

Equinet Calendar 2024

Equinet is the European Network of Equality Bodies, a membership organisation of 48 National Equality Bodies. By strengthening and supporting National Equality Bodies, Equinet works towards achieving equality and ensuring non-discrimination for everyone in Europe, in all aspects of their life.

Equality Bodies are public organisations that assist victims of discrimination, monitor and report on discrimination issues, and promote equality. They are legally required to do so in relation to one, some, or all the grounds of discrimination covered by the European Union law – gender, race and ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and disability. Most of them promote equality beyond the required grounds of discrimination, tackling multiple or intersectional discrimination and addressing contemporary challenges, such as artificial intelligence, socio-economic inequality, climate change and environmental policies. From equal access to employment and services to healthcare, education, and sports, Equality Bodies actively contribute to shaping truly inclusive societies.

This calendar serves as a testament to the profound influence of Equality Bodies. It collects 12 stories from Equinet members and showcases **how Equality Bodies make a tangible difference in the lives of everyone throughout Europe.**

The stories presented here are based on real-life cases, but all names have been changed to preserve individuals' privacy.

January 2024

THE ADVOCATE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY, SLOVENIA

Equality Bodies can ensure equal access to healthcare facilities and treatments, which guarantees that no one is excluded from enjoying their fundamental right to a healthy life.

On her journey to become a parent through biomedically assisted insemination, Ana was informed by her gynaecologist that they could no longer proceed with her medical treatment. The doctor invoked their conscientious objection to providing medical assistance to lesbian patients seeking assisted insemination.

Ana brought her case to the Advocate of the Principle of Equality in Slovenia, which initiated a discrimination investigation procedure. To further advocate for her rights, the Advocate

reached out to the Medical Chamber of Slovenia, which affirmed that conscientious objection in this context was not valid or permissible, emphasising the importance of avoiding discrimination in medical practices.

The Advocate concluded that the doctor's actions violated the prohibition of discrimination and that the mother-to-be had experienced discrimination solely based on her sexual orientation, contributing to the broader goal of fostering inclusivity and equality in healthcare.

February 2024

THE NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, THE NETHERLANDS

Artificial Intelligence is increasingly used in a variety of aspects of our everyday lives. Equinet and Equality Bodies are at the forefront of investigating the apparent neutrality of algorithms, tackling AI-enabled discrimination and ensuring an equality-compliant use of Artificial Intelligence.

Breeze is a relatively new dating app that uses an algorithm to find the right match for its users and arrange face-to-face dates. The app developers contacted the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights because they were concerned about the potential bias in the self-learning algorithm, which works with the personal preferences of the users, among other things. It seemed that individuals with darker skin tones had fewer possibilities to find a match.

The Institute was tasked with deliberating on several key legal aspects, including the necessity of bias correction, the use of personal data for such adjustments in accordance with the law, and compliance with affirmative action principles. A ruling on these critical matters was issued by the Institute, and developers are taking action to prevent discrimination against users with darker skin colour.

March 2024

FEDERAL ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AGENCY, GERMANY

Equality Bodies play a crucial role in achieving equal pay in Europe. Pay transparency is an essential tool to tackle the gender pay gap and ensure gender equality in the workplace and beyond.

Lilly learned there was a gap of almost €15,000 between her annual salary and that of her male colleagues in the same job category. After attempting negotiations with her employer, she turned to FADA for help.

FADA promptly communicated to the company that any gender-based disadvantage, including salary differences, is explicitly illegal. It clarified that better negotiations by male colleagues couldn't justify unequal pay, as the Federal Labor Court affirmed.

Thanks to FADA's involvement, Lilly's salary was increased to match her male colleagues, a significant stride towards gender equality in the workplace.

April 2024

UNIA, THE INTERFEDERAL CENTRE FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES, BELGIUM

Policies that counter climate change must include an equality dimension to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities. Equality Bodies ensure that the green transition is fully inclusive and that the road to a greener future does not leave anyone behind.

Belgian cities, among them the Brussels Capital Region implemented the Low Emission Zone (LEZ) initiative to champion public transport and eco-friendly vehicles. However, this climate-friendly measure has negatively affected the lives of people with disabilities, who face the dual challenge of limited mobility options and financial constraints.

Unia, the Belgian Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities, voiced concerns to the Brussels Environment Minister about the disproportionate burden faced by individuals with disabilities in Brussels' Low Emission Zone (LEZ).

As a result, owners of vehicles (or persons living at the same address) who receive increased compensation for health care and who have an EU parking card for people with disabilities are granted access to LEZs. Moreover, the Environment Minister committed to extending access to LEZs to all EU disability parking card holders, making the Low Emission Zone a more inclusive eco-friendly initiative.

May 2024

THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER OF RIGHTS, CZECH REPUBLIC

Equality Bodies that have a mandate to tackle discrimination based on the grounds of gender identity, sex characteristics and gender expression can better address the needs of the LGBTQI+ community and ensure equality for trans, intersex and gender-diverse people.

The Office of the Public Defender of Rights received a complaint from Saša, a graduate who had undergone gender reassignment and whose university refused to issue the diploma with the new personal data, claiming that it would have been against the law.

The Public Defender of Rights issued a recommendation highlighting the need to amend the law and the potential discriminatory effects on the career path of trans people if they are unable to obtain a university diploma with a new name. In response to the Public Defender of Rights' recommendation, the Ministry of Education provided comprehensive guidance to university rectors. Later, in a similar case, the Czech Court echoed the Equality Body's stance.

Following that, universities in the country are more likely to adopt a more inclusive approach, ensuring increased equality and safety for trans graduates and professionals. This progress paves the way for imminent legal changes, promising a brighter, fairer future.

June 2024

COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATION AND THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, CYPRUS

Equality Bodies can use their recommendation powers to promote reasonable accommodations and prevent disadvantages from happening, ensuring full equality for all.

After 30 years working at a broadcasting corporation, Georgia, a journalist and a person with disability, was informed she would be relieved of her duties, instead of being given the necessary and individualised reasonable accommodations needed to allow her to carry out her duties unhindered.

The Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights investigated the complaint filed by Georgia, and concluded that the refusal to provide reasonable accommodation in this case constituted discrimination on the grounds of disability. After receiving the recommendations issued by the Commissioner, the corporation complied with the findings, and Georgia was reinstated in her post.

July 2024

NON-DISCRIMINATION OMBUDSMAN, FINLAND

Sport plays a key role in social life as it brings together people from diverse backgrounds including different ethnicities, gender, and sexual orientation. Equality

Bodies can ensure that sports provide experience on the value of diversity and promote inclusion.

In Finland, Elias had been facing persistent racist harassment during his junior hockey games. As he was once again harassed, the team coach took a stand, swiftly instructing the team to return to the dressing rooms and seeking referee intervention. However, the Finnish Ice Hockey Federation suspended the coach instead of addressing the harassment.

The case was referred to the Finnish Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, whose investigation revealed that the coach was unfairly treated and that Elias had experienced indirect discrimination.

As a result, the Ice Hockey Federation extended compensation of €3,000 to both Elias and his coach. The Federation also implemented comprehensive guidelines for referees and teams to effectively handle discrimination-related situations and committed to enhancing disciplinary procedures to prevent harassment, an important step towards creating a more inclusive and safer environment in sports.

August 2024

PARLIAMENT COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, UKRAINE

Equality Bodies with the mandate to protect individuals from discrimination related to their racial and ethnic background ensure the preservation and respect of fundamental rights for all.

In the Donetsk region of Ukraine, a number of individuals of Roma ethnicity were stopped by armed guards at the checkpoints of Zaporizhzhia and Toretsk, without an official explanation and they were subsequently transported to police stations.

A Coalition of Roma NGOs in Ukraine presented a complaint to the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights. The Commissioner found that at these checkpoints, Roma community members were subjected to ethnic profiling, a clear breach of national minorities' equality rights.

In response to the Commissioner's actions, the police initiated an internal investigation and committed to preventing future infringements of citizens' rights based on ethnicity or any other grounds.

September 2024

COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, POLAND

Ensuring education for all is crucial, as it empowers individuals, promotes social equality, and fosters career advancement.

Michael, a long-term resident of the EU in Poland and an aspiring pilot, sought the Commissioner for Human Rights questioning the need for an explicit authorisation by the President of the Civil Aviation Office to enter pilot training, despite the same requirement not applying to Polish citizens.

The Commissioner for Human Rights in Poland started an investigation and issued a recommendation arguing that both national and European Union laws allow for long-term EU residents to be exempt from this requirement. They have the right to equal treatment with citizens of the host EU Member State with regard to access to vocational training, such as the pilot training program.

The Minister of Infrastructure and the President of the Civil Aviation Office embraced the Commissioner's interpretation: foreign citizens with EU long-term residence permits can now pursue aviation training at the same conditions as Polish citizens, ensuring fair and equal opportunities for everyone.

October 2024

DEFENDER OF RIGHTS, FRANCE

By considering socio-economic background as a potential ground for discrimination, Equality Bodies work to rectify injustices and promote equality, particularly for those in disadvantaged circumstances.

The Defender of Rights received a complaint concerning Bellamy, a child whose family resides in a social housing complex, run by social services. The town hall had repeatedly refused to enrol her in the local nursery school and school canteen despite the parents' request to do so and the various supporting documents provided. The family took legal action, but the interim relief judge of the Administrative Court initially ruled against their claim.

The Defender of Rights submitted their recommendations to the interim relief judge, stating that the refusal to register the child constituted an infringement of their right to education and

discrimination based on their place of residence and the socio-economic vulnerability of their family.

As a result, the Mayor registered both the child and her little brother in the nursery and the school canteen. The list of supporting documents for enrolment was also modified, to ensure inclusivity and equal access to education for all.

November 2024

THE OFFICE OF THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES OMBUDSPERSON, LITHUANIA

Equality Bodies that have a mandate to cover the ground of age can ensure a fair and just society that embraces all life experiences from that of children to the youth and the elderly.

The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania received a complaint about a local restaurant that restricted children under the age of 10 from entering after 5 PM. This posed a challenge for families with young ones, denying them the opportunity to enjoy the restaurant services.

In adherence to Lithuanian equality laws, age-based prohibitions are permissible only when supported by parliamentary legislation. As no such legal foundation existed for the restaurant's policy, the Ombudsperson conducted a thorough investigation that established discrimination on the ground of age and on the basis of family status, as the prohibitions impacted not just the children but also their parents.

Despite the restaurant owners' choice not to alter their practices, still believing that families with children could simply opt for take-out, the outcome of the Ombudsperson's investigation sparked a broad public debate on what services can be legitimately age-restricted.

December 2024

COMMISSION FOR PROTECTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION, BULGARIA

Equality Bodies' capacity to engage with civil society and cooperate with rights-holders ensures that the needs of people with disabilities are heard and considered, ultimately leading to equality and better living conditions.

The Commission for the Protection against Discrimination received a complaint from the SNC "Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus – Bulgaria", a non-governmental organisation uniting parents and relatives of children with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus. The organisation

lamented the lack of adequate urological care for children with this condition, which could endanger their lives.

The Commission advocated for better access to healthcare for children with Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus in the country. Subsequently, the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) submitted a decision adding this medical condition to the list of those for which medical products, medical devices, and dietetic foods are paid for by NHIF. This result is a clear step forward in better living conditions and equal access to adequate healthcare for people with disabilities in Bulgaria.

EQUINET MEMBERS

Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination, **Albania** | Austrian Disability Ombudsman, **Austria** | Ombud for Equal Treatment, **Austria** | Unia (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities), **Belgium** | Institute for Equality between Women and Men, **Belgium** | Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman, **Bosnia and Herzegovina** | Commission for Protection against Discrimination, **Bulgaria** | Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia, **Croatia** | Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, **Croatia** | Ombudswoman for Persons with Disabilities, **Croatia** | Office of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman), **Cyprus** | Office of the Public Defender of Rights, **Czech Republic** | Danish Institute for Human Rights, **Denmark** | Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, **Estonia** | Ombudsman for Equality, **Finland** | Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, **Finland** | Defender of Rights, **France** | Public Defender (Ombudsman), **Georgia** | Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, **Germany** | Greek Ombudsman, **Greece** | Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, **Hungary** | Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, **Ireland** | National Office Against Racial Discrimination, **Italy** | Ombudsperson Institution, **Kosovo*** | Office of the Ombudsman, **Latvia** | Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, **Lithuania** | Centre for Equal Treatment, **Luxembourg** | National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, **Malta** | Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability, **Malta** | Equality Council, **Moldova** | The Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (Ombudsman), **Montenegro** | Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, **Netherlands** | Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, **North Macedonia** | Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, **Norway** | Commissioner for Human Rights, **Poland** | Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality, **Portugal** | Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment, **Portugal** | High Commission for Migration, **Portugal** | National Council for Combating Discrimination, **Romania** | Commissioner for Protection of Equality, **Serbia** | National Centre for Human Rights, **Slovakia** | Advocate of the Principle of Equality, **Slovenia** | Council for the Elimination of Ethnic or Racial Discrimination, **Spain**

|Institute of Women, **Spain** | Equality Ombudsman, **Sweden** | Ukrainian Parliament
Commissioner for Human Rights, **Ukraine** | Equality and Human Rights Commission,
United Kingdom – Great Britain | Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, **United
Kingdom – Northern Ireland**

*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.