annual Charter Report 	FRA
Equality bodies protecting the rights of rainbow families on the move	Follow up of 2022 publication	Rainbow Families Cluster
Implementing the Work-Life Balance Directive	Seminar (in-person)	Gender Equality WG
Pay transparency	Taskforce on Pay Transparency	Gender Equality WG
Contributing to legal & policy developments in combatting online & offline Gender-based violence (GBV)	Taskforce on GBV	Gender Equality WG
Equality bodies tackling antisemitism	Follow-up to 2022 event: Qs to NEBs	
Equality bodies tackling hatred and intolerance against Muslims	Follow-up to 2022 event: Qs to NEBs	
Equality bodies contributing to national equality strategies	Event on Roma +NAPARs (online)	

Data Collection

Topic 2023	Output	Linked to: Group
Using equality data & research in legal casework	Outsourced publication (based on 2022 work)	R&D WG
Reporting on the state of discrimination: the use of equality data by national equality bodies	Swedish Presidency event (in-person)	Equality Ombud (Sweden)
Intersectionality & Multiple Discrimination: Methods on data collection and measurement, challenges and opportunities	Training (in-person)	R&D WG

Business and Equality

Topic 2023	Output	Linked to: Group
Role of equality bodies in supporting Equality Mainstreaming	Study visit	EM Cluster

Artificial Intelligence

Topic 2023	Output	Linked to: Group
AI and equality	Study visit TAIEX meeting on tackling AI-enabled discrimination for non-EU members	AI Cluster

Climate Change

Topic 2023	Output	Linked to: Group
Responses to climate change in Europe: exploring the role and potential of equality bodies	Roundtable (online)	Research launch

Equinet Working Structures

Cooperation with members is an essential part of the inner functioning of Equinet. Bringing in the expertise of National Equality Bodies and focused exchange on special topics fuels the development of critical resources for the Network.

Equinet Working Groups

The Equinet Working Groups are composed of expert staff from member organisations and are the central standing platforms for effective cooperation and sharing of expertise amongst equality bodies. Equinet Working Groups are headed by one or two Moderators from national equality bodies who, assisted by the Equinet Secretariat are responsible for the organisation and the implementation of the work as planned in the annual Work Plan. Each Working Group will meet twice during the year, most likely one in-person meeting, and one online.

- **Communication Strategies and Practices**
Secretariat Coordinator: **Sarah Cooke O'Dowd**
- **Equality Law in Practice**
Secretariat Coordinator: **Jone Elizondo Urrestarazu**
- **Gender Equality**
Secretariat Coordinator: **Moana Genevey**
- **Policy Formation**
Secretariat Coordinator: **Tamás Kádár**
- **Research and Data Collection**
Secretariat Coordinators: **Daris Lewis and Milla Vidina**

Projects

Set up in 2019 to support **the understanding, implementation and monitoring of European standards for equality bodies** at European and Member State level, this project enables Equinet to use the practical experience and expertise of equality bodies to develop indicators in order to measure compliance with standards for equality bodies. The Standards project will meet twice during the year, in-person or online, depending on the needs of the group in relation to the developments of the legislative proposal.

- **Standards for Equality Bodies**
Secretariat Coordinator: **Tamás Kádár**

Equinet Clusters

Equinet clusters are **time-limited taskforces focusing on specific topics of high interest** to equality bodies, bringing together **high-level experts for focused and results-oriented discussions**. Their objective is to provide a platform for Equinet members to exchange good practices, while also building their capacity by enabling engagement with European-level policy and legal developments. There is no fixed way in which the Clusters keep connected, as it depends on the needs of each group. Clusters may be in touch regularly via email, meet online or in-person if linked to other capacity-building events.

- **Age**
Secretariat Coordinator: **Daris Lewis**
- **Artificial Intelligence**
Secretariat Coordinator: **Milla Vidina**
- **Disability**
Secretariat Coordinator: **Jone Elizondo Urrestarazu**
- **Equality and Socio-Economic Rights (ESER)**
Secretariat Coordinator: **Milla Vidina**
- **Equality Mainstreaming**
Secretariat Coordinator: **Teresa Pedreira**
- **Rainbow Families on the Move**
Secretariat Coordinators: **Daris Lewis and Moana Genevey**

Description of activities

Standards for Equality Bodies

Contributing to EU legislation on standards for equality bodies

Context: 2023 promises to be a crucial year for strengthening standards for equality bodies. The past three years saw a breakthrough in the recognition of the need for stronger 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) acknowledging this. The legislative process is well under way and in autumn 2022, the Commission published its proposals for Directives on standards for equality bodies. The adoption of such binding legislation on equality bodies will 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, inter alia having developed and tested two sets of indicators for standards (on mandate and on independence). In 2023, the Project, together with the Equinet Executive Board and Secretariat, will continue to lead Equinet's work on this issue.

Objective: The swift adoption of strong and effective legislation on standards for equality bodies, reflecting members' needs, followed by swift and effective transposition and implementation of the legislation.

Target audience: The primary target audience will be the European Parliament and the Council of the EU as co-legislators.

Expected outputs:

- 2 meetings of the Project on standards for equality bodies
- 1 meeting with MEPs to inform them about equality bodies and their needs and to advocate for the swift adoption of the legislation
- 1 additional set of indicators developed to assist the monitoring of the implementation of standards for equality bodies
- 1 workshop organized for equality bodies from non-EU countries to discuss strengthening the position of equality bodies beyond the EU and how EU standards can contribute to this. This workshop will only be organized if TAIEX funding from DG NEAR is available.
- Continuous monitoring of the legislative process and contributions from the point of view of equality bodies as appropriate and necessary. Equinet will aim for engagement with decision-makers both at the European and, through its members, the national level.

Expected outcomes: A common lobby strategy at national and European level, which eventually feeds into strengthened guarantees for the independence, mandate, powers, accessibility and resources of equality bodies, ultimately benefitting all those at risk of discrimination and inequalities.

Inclusive design in communication: Improving the accessibility of equality bodies' outputs

Context: Equality bodies are public organisations who assist victims of discrimination, monitor and report on discrimination issues, and contribute to an awareness of rights and a societal valuing of equality. In order to effectively carry out these duties, they need to provide information that is both accessible and easy to understand.

Inclusion is a process of designing a product or communication piece for a variety of people at the beginning of the planning process. It is the concept that when one designs for the outer margins (working from the outside-in), then a diverse range of people will be accommodated. All outputs should be designed with a universal design approach, in which all written outputs are made accessible in accordance with state of the art EU level standards.

Objectives: This training will focus on helping equality bodies understand (1) how to make their digital materials accessible, as well as (2) learning how to create easy to read materials.

Target Audience: This training is particularly focused on members of the Working Group Communication but is open to other colleagues who work on producing accessible material.

Expected outputs:

- Two online training sessions, led by the European Disability Forum and the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Malta
- Checklists for each topic area, including any good practices by other members where relevant

Expected outcomes: All of the digital materials produced by equality bodies are accessible to all.

Awareness Raising: Developing and maintaining good media relations

Context: In order to do their work properly, equality bodies need to be visible to and known by the public. To that effect, future legislation on standards for equality bodies might suggest that Member States adopt a strategy to raise awareness on the existence of equality bodies and their activities. Equality bodies also have a role to play in raising awareness of their institutions. These can be done in a myriad of ways, including developing and maintaining good media relations, so that they can act as useful multipliers of the work done by equality bodies.

Objectives: In this training, we want equality bodies to understand:

- Why good media relations are essential for their work;
- How to organize a communication team and enable it to build and maintain good media relations;
- What support is needed from the head of the equality body in order to make the most out of media work;
- How to create media opportunities;
- The work of journalists and editors;
- Media relations in the context of crisis communication;
- Golden rules for media statements/interviews, which can be used to use to train heads of equality bodies.

Target Audience: This training is particularly focused on members of the Working Group Communication

Expected outputs:

- 1 training
- Follow-up Guide on media relations, including examples from WG members
- Follow-up meeting with WG members 6 months after members receive the handbook
- Training to be linked to the in-person WG Communication meeting in 2023

Expected outcomes: Participants will improve their understanding of the work of the media, and how they can harness their power to raise awareness about the work of their equality body. They will learn about the good practices of other colleagues and have a tailor-made guide on media relations to refer to when looking for inspiration.

We would measure the impact of this work through the follow up meeting, wherein participants would assess and explain how the training has helped them:

- Persuade their heads of the importance of quality media relations
- Enhance their media relations and create more media opportunities to promote equality
- Train their heads (and other spokespersons) to perform better in statements and interviews

Developing equality law and the role of equality bodies

How can Equality Bodies support de- institutionalization from an intersectional perspective?

Context: Independent living is enshrined or inferred from the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UN CPRD), the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), the [European Social Charter](#) and the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) among others. Likewise, the EU has dedicated financial efforts, such as the [European Structural and Investment Funds](#) (ESIF) that may support a wide range of measures in line with the requirement of the poverty reduction policy framework ([thematic objective 9](#)), specifically, to prevent institutionalisation and support the reforms for the transition. Building or renovating long-stay residential institutions is excluded from the ESIF support, regardless of their size. According to the [European Disability strategy 2021-2031](#), more than 1 million children and adults with disabilities aged less than 65 and more than 2 million aged 65 and over live in institutions. The strategy reiterates the EU committed to promote the participation of persons with disabilities in leisure activities, employment, education, health, social services and to achieve the transition from institutional to community-based care. Further, many children and older persons without identified disabilities currently also live in institutions, without a chance for independent living and making their own choices.

These figures show the need for Member States and the European Union to take further action in the area to reinforce the transition from institutional to community-based services. Equality Bodies, as national Equality watchdogs should be vested with the knowledge and powers to support this transition for right-holders, in order to enable them to exercise choice and control over their lives and make all decisions concerning their lives.

To this end, this workshop, to be organised in collaboration with right holder's organisations aims to, through an intersectional lens, explore the role Equality Bodies may take in supporting de-institutionalisation.

Target Audience: National Equality Bodies experts that are playing or may play a role in supporting de-institutionalisation, concretely members of the Age and Disability Clusters.

Expected outputs:

- **1 Workshop**
- **1 meeting of the Age cluster**
- **1 meeting of the Disability Cluster**

Expected outcomes: Experts from equality bodies will be better equipped to understand and support the de-institutionalisation process.

Enforcement in anti-discrimination legislation: redress, 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 are 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 nondiscrimination 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.

Based on Equinet’s commissioned 2022 research regarding Sanctions and remedies in discrimination cases, a Conference will be organised with the objective of reflecting on the enforcement of the existing equality and non-discrimination legislation in order to ensure that future legislative and policy measures target ensuring effective enforcement through the redress mechanisms such as sanctions.

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

Expected outputs: A Conference on Enforcement in anti-discrimination legislation: redress, sanctions and remedies

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.

Equality bodies exploring online and offline harassment

Context: Although harassment has always been included in the anti-discrimination and equality Directives as a form of discrimination, it remains a relatively less-explored subject comparing to similar forms of discrimination such as sexual harassment or hate speech. The blurred lines in between these legal constructs could also potentially help Equality Bodies maximise their mandate in cases in which they are not allowed to work on hate speech. [FRA found](#) that in 2021, more than one in four Europeans were victims of harassment in the year prior to conducting the survey, both online and offline. While the average rate of harassment was reportedly 41 % (over a five-year period), higher rates were revealed when the data was broken down by specific socio-demographic groups (for the same period): 57 % for people who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or 'other'; 54 % for those without the citizenship of the country they lived in; 51 % for those born in another EU Member State; 49 % for those born outside the EU; and 50 % for persons with disabilities (those who had difficulties in activities people usually do, due to a health problem or disability).

[It is clear from this concerning data that harassment, both online and offline, is an important issue for Equality Bodies and one which they need to focus on.](#) This Equinet training will reinforce Equality Bodies' legal experts' expertise in this area to enhance their understanding of the phenomena and be better equipped to face the specific challenges online and offline harassment presents. It will examine cases in which this kind of claim has been put forward successfully, explore the problematic areas of implementation and identify good practices among others.

Objective: To equip Equality Bodies with the tools to better understand and face cases of online and offline harassment and their connection.

Target Audience: National Equality Bodies legal experts.

Expected outputs:

- 1 Training
- 2 meetings of the Equality Law in Practice Working Group

Expected outcomes: Legal experts from equality bodies will be better equipped to understand, investigate and face the challenges that rise regarding online and offline harassment.

Strengthening Equality Bodies' capacity on improving the protection of social and economic rights

Context: Historically, the mandate and work of national equality bodies have been closely intertwined with the protection of social and economic rights through the intrinsic link—in European Union law and in legal systems of EU member states— between non-discrimination law and employment law. In fact, as revealed by Equinet's Complaint Data Report and based on the fields for which equality bodies record their complaints, most of the equality bodies' work at the national levels is focused on areas of life related to social and economic rights. Thus, overwhelming majority (91%) of equality bodies document the

number of complaints in the domain of work and employment, whereas between 70% and 78% also keep track of the number of cases in the fields of healthcare, access to goods and services, education and housing.

In 2022 Equinet created a dedicated Cluster on economic and social rights to provide a platform for peer exchange and capacity building, dedicated to the interface between social and economic rights, on one hand, and non-discrimination and equality promotion, on the other hand. The Cluster builds on seven years of collaboration and annual events targeting Equality Bodies within the framework of the CoE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on social and economic rights. In 2023, the Cluster will continue its activities under the name Equality and Socio-Economic Rights Cluster (ESER Cluster), reflecting and further highlighting the fact that its work is focused on socio-economic rights through the prism of non-discrimination and equality promotion.

Building upon the 2022 Equinet Report on Expanding the List of Protected Grounds and in specific, its focus on the socio-economic status ground, Cluster members have suggested that in 2023 their work focuses on how to use more effectively the ground of the socio-economic status in the legal work of equality bodies, with possible emphasis on how to prove socio-economic discrimination. Cluster members will continue to benefit from activities co-organized by Equinet with the framework of the CoE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on social and economic rights.

The planned activities of the Equality and Socio-Economic Rights Cluster will take into consideration the implications of the current socio-economic situation and in specific, the ongoing exponential increase in the cost of living, which exacerbates socio-economic inequalities. The developing economic crisis—just like the global pandemic—is expected to affect disproportionately those individuals and groups already facing discrimination and socio-economic disadvantages.

Objective: To enable equality bodies to share good practices and benefit from further capacity building related to the use of the socio-economic status ground in their work, as well as further strengthen their knowledge on how to use the EU Fundamental Rights Charter and the Council of Europe Charter of Social Rights to protect socio-economic rights at the national level.

Target audience: Equality bodies staff, who are members of Equinet’s Equality and Socio-Economic Rights Cluster (ESER Cluster)

Expected outputs:

- **1 meeting of the ESER Cluster** with focus on the use of the socio-economic status ground in the work of equality bodies;
- **1 Seminar** within the framework of the CoE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform;
- **Small project-based grants**, financed and administered by the Council of Europe Social Charter Department, targeting NEBs and on enabling the implementation of the CoE Social Charter at the national level

Expected outcomes: Improved practical understanding of Equality Bodies how to more effectively use the ground of socio-economic status in their work, as well as strengthened competence to use the EU Fundamental Rights Charter and the Council of Europe Charter of Social Rights to protect socio-economic rights at the national level.

Equality Bodies making recommendations

Context: Equality bodies are a central and essential part of the equality institutional architecture at the national level, building up considerable experience and expertise in promoting equality and addressing

discrimination. This places increased demands on them as they must not only provide assistance to victims of discrimination, as well as ensuring a better understanding of equality and non-discrimination, but also inform and guide different institutions ensuring equal treatment legislation achieves its purpose and potential within the Member States.

While their role making recommendations to public bodies related to discrimination is defined under the EU equal treatment legislation, the [Factual summary report](#) linked to the proposed legislative initiative on binding standards for Equality Bodies, highlights that a significant number of respondents to the open consultation deem that this service could and should be enhanced.. Furthermore, some equality bodies have reported the lack of responses from public bodies to their recommendations. Thus, to maximise the potential of equality bodies in this field of work, it is important that they are supported to secure their full and effective impact.

In the past number of years, Equinet has not explored in depth the experiences of Equality Bodies making recommendations to policymakers and legislators and how to ensure responses from relevant actors. Equinet can ensure that these practices and learning are shared with members throughout the network. This perspective will aim at collecting the experiences of Equality Bodies making recommendations to policymakers and legislators, in order to identify best practices on how to ensure their full and effective role as advisors.

Objective: The perspective will collect and use the experience and expertise of equality bodies making recommendations to inform and generate discussions and peer learning about the role and capacities of equality bodies making recommendations on equal treatment legislation.

Target audience: Equality bodies staff and policymakers at European and Member State level.

Expected outputs:

- One meeting of the Working Group on Policy Formation
- A Perspective of the Working Group on Policy Formation on the work and experience of Equality Bodies making recommendations to policymakers and legislators

Expected outcomes: Equinet members will gain further understanding on how equality bodies are using their function and their power to make recommendations.

Equality Bodies work in the field of education

Context: While protection from discrimination in Education was solely included as a protected field under the Racial Equality Directive, the importance of education both as a means to combat current and future discriminatory behaviours, and as a field of life in which discrimination occurs, has been outlined in the different Equality Strategies published in 2020-2021.

Equinet has regularly shared that experience from Equality Bodies also shows that Education is a field in which discrimination occurs often. Further, the [European Commission](#) reported that 63% of respondents reported discrimination based on race or ethnic origin by teachers or classmates at school/university, which occurred more than five times for 43%. Although 29% reported to have never experienced discrimination in contacts with a school/university administration, 47% faced it at least once (according to the Possible Gaps in the Legal Protection against Discrimination on Grounds of Ethnic or Racial Origin Factual Summary Report).

This perspective will aim at dedicating a single space to gather experiences of Equality Bodies in this field in a horizontal and intersectional way, in order to empower peer-to-peer exchange and good practices.

Objective: The Perspective will highlight the work done by equality bodies regarding equality and non-discrimination in the field of education from a horizontal and intersectional perspective.

Target Audience: Equality bodies staff working on the field of education and other stakeholders.

Expected outputs:

- **One meeting** of the Working Group on Policy Formation
- A **Short Paper** of the Working Group on Policy Formation on the work and experience of Equality Bodies working in the field of education, identifying and listing discrimination issues they come across.

Expected outcomes: Equality bodies are more aware of the problems encountered in the field of education and are ready to apply good practices gathered from peer-to-peer exchange in their own national contexts.

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 will build on previous workshops, seminars and reports produced by the Fundamental Rights Agency and the Annual report regarding the use of the Charter by the European Commission (EC) the last two years (focusing on fundamental rights in the digital age and the role of civil society organisations and rights defenders in protecting and promoting fundamental rights). Building upon previous training events and on support and tools offered by the Commission and by the FRA, and the work done by Equality Bodies and Equinet regarding the use of the Charter on different areas such as the annual report on the use of the Charter; this initiative aims at sharing good practices, building on support and tools offered by the Commission and by the FRA and outlining the 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.

Target Audience: Equality Body experts

Expected outputs:

- **An initiative** aiming at showing the use and best practices of the Charter by Equality Bodies in order to inform fellow Equality Bodies on their use of the Charter.

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.

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.

Last year, Equinet set up a multi-annual Cluster of equality bodies focusing on the protection of rights of rainbow families under the principle of freedom of movement to capitalise on equality bodies' experience and expertise and to use this experience to inform policymaking at European and national level and trigger discussions on the topic. In 2022, the Cluster worked on 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.

Based on this Equinet's discussion paper, a follow-up meeting will be organised with the objective of sharing and discussing the work of equality bodies ensuring LGBTIQ families are respected and treated equally under the principle of freedom of movement across the European Union.

Objective: This follow-up meeting will contribute to a better understanding of the key issues and experiences of equality bodies protecting the rights of rainbow families under the principle of freedom of movement.

Target Audience: staff members of equality bodies

Expected outputs:

- One or two meetings of the Equinet Cluster 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

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.

Implementing the Work-Life Balance Directive

Context: August 2022 was the deadline for all EU Member States to finally transpose the Work-Life Balance Directive into national legislation. This Directive opens the way for better protection of parents

and carers in the labour market, while allowing them to take new kind of leave and flexible work arrangements. The Directive also grants new responsibilities and competencies for equality bodies

across the EU, including direct assistance to parents and carers when they are being victims of discrimination and unfair dismissal. Following its implementation, it is now essential to understand the national impact of the EU Directive and how it is affecting the work of various stakeholders, including equality bodies, labour inspectorates and trade unions.

Before the Directive was adopted, Equinet took part in the Work-Life Balance package by co-organising a seminar on dismissal protection with the European Commission. 5 years later, and to follow-up with the adoption of the Work-Life Balance Directive, Equinet will take part in a new seminar on the issue, together with the European Commission. The event will take place in the framework of the EU Care Strategy package and will focus on the implementation and impact of the Work-Life Balance Directive.

Objective: To follow-up on the implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive

Target Audience: staff members of equality bodies, and potentially other stakeholders (labour inspectorates and trade unions)

Expected outputs:

- One seminar co-organised with the European Commission focusing on the implementation and impact of the Work-Life Balance Directive

Expected outcomes: Equality bodies are better aware of their potential and capacities to efficiently implement the Work-Life Balance Directive and ensure a strong protection of parents and carers.

Pay transparency

Context: On March 2021, the European Commission issued a proposed Directive on Pay Transparency. Initially, the Directive granted many new powers to equality bodies, including the possibility to undergo collective action on equal pay and better access to gender pay data. The proposed Directive also offered to secure new resources for equality bodies, based on the fines retrieved from equal pay cases. The legislative proposal is now being negotiated by the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the EU Commission. While the text has already been changed (and the powers offered to equality bodies have been lowered), it is essential to closely monitor the evolution of the Directive before its adoption.

The Equinet Taskforce on Pay Transparency is a platform for peer exchange between equality bodies, but also a space for discussing with relevant EU stakeholders on the legal developments regarding the Directive. After issuing a report on the topic and organising a seminar with trade unions on pay transparency, the Taskforce will continue its work on the Directive.

Objective: To monitor developments of the Pay Transparency Directive

Target Audience: staff members of equality bodies

Expected outputs:

- The Taskforce will meet at least twice a year to monitor developments of the Pay Transparency Directive and ensure equality bodies voices are heard and represented in the text

Expected outcomes: The Pay Transparency Directive improves the situation, powers and resources of equality bodies on equal pay.

Contributing to legal & policy developments in combatting online & offline Gender-based violence (GBV)

Context: On March 2022, the European Commission issued a proposed Directive on Violence Against Women. While the text focuses on criminalising violence against women, it also opens the possibility for equality bodies to directly assist victims of violence and issue reports and recommendations. Although most equality bodies have the mandate to tackle sexual harassment (based on the Gender Recast Directive), very few are mandated to tackle matters of criminal law. The Istanbul Convention is another legal instrument which can serve as a basis for equality bodies to combat online and offline gender-based violence, and its ratification at the EU level is still pending. It is essential to grasp what legal and policy tools can best enhance and support the actions of equality bodies regarding the fight against all forms of gender-based violence.

The Equinet Taskforce on Violence Against Women aims at discussing the role of equality bodies regarding gender-based violence, in relation to existing and proposed legal and policy documents. The Taskforce also examines how to improve existing work of equality bodies, on the field of sexual harassment for instance.

Objective: Discussing the role of equality bodies on combatting gender-based violence and the appropriate legal & policy tools to do so

Target Audience: staff members of equality bodies

Expected outputs:

- The Taskforce will meet at least once to monitor developments on the Directive on Violence Against Women and the Istanbul Convention, and to discuss the role of equality bodies in relation to tackling sexual harassment.

Expected outcomes: Equality bodies are better informed and positioned to combat different form of gender-based violence

Equality bodies tackling antisemitism

Context: The European Commission adopted its first ever Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life in the EU in October 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. Equinet organized an online workshop in March 2022 to discuss equality bodies' contribution to the Strategy and tackling antisemitism. In the report from this event, Equinet committed

to send questions to equality bodies in order to evaluate progress in their work on combating antisemitism and their collaboration with Jewish communities and civil society.

Objective: Follow-up the 2022 Equinet workshop on Equality Bodies combating antisemitism and reflect on progress in the work of equality bodies.

Target audience: Equality bodies, in particular those that attended the 2022 Equinet workshop.

Expected outputs:

- 1 brief report summarizing the responses received from equality bodies.

Expected outcomes: Increased attention to and more effective work on antisemitism by equality bodies

Equality bodies tackling hatred 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. Most recently, in September 2022, Equinet organized another workshop on the topic, in cooperation with the German Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency.

Objective: Follow-up the 2022 Equinet workshop on Equality Bodies tackling hatred and intolerance against Muslims and reflect on progress in the work of equality bodies.

Target audience: Equality bodies, in particular those that attended the 2022 Equinet workshop.

Expected outputs:

- 1 brief report summarizing the responses received from equality bodies.

Expected outcomes: Increased attention to and more effective work by equality bodies on tackling hatred and intolerance against Muslims.

Equality bodies contributing to National Roma Strategic Frameworks and National Anti-Racism Action Plans

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. 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. Equinet organized an online workshop in April 2022 to discuss these national strategies, with a focus on NAPARs and National Roma Strategic Frameworks.

Objective: Follow-up the 2022 Equinet workshop and reflect on progress in the work of equality bodies.

Target audience: EU institutions, national authorities and equality bodies, in particular those that attended the 2022 Equinet workshop.

Expected outputs:

- 1 online workshop focusing on the contribution of equality bodies to the National Roma Strategic Frameworks
- Contribution to the Swedish Presidency conference on NAPARs, as appropriate

Expected outcomes: Strengthened and more effective National Roma Strategic Frameworks and NAPARs through enhanced involvement and contributions by equality bodies.

Data Collection

Using equality data & research in legal casework

Context: In the course of the past years, Equinet's Working Group on Research and Data Collection has focused its work on and continuously build the capacity of its members to contribute to improving the collection and use of equality data at the national level, with a particular focus on their own complaints data.

In addition to a report of the collection and use of complaints data by equality bodies, in 2022 Equinet has developed a publication and a dedicated training on the use of equality data in the work of equality bodies. In specific, the 2022 training focused on the good practices and overcoming challenges for the use of equality data in the legal casework of equality bodies. The topic of this training has been suggested by staff of equality bodies themselves and has been brought up at meetings of Equinet's Working Group on Research and Data Collection on several occasions. Because of this strong and sustained interest in the topic, as well as its practical added value to the everyday work of equality bodies, Equinet has decided to follow-up on the 2022 training through developed a targeted Handbook on the use of equality data in the legal casework by equality bodies. The Handbook aims to provide an actional checklist and practical step-by-step guidance to relevant staff of equality bodies who need to identify and use equality data as evidence in legal work of their organizations. The Handbook will draw upon and will be directly linked to the findings of the 2022 training on the same topic and will be developed externally.

Objective: To enable staff of equality bodies to more frequently and more effectively use equality data as evidence in their legal casework

Target audience: Equality bodies staff, including members of Equinet's Working Group on Research and Data Collection

Expected outputs:

- **1 meeting of the** Equinet's Working Group on Research and Data Collection, related to the launch of the Handbook and focused on a presentation of the findings of the Handbook;

- **1 Handbook** on the use of equality data in the legal casework by equality bodies;

Expected outcomes: Improved effectiveness and strengthened competence of staff of Equality Bodies to use equality data as evidence in their legal casework.

Reporting on the state of discrimination: the use of equality data by national equality bodies

Context: In the past two years the EU published a number of important Equality Strategies, such as the EU Anti-racism Action Plan and the LGBTIQ and Roma Equality Strategy, which call on Member States to collect equality data to monitor their national implementation. Crucially, in the Roadmap to its legislative initiative on the future Directive(s) on binding standards for equality bodies, the European Commission mentions data collection requirements as one of the potential areas for which binding standards for equality bodies could be created.

These developments reflect the increased attention to the importance of equality data in the context of non-discrimination policy and law-making. The limited availability of equality data within and across European states leads to a lack of evidence on the state of equality and non-discrimination in individual states and comparatively, across Europe. This, in turn, prevents evidence-based assessment of existing laws and policies in terms of their impact on equality, as well as, the development of future laws and policies in a way that integrates non-discrimination considerations and ultimately, protects and promotes equality. In order to remedy this, EU Member States and Equality Bodies have been increasingly called to collect more and better quality equality data.

In that context, in 2023 Equinet will contribute to a conference organized by the Swedish Equality Ombudsman under the auspices of the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU. The conference aims to improve awareness on the state of discrimination through the use of equality data.

Objective: Improve understanding of the use of equality data by equality bodies in order to bring more evidence and greater clarity on the state of the protection of the non-discrimination principle at the national level

Target audience: Equality bodies, in particular management level staff and those in decision-making positions relevant for data collection. Other relevant national stakeholders who are involved in the collection and/or use of equality data.

Expected outputs:

- Contribution to a Swedish Presidency conference on equality data, as appropriate

Expected outcomes: Increased competence and motivation of equality bodies' staff to collect and use equality data in the reports and recommendations of equality bodies, and more generally, in order to provide evidence for the development and implementation of national laws and policies.

Intersectionality & Multiple Discrimination: Methods on data collection and measurement, challenges and opportunities

Context: The issue of intersecting grounds is a relatively recent focus for anti-discrimination and equality work. Yet, it holds a potential to challenge norms and stimulate innovation in the field of equality. While

it is still under-developed in theory, policy and practice, a focus on intersectionality is encouraged in that it enables equality bodies to have an understanding of and respond effectively to the real-life experiences of people experiencing discrimination.

The dominant area of work by equality bodies on intersectionality is research, with an emphasis on building a knowledge base for work on intersectionality and bringing this into public and political debate. Equality bodies need to collect and analyse data from an intersectional perspective and to promote this approach to other relevant bodies. However, data gaps present significant barriers in taking an effective approach to intersectionality and multiple discrimination.

Following the training on Equality bodies engaging with hard-to-reach groups in the context of equality research organised by Equinet in collaboration with the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, this initiative aims at building further the capacities of equality bodies relating to the development of methods on data collection and analysis connected to intersectionality and multiple discrimination, and to effectively enable equality bodies to adequately capture both forms of discrimination.

Objective: This training aims to increase the capacity of equality bodies' staff to develop methods on intersectionality and Multiple Discrimination data collection and measurement by sharing and discussing good practices as well as challenges and opportunities 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 in-person 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 in intersectional approach in collecting data.

Business and Equality

Role of equality bodies in supporting Equality Mainstreaming

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.

In 2021, 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 first two years, the Cluster focused on sharing good practices and raising awareness among decision makers on equality mainstreaming tools, including equality duties, equality impact assessments and equality plans. Two compendiums of equality bodies' good practices of working with those tools were published and two high level conferences were held.

In 2023, the Cluster will continue to focus on the role of equality bodies in supporting equality mainstreaming at the national level by public bodies, as well as by private sector actors, including members of national Diversity Charters. After having a strong external focus in the first two years, the Cluster will focus more on peer exchange in 2023, with a study visit to one of the Cluster members' institutions to learn about their work on equality mainstreaming. This study visit will be combined with an in-person Cluster meeting and the opportunity to meet with some local relevant organisations, including members of the national diversity charter and other public and private sector organisations working on equality mainstreaming. The lessons learned can then be shared among Cluster members and further disseminated among the Network through the production of a post-visit report.

Objective: Build the capacity of equality bodies to support and promote the use of equality mainstreaming tools by public authorities and private sector actors through focused peer exchange.

Target Audience: Equality Bodies, in particular those staff working on equality mainstreaming.

Expected outputs:

- **1 study visit** (1 day) of the Cluster to one of the Cluster members' institutions to see and learn about their work on equality mainstreaming and to meet with relevant local partners in the public and private sectors.
- **2 meetings of the cluster (1 of which will be next to the study visit)** on equality mainstreaming, providing a platform for sharing good practices and peer exchanges.
- **Short report** on lessons learnt from the study visit, with the aim of informing the work of equality bodies and responsible public authorities and private sector actors.

Expected outcomes: Strengthened and more effective use of equality mainstreaming tools by public and private actors through enhanced support by equality bodies.

Artificial Intelligence and other digital automation

Artificial Intelligence and protecting and promoting equality: a new role for equality bodies

Context: Over the past several years, discussions on regulating the impact of the use of Artificial Intelligence systems on fundamental rights at European level—both at the European Union and Council of Europe levels—have increasingly brought the spotlight on non-discrimination as being one of the rights often negatively affected by the increasing use of AI technologies.

As national public bodies specialized in non-discrimination law and the provision of redress to victims of discrimination, Equality Bodies across the EU have a unique role and distinct added value in making sure AI systems are used in an equality-compliant way. Equinet's dedicated report "Regulating for an Equal AI: A New Role for Equality Bodies" and a Good Practice Guide on Equality Bodies already engaging with the topic of the effect of AI systems on equality, alongside with two trainings and a capacity building online platform, have sought to equip staff of Equality Bodies with the knowledge necessary to more readily fulfil this role.

These capacity-building initiatives took place over the course of the past three years and largely emphasized identifying and leveraging relevant external sources of expertise—be it legal practitioners,

university researchers or digital rights organizations—to enable and empower Equality Bodies to effectively address algorithmic discrimination.

In 2023, Equinet plans to shift the focus to equality bodies themselves as the main source of applied knowledge and practical insight in how to tackle AI-enabled discriminatory practices at the national level. While Equinet’s second training on AI, namely a Legal Advice Clinic which discussed cases brought by equality bodies, also capitalized on the experience of equality bodies, the primary focus was on problem solving as opposed to showcasing a specific good practice.

Since the start of Equinet’s work on AI, there has been a gradual and steady increase in the number of equality bodies starting to engage with this topic. Some of Equinet members have already brought legal cases (concerning both the private and the public sector) related to AI, have contributed to the development of national strategies on AI or have given inputs to national legal reforms. They are also building national partnerships across sectors with relevant national regulators such as national data protection authorities, national financial supervisory authorities, etc.

To leverage the above experiences and ensure that relevant knowledge is captured and shared with members throughout the network, in 2023 Equinet will organize a study visit to an equality body identified as a source of good practices. This exchange is anticipated to involve members of Equinet’s Cluster on Artificial Intelligence and to build upon and further expand the knowledge base that the Cluster started creating in 2022. A possible focus of this study visit could be partnerships with national data protection authorities and the way data protection law could be used by equality bodies for tackling AI-enabled discrimination.

Objective: To showcase and create and disseminate knowledge about specific and potentially replicable activities of an equality body in addressing AI-enabled discrimination at the national level.

Target audience: Equality bodies staff and if applicable, relevant national partners of the equality body hosting the study visit

Expected outputs:

- **1 study visit** (1 day) of the AI Cluster and a limited number of other potentially interested staff of Equality Bodies to see and learn about their work on AI-enabled discrimination and if relevant, to meet with national partners of the equality body hosting the study visit;
- **1 meeting of the Cluster** on Artificial Intelligence, providing a platform to discuss on relevant national and European legal and policy developments and further engage in peer exchanges;
- **1 workshop** organized for equality bodies from non-EU countries to discuss how the EU legal framework on non-discrimination and relevant EU legislative developments on AI could be used to strengthen protection against AI-enabled discrimination by private and public actors in non-EU countries. This workshop will only be organized if TAIEX funding from DG NEAR is available.
- **Short report** on lessons learnt from the study visit, with the aim of informing the work of equality bodies and responsible public authorities and private sector actors.

Expected outcomes: Equinet and equality bodies will gain further understanding on concrete measures, tools and activities related to providing protection against AI-driven discrimination which an equality body has already implemented in their national context

Climate Change

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

Context: In 2022, Equinet commissioned a research project to unpack and highlight the link between climate change and equality. The research aims at developing an equality assessment of the European Green Deal to examine how this policy and legal package affects and takes into account the needs and realities of various discriminated groups, including women and racialised people, but also persons with disabilities, younger and older persons, religious minorities and LGBTIQ persons. Moreover, this assessment aims at highlighting the “hidden” equality aspects of some key policy fields such as energy, agriculture, transport, industry, climate, environment and research.

Uncovering the invisible equality components of climate laws and policies is essential for assessing the role equality bodies can play in ensuring fair and equal climate action. Indeed, equality bodies engage on issues that are directly linked to climate change and its consequences, such as access to housing and resources, accessibility of transport, health inequalities, socio-economic inequalities, etc. However, they might not envisage and conceive that the work they deliver directly falls within the framework of climate change and environment laws and policies. Re-defining the issue of climate change through the lens of equality could help better identify the current actions taken by equality bodies in this field, while accurately assessing their potential to protect discriminated groups and promote equal and fair climate policies. The research therefore also aims at better defining the role and potential of equality bodies regarding climate action, policies and legislation.

Objective: to present the findings of the Equinet research on climate change and equality bodies.

Target audience: staff members of equality bodies and relevant EU stakeholders and policy-makers.

Expected output:

- One roundtable discussion presenting the findings of the Equinet research on climate change and equality bodies, including recommendations and potential follow-up for Equinet and equality bodies on this innovative issue.

Expected outcome: Equality bodies are better informed of their role and potential regarding climate change policies and are able to define a set of actions to efficiently intervene in this innovative field.

Network Strategic Engagement

Communication

Effectively communicating the activities and outputs developed by the Network is an integral part of Equinet's strategy. Promoting all the activities described in this work plan within the Network and to relevant external audiences ensures the positioning of Equinet, delivering content and activities that are relevant not only for its members, but also for the equality and non-discrimination agenda at the EU level.

In 2023 Equinet will revisit its communication strategy, focusing on Network communication (in collaboration with its Membership Engagement strategy) and on key external stakeholder audiences. The goal will be to build a communication strategy that can effectively:

- Make the content and knowledge that are created within the Network as easily transferable and “usable” as possible.
- Ensure that the flows of information within the Network are optimised, between the Secretariat and Members and directly between Members themselves.
- Communicate 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.
- Disseminate knowledge about equality, developments and innovation in the field, equality legislation and policy, highlighting in particular the work and contribution of equality bodies.
- Promote 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
- Equality Blog with expert opinions on key developments in the field of equality
- Optimised membership communication
- Newsletters
- Social Media channels updated with relevant content
- Equinet Publications
- Calendar of events and activities

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.

Membership Engagement

In 2023, Equinet will continue to strengthen its focus on membership engagement and strive to provide a membership experience that is as beneficial and supportive as possible for all its members.

Throughout the year, the Secretariat will continue to provide support, resources and opportunities for peer exchange within the Network, facilitate knowledge-building and exchange, support members in need, as well as in the context of calls for proposals on equality funding. Especially in the context of the legislative proposal on standards for equality bodies, Equinet will offer a space to Members to exchange, plan and advocate together for the approval and implementation of the legislation.

Following the vision set out in the new Equinet Strategic Plan 2023-2026, Equinet will develop a new membership engagement strategy. This will look at the ways equality bodies currently engage with the Network and set out steps to reinforce and continuously improve efficient and active membership communication and engagement. The strategy will help Equinet remain relevant to the Members, meet their expectations in a broad range of areas, and ensure that Equinet is well-placed to support them with challenges.

We will also continue to analyse the health of the Network by measuring the impact of our activities within the membership, sharing the results with the Board in order to inform the implementation of our work and future direction of the Network.

Engagement with partners

Contributing the perspective and experience of national equality bodies on the ground, Equinet will pursue its close cooperation 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, such as the Social Rights and Inclusion Directorate in DG Employment. We will sustain important engagement with the Commission's Task Force on Equality, and with relevant high-level expert groups and networks of the European Commission. In particular, through continued participation in its role as Observer to the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, or engagement with the European Commission High Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity (including the Subgroup on Equality Data) and the High Level Group on combating hate speech and hate crime.

We will consolidate fruitful engagement with relevant actors working on anti-discrimination at European Commission level, particularly the European Commission anti-racism coordinator, the European Commission's coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred and the European Commission's coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life.

Equinet will also strive to build closer links and cooperation with other Directorates (in particular DG NEAR) connected to specific regions within Equinet membership to support their full engagement in the activities of the network.

In 2023, Equinet will deepen its engagement 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. Such consolidated and targeted engagement with members of the

EP will be particularly relevant in view of the upcoming legislative proposals on Standards for Equality Bodies, as well as to ensure continuing support to the core European values of equality and fundamental rights ahead of the next European Elections in 2024.

Equinet will strive to continue building closer 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. In past years, fruitful involvement of Equinet and equality bodies in events organized by Presidencies of the Council of the EU, including engagement with Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council configuration (EPSCO), underlined the relevance and added-value of an increased engagement with the Council of the EU, which Equinet will strive to further develop in 2023, conveying the work and experience of our members in relation to relevant equality files and proposals.

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 European Labour Authority (ELA).

Together with our members, Equinet will continue 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) in the field of advancing economic and social rights. This partnership features annual thematic meetings and targeted seminars for equality bodies and national human rights institutions.

We will also pursue 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), and in this context, 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 key ongoing links and cooperation with civil society and social partners through their European networks. At the level of the UN, relevant engagement with the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) and other relevant structures will be pursued. Regarding the Council of Europe, Equinet will pursue its long-standing close cooperation with the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), will further develop its engagement in its role as Observer to the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) and with relevant bodies within the Council of Europe working on anti-discrimination and artificial intelligence, in specific the Council of Europe Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI). Equinet remains open to pursue cooperation with equality bodies outside of the European continent, based on mutual learning and peer support.

Equinet takes and will pursue 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 8 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), OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), European Commission DG Justice, European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). FRA is convening and presiding the regular 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.

Network Development

The new CERV programme is core and its funding restrictions (restricted to EU-based activities and Members) have had an impact on the life of the Network. Realising that this poses a challenge to the internal cohesion of Equinet, the Secretariat and Equinet Board have launched an all-out effort to try and secure additional funding that would allow us to come back to the *status quo ante*, of equal financial support provided to all Equinet members to support their participation in the Network's activities. Discussions are ongoing with the EC to make the best use of existing funding instruments to that end. Throughout 2022, Equinet is developing efforts towards funding consolidation and diversification, and will pursue these in hope to lead to constructive solutions in 2023 with potential relevant and interested donors, including other departments of the European Commission, Foundations and governmental bodies.

In addition to securing the funds necessary for ensuring the full participation of all Equinet Members in our activities, consolidated and additional funding is also being pursued to safeguard the current capacity of the Equinet Secretariat, as the limits of the current funding levels have been reached, especially after a year of very high inflation. Fund-raising will remain at the top of priorities for the Secretariat and the Board in 2023.

Monitoring & 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. Basically, it looks 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. Over the past years the process of data collection and analysis has been improved and refined in line with Equinet's needs and in 2023, 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).

Admin & finance: Budget

In 2023, Equinet expects to have a team of 9 full-time staff or equivalent, as well as a number of traineeships. The budget for 2023 is of similar scale to that of the previous year. 2023 will also mark the first year of the new 4-year Strategic Plan (2023-2026), of which the annual Work Plans will be the implementation.

Monitoring and Evaluation duties have been reinforced under the framework of the new EU CERV programme, from which Equinet gets its main funding. New online tools have been introduced by the EC ensuring a continuous monitoring and reporting to them on Equinet activities. The Secretariat, under the supervision of the Board (and with the assistance of the Equinet Treasurer), will ensure that M&E requirements are met and that funds are conservatively managed, especially in these times of uncertainties regarding the level and rise of inflation. Inflation can have a detrimental effect on the overall costs of the Secretariat, with a particular impact on salary costs. In case we see continued inflation during 2023, Equinet might have to reassign some of the funds from one category to another in order to meet its full commitments. This could have a significant impact on the planned delivery of activities (for instance, an event that was foreseen to be organised in-person might need to be moved online to cut on costs).

Since Equinet is bound to receive the same level of EU funding in 2023 as in 2022, the budget for 2023 was planned to be similar. However, due to the historically high level of inflation experienced throughout 2022, a rebalancing of the allocation of funds was necessary for the new budget. Salary costs have been increased substantially and this logically is leading to a reduction in funds assigned to other headings such as activities (travel & accommodation, venue rentals...) and other services.

You will also notice that it is foreseen to make a more extensive use of the Membership fees compared to other years to compensate for the budget shortfall, since the EC grant contribution is capped at 1,200,000€/year. This logically entails that less money will be set aside as reserves (as more of the annual collected amount will go to activities). At the end of 2021, our reserves had accrued to 46,193€.

Provisional budget for 2023

Cost Centre	Budget 2023	Budget 2022	Diff 2023/2022
Staff Costs	790.000	740.000	50.000
Outsourcing	98.000	109.696	-11.696
Travel	120.000	137.700	-17.700
Accommodation	70.000	65.700	4.300
Subsistence	45.000	44.850	150
Equipment	3.000	5.000	-2.000
Services	155.000	185.588	-30.588
Total Budget	1.281.000	1.265.000	16.000

Source of Income	Income 2023	Funding %	Income 2022	Funding %
EC Grant	1.200.000	93,68%	1.200.000	94,86%
Membership Fees	81.000	6,32%	65.000	5,14%
Total Income	1.281.000	100,00%	1.265.000	100,00%