



2024 WORK PLAN



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Executive summary

Equinet is a cornerstone of the fundamental rights architecture in the EU. 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 across Europe. This document presents Equinet's comprehensive work plan for 2024, outlining key focus areas and strategic initiatives that will drive our efforts to advance equality. The work plan encompasses various areas of focus, including relationship management and network development, standards for Equality Bodies, EU equality strategies, new and current equality trends in equality, and developing equality law. Each section highlights specific objectives and initiatives that Equinet aims to undertake in the year 2024.

2023 saw exciting developments in the equality field, with the advances in the negotiations around the proposed legislation on Standards for Equality Bodies, and Equinet and its members played a crucial role in facilitating some of the discussions and raising the importance of the issue. 2024 will bring many changes and renewed energy to the European context with the European Parliament elections and the appointment of new Commissioners. Equinet will continue to work with our partners and will pursue and establish new and strong relationships, advocating for Equality Bodies and furnishing evidence to EU legislators of the need for strong standards and ways to monitor compliance.

Internally, Equinet will continue to build upon its strong capacity-building program, providing members with tools and know-how to further their efforts in safeguarding equality. In 2024, we will analyse and assess the impact of previous EU equality strategies to gain valuable insights for future policy development, with a particular focus on LGBTIQ equality and disparities in Roma health equality.

Equinet will also continue to explore new and trending topics, supporting and guiding Equality Bodies in implementing the Artificial Intelligence Act, ensuring their effective involvement in the development and enforcement of regulations to safeguard against AI-driven discrimination. We will also facilitate knowledge sharing, research collaboration, and engagement with policymakers to ensure that climate change responses are inclusive and equitable.

In looking into developing equality law and Equality Bodies' role, Equinet will promote and support Equality Bodies in submitting their expert opinions to national and European Courts. Equinet will also work towards ensuring that Equality Bodies actively contribute to developing accessibility standards, advocate for inclusive design, and address the barriers faced by older persons and persons with disabilities in accessing physical and digital environments. Finally, Equinet will support Equality Bodies in using situation testing methodologies and explore the work of Equality Bodies in relation to the role of sport in fighting discrimination, discussing with relevant actors how Equality Bodies can cooperate with them to promote equality and tackle discrimination through sport and sporting events.

This comprehensive program builds upon the Network's work in previous years to support Equality Body staff and help our members to be champions for equality in their countries. As we enter this challenging but exciting period, we look toward a future where Equality Bodies are supported and strengthened through strong European legislation. We develop this work always focused on the values we hold dear as a Network – respect, equality, and justice. Together we can achieve equality for all and secure a better future for this and the next generations.

Equinet Strategic Plan 2023- 2026

Vision: An equal Europe, where equality is a reality for everyone, diversity is valued, and all forms of discrimination have been eliminated.

Mission: Equinet promotes equality in Europe by supporting Equality Bodies to be independent and effective catalysts for more equal societies, and delivers its mission in a way that embodies and promotes its values.

Values: Equality, Respect, Dignity, Solidarity, Diversity, Inclusion, Transparency, Participation, Innovation, Justice, Protection.

Areas of change & long-term objectives

Equinet will deliver on its mission with awareness of the work that remains to be done in the field of equality and non-discrimination and the context in which the Network and its members evolve. The focus will be on three main areas for which three long-term strategic objectives have been identified:

A) Strengthen and support Equality Bodies to achieve equality for all

1. Strengthen Equality Bodies as the cornerstones of national and equality infrastructures
2. Support Equality Bodies through knowledge, capacity-building, and skills sharing for the enforcement of their mandate

B) Act as an expert voice of Equality Bodies in Europe on equality and non-discrimination

3. Advance the equality agenda in Europe through strategic engagement and communication
4. Maintain Equinet's position as a research and knowledge hub drawing on Equality Bodies' experience of equality and non-discrimination

C) Maintain and improve Equinet's capacity as a strong, resilient, and innovative Network

5. Ensure an enriching membership experience in Equinet by tailoring activities and engaging all members
6. Develop and sustain Equinet's resources and accountability to better respond to members' needs

[For further information on our Strategic Plan, please see the Equinet website.](#)

Equinet Expert Groups

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 meets twice during the year, typically one in-person meeting, and one online.

- **Communication Strategies and Practices** (coordinated by Teresa Pedreira)
Moderators: **Mintautė Jurkutė**, Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Lithuania & **Ana Tretnjak**, Communication Officer, Office of the Ombudswoman, Croatia
- **Equality Law in Practice** (coordinated by Jone Elizondo-Urrestarazu)
Moderators: **Imane El-Morabet**, Unia, Belgium & **Leona Bashow**, Equality and Human Rights Commission, United Kingdom
- **Gender Equality** (coordinated by Moana Genevey)
Moderator: **Aleksandra Szczerba**, Commissioner for Human Rights, Poland
- **Policy Formation** (coordinated by Tamás Kádár)
Moderator: **Monika Cavlovic**, Office of the Ombudswoman, Croatia
- **Research and Data Collection** (coordinated by Daris Lewis and Milla Vidina)
Moderator: **Bogdan Banjac**, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Serbia

Project

Set up in 2019 to support **the understanding, implementation, and monitoring of European standards for Equality Bodies** at the 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 meets twice during the year, in-person or online, depending on the needs of the group in relation to the developments of the legislative proposal and its future implementation.

- **Standards for Equality Bodies** (coordinated by 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. Clusters may be in touch regularly via email, meet online, or in-person if linked to other capacity-building events.

- **Age** (coordinated by Daris Lewis)
- **Artificial Intelligence** (coordinated by Milla Vidina)
- **Disability** (coordinated by Jone Elizondo Urrestarazu)

Activities

To plan for 2024, the Equinet Executive Board and Secretariat have collaborated with the Network's Expert Groups to propose a program that fits the Equinet Strategic Plan 2023-2026, always guided by our main strategic objectives of:

- Strengthening and supporting Equality Bodies to achieve equality for all;
- Acting as an expert voice of Equality Bodies in Europe on equality and non-discrimination; and
- Maintaining and improve Equinet's capacity as a strong, resilient, and innovative Network.

This Equinet Work Plan 2024 outlines all planned activities for the coming year, structured along the following areas of activity and themes:

1. Standards for Equality Bodies

- Adoption and implementation of legislation on Standards for Equality Bodies

2. EU Equality Strategies

- EU equality strategies: Policy Guidance
- Equality Bodies promoting LGBTIQ equality
- Equality Bodies and racialised communities' access to healthcare

3. Exploring new and current equality trends

- Practical & Ethical Issues surrounding the use of AI in Communication
- Equality Bodies implementing the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA)
- Climate Change and equality

4. Developing equality law and the role of Equality Bodies

- Equality Bodies providing their expert opinion in courts
- A living conditions affair: Accessibility, infrastructure & habitat
- Equality Bodies using situation testing
- Equality Bodies and the role of sport in the fight against discrimination

5. Relationship management, network development, and governance

- Communication
- Member engagement
- Partnerships
- Funding
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Administration and Finance

Description of activities

1. Standards for Equality Bodies

2023 saw exciting developments in the equality field, with the advances in the negotiations around the proposed legislation on Standards for Equality Bodies. In 2024, Equinet will continue advocating for a legislation that effectively addresses minimum standards and empower Equality Bodies to rise to the challenge when the times come to implement these standards.

Adoption and implementation of legislation on Standards for Equality Bodies

Context/Policy Relevance: Equinet expects that the adoption of the Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies, proposed by the European Commission in December 2022, will happen in 2024. This will be a reason to celebrate the first ever legally binding international standards for Equality Bodies, a culmination of a decade-long process and work initiated and supported by Equinet. The adoption of this 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.

However, this will be no time for complacency as the work continues with all Member States transposing the EU Directives and strengthening their Equality Bodies in the process. Equinet's Project on Standards for Equality Bodies has been a driver for our engagement (including the development of indicators on different aspects of standards) and, together with the Equinet Executive Board and Secretariat, will continue to lead Equinet's work on this issue.

Activities:

- 3 Mini workshops related to different aspects of standards (topics could include for instance cooperation with other public bodies and with social partners; inquiry and litigation powers, etc.). 1 workshop will be held in hybrid form, the others online.
- 2 meetings of the Equinet Project on Standards for Equality Bodies (1 online and 1 hybrid, coinciding with the hybrid mini workshop above)
- TAEIX 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 (subject to dedicated funding)

Objectives:

- Providing a platform for Equinet members to discuss challenges and good practices relating to different aspects of the standards
- Contributing to the correct and swift transposition of the Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies by developing materials and providing advice to Member States and EU Institutions as necessary

Target audience: Primarily the senior management of Equality Bodies. For the TAIEX workshop, Equality Bodies and public administration in non-EU countries. In the case of providing advice and materials, Member State administrations and EU Institutions.

Outputs:

- 3 mini workshops and short summaries for them
- 2 project meetings
- 1 TAIEX workshop

Expected Outcomes & Impact: Equality Bodies become more aware of the content and impact of the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies and therefore also more able to advise and hold to account their Member States. This will contribute to the full and correct transposition and implementation of the EU Directives, and it will strengthen the independence, resources, powers and accessibility of Equality Bodies, ultimately benefitting all those at risk of discrimination and inequalities.

2. EU equality strategies

As we look ahead to 2025, when many of EU Equality Strategies are up for renewal, it becomes imperative to gather evidence and provide advice to the European Commission on the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of the existing strategies, based on the experience of Equality Bodies. In the following activities, we will delve into specific areas of equality work, such as promoting LGBTIQ equality and addressing health inequalities faced by racialized communities and Roma people.

EU equality strategies: Policy Guidance

Context/Policy Relevance: A number of EU Equality Strategies (including on LGBTIQ, gender equality, anti-racism) will be up for renewal in 2025. These Equality Strategies provide the framework for EU action and ambition in the field. Taking this into account, 2024 will be a crucial year to collect evidence and provide advice to the European Commission on the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the current Strategies as experienced by Equality Bodies. The unique experience of Equality Bodies can ensure that the next Strategies build on the existing ones, fill any potential gaps, and make any necessary corrections to further equality.

Activities:

- 1 WG Policy Formation meeting (online)

Objectives:

- Ensuring ambitious and comprehensive future EU Equality Strategies

Outputs:

- Perspective on the future EU Equality Strategies

Target audience: European Commission

Expected Outcomes & Impact: The Equinet perspective will be used and referenced by the European Commission in the development of the post-2025 EU Equality Strategies. As a consequence, owing to the evidence-based advice of Equality Bodies, the post-2025 EU Equality Strategies will be ambitious, comprehensive and will represent a step forward for the affected communities.

Equality Bodies promoting LGBTIQ equality

Context/Policy Relevance: While the European Commission issued its first ever LGBTIQ Strategy and its proposed Regulation on Mutual Parenthood Recognition, LGBTIQ equality remains threatened and challenged in many countries of the EU. Equality Bodies have been working for years to ensure better and stronger protection of LGBTIQ people. They are essential allies to ensure that the EU is an LGBTIQ Freedom Zone, including by protecting trans and intersex people and assisting rainbow families on the move. Their experience needs to be shared and strengthened, in order to create a safer and better environment for LGBTIQ people in Europe.

Activities:

- Roundtable/Webinar (online) on the rights of rainbow families
- 1 WG Gender Equality meeting

Outputs:

- Factsheet on LGBTIQ equality and Equality Bodies

Objectives:

- Share expertise and good practices on cases related to rainbow families on the move (marriage, parenthood, etc.)
- Gather national expertise, knowledge, and practices from the ground on LGBTIQ equality to share with policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders

Target audience:

- For the webinar on rainbow families: Equality Bodies
- For the factsheet on LGBTIQ equality: Equality Bodies, policy-makers and other relevant external stakeholders

Expected Outcomes & Impact: The webinar will allow Equality Bodies to better address cases of discrimination against rainbow families on the move in their own national context by learning from good practices of other Equality Bodies. As a consequence, rainbow families on the move will receive better assistance from Equality Bodies when requesting it. The factsheet will allow policy-makers to have a better understanding and knowledge of the work undertaken by Equality Bodies in the EU on LGBTIQ equality. As a result, there will be an enhanced overview of activities, experiences and contribution of Equality Bodies to an EU LGBTIQ Freedom Zone.

Equality Bodies and racialised communities' access to healthcare

Context/Policy Relevance:

The Racial Equality Directive prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin across different areas including healthcare. Despite the advanced legal framework against discrimination, inequalities in access to healthcare persist and legislation needs to be backed up with further actions. According to the [EU Action Plan Against Racism](#), the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the consequences of existing health inequalities suffered by people with a minority racial or ethnic background into the spotlight as well as underlined that racism can also affect people's mental health. Likewise, the [EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020 - 2030](#) pointed out the significant life expectancy gap at birth between the general population and Roma people, specifically 10.4 years for Roma women and 10.2 years for Roma men. The current importance of this topic is also emphasized at the international level. This is the case of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which during its 107th session focused on experiences shared by persons protected under International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, challenges and lessons learned and demonstrated the need to provide clarity and guidance on the obligations under the ICERD regarding the right to health.

The EU Action Plan against Racism, 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. Equinet organized an online workshop in April 2022 and February 2023 to discuss National Roma Strategic Frameworks and National Action Plans against Racism. Furthermore, Equinet is an active stakeholder of the EPHA's led [DisQo network](#) which through a series of webinars, explored some of the key priorities where action is required in relation to racism and discrimination on both mental and physical health inequities.

Building upon the above activities, Equinet will organise in collaboration with EPHA a workshop to explore the inequalities and experiences of discrimination of racialised communities with a focus on Roma people in the access to healthcare, as well as to discuss the role Equality Bodies may play in collaborating with National Roma Contact Points (NRCPs) and addressing such issues.

Activities:

- Workshop (online/hybrid-TBC)

Outputs:

- 1 online/hybrid Workshop
- 1 brief report summarizing the workshop

Objectives: To identify challenges, showcase and disseminate knowledge about specific and potentially replicable activities of Equality Bodies and relevant stakeholders in addressing health discrimination and inequalities of racialised communities and Roma people.

Target audience: EU institutions, national authorities, NRCPs and Equality Bodies

Expected Outcomes & Impact: Strengthened and more effective National Roma Strategic Frameworks and NAPARs addressing health through enhanced involvement and contributions by Equality Bodies.

3. Exploring new and current equality trends

Equinet will continue to delve into emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in promoting equality across innovative domains. In 2024 we will focus on three interconnected areas that are of significant impact in today's society: the practical and ethical considerations surrounding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in communication, the vital role of Equality Bodies in equality-proofing AI systems, and the intersection between climate change and equality.

Practical & Ethical Issues surrounding the use of AI in Communication

Context/Policy Relevance: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is poised to reinvent the entire communication industry and pave the way for new ways of working by eliminating monotonous tasks and expanding creative potential. While AI has the potential to change the way we work if we understand how to apply it effectively, it also comes with ethical concerns that we need to consider, especially in the field of communicating equality.

Activities:

- 2-day training (in person)
- 6-month follow-up meeting (online)

Objectives:

- Understanding AI in communication: Practical application
 - Understand how AI can help in our communication work and improve our efficiency
 - Identify tips & tricks to using AI in communication processes
 - Explore the possibility of using AI in languages (other than English), voiceovers, etc.
- Future-proofing AI in communication: Ethical questions
 - Identify the ethical concerns connected to using AI in communication
 - Learn to recognise AI-created work and how to acknowledge its use
 - Outline risks & mitigation techniques that stem from using or misusing AI in communication (misinformation, bias, copywriting/intellectual property, data & security etc.)
- Communicating on AI
 - Outline ways in which to communicate on the topic of AI (good practices, examples...)

Target audience: Communication experts within Equality Bodies, or other NEB staff interested in AI and communication

Outputs:

- Guidelines on how to ethically use AI in communicating equality

Expected Outcomes & Impact: Equality Body staff use AI tools to improve communication processes and outputs where relevant and helpful. They apply the guidelines in their work to mitigate the risks identified, and update these over time to adapt to the ever-evolving developments within AI.

Equality-proofing AI systems: Equality Bodies rising to the challenge

Context/Policy Relevance:

In 2024 Equinet will continue to build the knowledge of members and engage with external stakeholders on how various forms of digital automation, including AI systems, impact equality and non-discrimination and the role of Equality Bodies. The forthcoming adoption of EU's groundbreaking legislation on AI, the Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA), which regulates the impact of these systems on equality and fundamental rights, provides unique opportunity for the involvement and empowerment of Equality Bodies. Equinet will organize a thematic conference to give visibility to the important role of Equality Bodies in the future implementation of the AIA and to equip Equality Bodies with better understanding of the different opportunities for involvement under the AIA. Equinet will contribute to ensuring that the practical implementation of the AIA through the future harmonized technical standards effectively safeguards equality by taking into the account the complex intersectional ways in which AI systems can discriminate.

Equinet will continue its engagement with the Council of Europe Committee on Artificial Intelligence to ensure that this future legislation fulfils its potential of providing strong and impactful protection of equality.

We will also continue our capacity building activities with a focus on gender equality and strengthening the involvement and expertise of Equality Bodies beyond the EU.

Activities:

- Conference / Roundtable (hybrid)
- Joint AI Cluster/Gender Equality WG meeting
- Series of short webinars on AI and gender equality
- TAEIX workshop for non-EU members (subject to dedicated funding)

Outputs:

AIA guidance on equality-proofing the harmonized technical standards

Objectives: Enable the effective contribution of Equality Bodies in the context of the implementation of the AIA and strengthen their capacity to monitor and address the impact of AI systems on gender equality.

Target audience:

Experts from Equinet's Cluster on AI and the Working Group on Gender Equality, as well as other interested staff of Equality Bodies.

Expected Outcomes & Impact: Equality Bodies are able to apply future legislation on AI and to identify any gaps in the applicable legal framework, providing effective protection against AI-enabled discrimination. Equality Bodies also have an improved understanding and knowledge of the impact of AI systems on gender equality, resulting in better protection of those affected by AI systems.

Climate Change and equality

Context/Policy Relevance: In 2022, Equinet commissioned a research project on the link between climate change and equality. More precisely, the research paper analyses the EU Green Deal with an equality perspective and explores the equality aspect of policy domains such as fisheries, energy and transportation. The research paper also discusses the potential role of Equality Bodies when engaging on this issue, and on these specific policies and legislation. In the research paper, while few Equality Bodies had experience in this field, many of them indicated that they would be interested in building their capacity on issues related to climate change, environmental policies and their impact on equality and on marginalised groups. Therefore, in 2024, Equinet will organise a training or a seminar to enhance knowledge and understanding of Equality Bodies regarding climate change and its impact on equality and discriminated groups.

Activities:

- Training / Seminar (hybrid)

Outputs:

- 1 training on the impact of climate change and climate policies on equality and anti-discrimination

Objectives:

- To build capacities of Equality Bodies regarding the link between climate change and equality policies and issues
- To develop avenues of action for Equality Bodies in the field of climate change

Target audience:

- Equality Bodies
- European policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders (academics, NGOs, etc.)

Expected Outcomes & Impact: Equality Bodies are better informed and have a stronger understanding of climate change, climate & environmental policies and of their impact on equality issues directly related to their work. As a result, they engage directly on the issue and are eager to further deepen their knowledge and work related to the impact of climate change on equality.

4. Developing equality law and the role of Equality Bodies

Equinet's commitment to advancing equality law will continue in 2024, including in the context of recent EU gender equality law developments. Equinet's Working Group on Gender Equality will remain actively engaged in monitoring and discussing the critical directives on Pay Transparency, Violence Against Women, Women on Board, and Work-Life Balance.

Equinet will also highlight the critical role of Equality Bodies in providing their expert opinions to courts, aiding judges and decision-makers in interpreting and applying equality legislation. Additionally, Equinet will explore the role Equality Bodies may take in enabling accessibility, adequate infrastructure and mobility to older persons and persons with disabilities. We will also address the use of situation testing

as an effective tool for monitoring, uncovering, and addressing discrimination. Finally, Equinet members will discuss the significant role that sport play in promoting inclusion, combating discrimination, and breaking harmful stereotypes.

Equality Bodies providing their expert opinion in courts

Context/Policy Relevance:

Enforcement of Equality legislation is a key element to make the right to equality and non-discrimination a reality. Equality Bodies are often requested to provide their expert opinions to Courts to aid judges and other decision makers that need to interpret and apply Equality legislation. The effective enforcement of equality and non-discrimination legislation often benefits from the collaboration of equality experts (Equality Bodies) and the judiciary and other semi-judicial entities working together. One way to do that has been through the submission of expert opinions by Equality Bodies to individual cases or guidance on interpretation to Courts.

The regulation of this power and the form that it takes varies across Europe. In some cases, it takes the form of *amicus curiae*, in which the Equality Body may decide on their own accord to send their external analysis regarding questions of law, comparative information in their area of expertise, and in others it is delivered upon request by the Court and takes the form of expert opinions. Furthermore, Courts may have the option to request such information freely or have an obligation to do so under national law in cases that have an equality and non-discrimination element. As analysed in the first chapters of the Equality Law Working Group Discussion paper 2022, [Equality Bodies working on cases without an identifiable victim: Actio popularis](#), not all Equality Bodies across Europe have legal standing before courts and/or *amicus curiae* powers, while some have had a long tradition of submitting such opinions to national and international Courts. The Directive proposals on Standards for Equality Bodies foresee this kind of power to be given to all Equality Bodies, necessitating a discussion and training on the subject.

Activities:

- 2-day training
- One meeting of the Equality Law Working Group

Outputs:

- An in-person 2-day training to be provided with the collaboration of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC).

Objectives: The training will provide legal experts in Equality Bodies with the tools and know-how, through a practical perspective, to submit expert opinions and *amicus curiae* briefs to national and European Courts.

Target audience: Members of the Equality Law working group and legal experts of Equality Bodies.

Expected Outcomes & Impact: Equality Bodies are prepared to effectively provide courts with their expert opinions and therefore have the tools and know-how to ensure a smooth and consistent enforcement of EU equality law, including the future Standards for Equality Bodies Directives.

A living conditions affair: Accessibility, infrastructure & habitat

Context/Policy Relevance:

Accessibility and inclusion of older people and persons with disabilities is becoming one of the most important global issues which will only rise in the coming years. By 2050, it is expected that about 6.25 billion people, 15% of whom are persons with disabilities, will be living in urban centres. The global population is also ageing rapidly, with the numbers of people aged over 60 set to pass the 1 billion marks over the next decade. A significant and growing number of the world's urban residents are older people – more than 500 million. However, research shows that for older people and persons with disabilities, cities and towns present physical, social and economic barriers that prevent them realising their right to live in dignity and enjoying equal access to transport, housing and urban infrastructures.

Architectural barriers can seriously affect the daily lives of older persons and persons with disabilities. They may be unable to leave their houses or to access public buildings, shops and other spaces owing to a lack of elevators or inaccessible pavements. In addition to the physical aspects of accessibility (accessible streets, transport and buildings), States should also take into account affordability and informational accessibility. The lack of accessible transport and neighbourhoods can lead to the discrimination and social exclusion of older persons and persons with disabilities.

Accessibility is defined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as cross-cutting issue that enables persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. Its Article 9 (accessibility), Article 19 (independent living) and Article 20 (mobility) provide detailed guidance on measures that States shall take to advance accessibility. Likewise, the Madrid International Plan for Action on Ageing states the need to promote accessibility and the empowerment of older persons to participate fully in all aspects of society. Sustainable Development Goal 11 also calls for access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons. Additionally, at the European Union level, Principles 17 and 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights provide a comprehensive approach to accessibility and social inclusion beyond solely income-related aspects.

To this end, this workshop, to be organised in collaboration with right holder's organisations and European and International institutions aims to, through an intersectional lens, explore the role Equality Bodies may take in enabling accessibility, adequate infrastructure and habitat to older persons and persons with disabilities.

Activities:

- Workshop (online)

Outputs:

- 1 online Workshop
- 1 meeting of the Age Cluster
- 1 meeting of the Disability Cluster

Objectives: Experts from Equality Bodies will be better equipped to understand and support the rights of people with disabilities and old persons in connection to accessibility, infrastructure and habitat.

Target audience: National Equality Bodies experts on accessibility, concretely members of the Age and Disability Clusters as well as relevant CSOs and policymakers at European and National level.

Expected Outcomes & Impact: Equinet members will gain further understanding on problems in the area of accessibility and how Equality Bodies and other relevant stakeholders are using their mandate and their power to address these in their own national contexts.

Equality Bodies using situation testing

Context/Policy Relevance: Situation testing has been used by anti-discrimination lawyers and researchers for decades. Not only can it be a useful and much needed tool to gather proof in individual cases, it is also an important tool for research, awareness-raising and policy work, effective in monitoring, uncovering and illustrating discrimination and achieving practical change. Despite this long history and its usefulness, situation testing remains a relatively lesser known and under-used tool in challenging discrimination. Limited knowledge of this tool sometimes also leads to concerns about its fairness and admissibility. Similarly to the broader equality community, situation testing is known and used by some Equality Bodies, but for many, it remains a new and relatively unknown tool.

Activities:

- 2-day Seminar on situation testing
- One meeting of the Policy Formation Working Group (linked to the seminar)
- One meeting of the Research and Data Collection Working Group (linked to the seminar)

Outputs:

- Short report of the seminar with a checklist/guidance for Equality Bodies.

Objectives:

- Informing Equality Bodies about the different uses of situation testing, including in legal case work, policy, research and awareness-raising
- Discussing practical challenges and good practices in the use of situation testing

Target audience: Staff members of Equality Bodies using or considering the use of situation testing in their work, particularly members of the Working Groups on Policy Formation, Research and Data Collection, and Equality Law.

Expected Outcomes & Impact: As a result of the seminar, more Equality Bodies will use situation testing, increasing the effectiveness of their legal, policy, research and awareness-raising work.

Equality Bodies and the role of sport in the fight against discrimination

Context/Policy Relevance:

Sport plays a key role in social life and have the power to bring together people from a diverse background including races, gender and sexual orientation. Sport has an instrumental role to play in

providing experience on the value of diversity, promoting inclusion and combating discrimination, harmful stereotypes and prejudice. Furthermore, sporting activities should also provide an important reflection of the European society in which children, young people and adults can feel represented in their full diversity.

There have been repeated racist incidents at sporting events and within sport generally across Europe, and many challenges related to discrimination against women, racial minorities and the LGBTIQ community. Likewise, the persistence of barriers to their participation in sport including prejudice and harmful stereotypes, calls EU institutions and Member States to step up their action towards more equal and diverse participation in the sport sector for racialised communities and women as well as LGBTIQ people.

At the European level, the legal and policy framework set a solid foundation for the strengthening the role of sport in the fight against discrimination. The EU have launched several equality strategies addressing inequalities and discrimination across all areas of life including sport. This is reinforced by further measures such as the Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport, and European Parliament resolution of 8 March 2022 on the role of culture, education, media and sport in the fight against racism (2021/2057(INI)). The later specifically stresses and encourages further collaboration between the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Equality Bodies, CSOs and governments and right holders' stakeholders affected by racism and discrimination.

So far, Equinet has not explored in depth the work of Equality Bodies in relation to the role of sport in fighting discrimination. Some Equality Bodies have experience addressing the issue and should be able to share good practices. Equinet can ensure that these practices and learning are shared with members throughout the network. Beyond this, it is important to discuss with relevant actors how Equality Bodies can cooperate with them to promote equality and tackle discrimination through sport.

Activities:

- 1 day conference (hybrid)

Outputs:

- A hybrid 1 day conference

Objectives: Bring together Equality Bodies and relevant institutions and organisations from across Europe to share good practices and develop their cooperation on promoting equality and tackling discrimination in sport.

Target audience: EU institutions, national authorities, Equality Bodies and CSOs.

Expected Outcomes & Impact: The event will allow policymakers to have a better understanding and knowledge of the work undertaken by Equality Bodies fighting discrimination through sport. As a result, there will be an enhanced overview of activities, experiences and contribution of Equality Bodies, EU institutions, National authorities and CSOs to the fight against discrimination within sport and sporting events.

5. Relationship management, network development, and governance

With a newly developed Communication and Member Engagement Strategy, and in view of the upcoming European Parliament elections, fostering healthy relationships with members and partners becomes a central piece in the activities of the Network. Additionally, the Equinet Secretariat will continue to work on its capacity to provide all members equal access to activities and resources and sustain transparent administration and governance practices.

Communication

One of the main strategic objectives of the Network is to act as an expert voice of Equality Bodies in Europe on equality and non-discrimination. For that purpose, effective communication and dissemination activities are an essential element of Equinet's work. 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.

The newly adopted Equinet Communication and Member Engagement Strategy focuses on key external stakeholder audiences and member engagement to ensure we can efficiently:

- Disseminate knowledge about equality, developments and innovation in the field, and equality legislation and policy. Equinet will strive to highlight, in particular, the work and contribution of Equality Bodies, ensuring that all content disseminated is relevant, accessible, high quality, and innovative.
- Ensure that the interests of the members are defended, promoted in the right places and to the right people.
- 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.

Member Engagement

In 2024, Equinet will continue to strengthen its focus on member engagement and strive to provide a membership experience that is as beneficial and supportive as possible for all its members.

Having developed a specific strategy for member engagement in 2023, the Network launches a new communication system (Members Area) to ensure the members have a more direct channel of communication with their peers and more control over the flow of information from the Secretariat. This will ensure that the information flows within the Network are optimised between the Secretariat and Members and directly between members themselves.

The new Communication and Member Engagement Strategy will allow the Secretariat to continue to provide support, resources, and opportunities for peer exchange within the Network, facilitate

knowledge-building and exchange, support members in need, and in the context of calls for proposals on equality funding.

Partnerships

In view of the 2024 EP elections and the appointment of a new European Commission, Equinet will continue its efforts to keep equality high in the European agenda, supported the experience and perspective of Equality bodies

Equinet will continue to pursue a 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 a strong engagement with the new Commission and all relevant high-level task forces, expert groups, and networks of the European Commission. We will do so, in particular, through continued participation in our 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), the High-Level Group on combating hate speech and hate crime and the European Network of Legal Experts in gender equality and non-discrimination.

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 continue to foster close 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 2024, Equinet will continue its close engagement with the current European Parliament (EP), in particular with the committees and rapporteurs linked to the legislation on Standards for Equality Bodies and other relevant legislative initiatives. Equinet will also continue to foster relationships with 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. In addition, Equinet will continuously raise awareness on the importance of ensuring the continued support to the core European values of equality and fundamental rights ahead of the next European Elections in 2024. With a new EP elected in June, Equinet will pursue establishing strong relationships with relevant new members of the EP and their staff, to ensure the continuation of all efforts to promote and safeguard the rights to equality and non-discrimination in the EU.

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 the recent past, fruitful involvement of Equinet and Equality Bodies in the negotiations on the legislation on Standards for Equality Bodies and on events organized by Presidencies of the Council of the EU, underlined the relevance and added-value of an increased engagement with the Council of the EU. Equinet will strive to further develop this relationship in 2024, 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, 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 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 C10 Group, an inter-institutional project team, working on promoting and communicating human rights, with the chief communication officers of the following 9 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), and EEA and Norway Grants. Members of the group rotate in 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 C10 members.

Funding

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. In 2024 the Secretariat and Equinet Board will continue to work on securing 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. Throughout 2023, Equinet has been developing efforts towards funding consolidation and diversification, with important progress achieved. In 2024 the Secretariat will continue to pursue these activities, striving to successfully engage 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 two years of very high inflation. Fundraising will remain at the top of priorities for the Secretariat and the Board in 2024, including supporting equality bodies in the context of calls for proposals on equality funding, to the best of the Secretariat's limited resources.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Over the past few years, the Equinet Secretariat has been maintaining a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, that is attuned to the EC's reporting requirements. The main objective of this frame is not only to facilitate the reporting of the Network's activities, but also to provide an overview of our successes and achievements, and to identify areas for improvement.

The Monitoring and Evaluation capacities of the Secretariat will be further strengthened, to better meet the reporting requirements set by funders while also accelerating Equinet's learning capacities. A learning organisation can better identify and understand the consequences and impact (positive and negative) of its action, adapt current activities for more impact or develop new ones better geared towards achieving the strategic objectives of the organisation. The current M&E framework in use at Equinet will be revised and data collection and analysis practices will be reinforced. A Theory of Change for the organisation will be developed.

Administration and Finance

In 2024, Equinet expects to have a team of 9 full-time staff or equivalent, as well as a number of trainees. The part of the Equinet budget for 2024 that is guaranteed by the annual EU Grant is of similar scale as in previous years (1,200,000€). In the last year, the Equinet Secretariat has started developing an extensive fundraising effort led by one of the Co-Directors and it hopes to secure additional funds soon to further expand its capacities and headcount.

The Secretariat, under the supervision of the Board (and with the assistance of the Equinet Treasurer), will keep a close control of expenditures in order to identify and mitigate any potential financial pitfall, notably with the level of inflation, that was less of a concern in 2023 while remaining at an elevated level.

Our level of EU funding will remain the same in 2024 compared to 2023. Logically, the main expenditure headings will be quite similar between the two budgets. However, with the application of the new travel policy, we expect travel (flight/train) costs to be reduced compared to previous years.

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).

Provisional budget for 2024

Expenses			
Cost Centre	Budget 2024	Budget 2023	Diff 2024/2023
Staff Costs	867.408	850.400	17.008
Outsourcing	70.527	69.476	1.051
Travel	84.450	118.500	-34.050
Accommodation	56.104	51.350	4.754
Subsistence	44.593	33.550	11.043
Equipment	2.000	3.500	-1.500
Services	162.425	158.400	4.025
Total Budget	1.287.508	1.287.176	332

Income			
Sources	Budget 2024	Budget 2023	Diff 2024/2023
EC Grant	1.200.000	1.200.000	0
Membership Fees	93.200	93.200	0
Total	1.293.200	1.293.200	0
To reserves	5.692	6.024	-332

Annex - Table of activities

Standards for Equality Bodies

Topic 2024	Output	Linked to: Group
Adoption and implementation of legislation on Standards for Equality Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow and contribute to the legislative process • 3 Mini workshops related to different aspects of standards • TAIEX meeting on standards for non-EU members (subject to funding) 	Project on Standards

EU equality strategies

Topic 2024	Output	Linked to: Group
Policy Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspective on the future EU Equality Strategies 	Policy formation WG
Equality Bodies promoting LGBTIQ equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roundtable/Webinar (online) on the rights of rainbow families • Factsheet on LGBTIQ equality and Equality Bodies 	Gender Equality WG
Equality Bodies and racialised communities' access to healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 online Workshop • 1 brief report summarizing the workshop 	

Exploring new and current equality trends

Topic 2024	Output	Linked to: Group
Practical & Ethical Issues surrounding the use of AI in Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-day training (in person) • 6-month follow-up meeting (online) • Guidelines on how to ethically use AI in communicating equality 	Communication Strategies and Practices WG
Equality-proofing AI systems: Equality Bodies rising to the challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference / Roundtable (hybrid) • Joint AI Cluster/Gender Equality WG meeting • Series of short webinars on AI and gender equality • TAEIX workshop for non-EU members(subject to dedicated funding) • AIA guidance on equality-proofing the harmonized technical standards 	AI Cluster Gender Equality WG
Climate Change and equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on the impact of climate change and climate policies on equality and anti-discrimination 	Follow up to 2023 Research Paper

Developing equality law and the role of Equality Bodies

Topic 2024	Output	Linked to: Group
Equality Bodies providing their expert opinion in courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person 2-day training to be provided with the collaboration of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) 	Equality Law WG
A living conditions affair: Accessibility, infrastructure & habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 online Workshop 	Disability Cluster Age Cluster
Equality Bodies using situation testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-day Seminar on situation testing • Short report of the seminar with a checklist/guidance for Equality Bodies 	R&D WG Policy Formation WG
Equality Bodies and the role of sport in the fight against discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-day event 	

Equinet Member Equality Bodies

ALBANIA

Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination
www.kmd.al

AUSTRIA

Austrian Disability Ombudsman
www.behindertenanwalt.gov.at

AUSTRIA

Ombud for Equal Treatment
www.gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft.gov.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

Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia
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.volinik.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.ncpe.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.snslp.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

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



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