

## Equinet Training Guidelines

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# Improving Equality Bodies' media relations

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## Improving Equality Bodies' media relations

To do our work efficiently – promote equality and help fight discrimination – we as National Equality Bodies (NEBs) need to be visible to, well known by and able to reach various audiences – vulnerable groups, NGOs, politicians, and other decision makers as well as the media (both journalists and editors). Among all these audiences, the media have the most potential to help us reach other target audiences and multiply our messages. They can do it on a much larger scale than we can in direct contact or that other audiences can as multipliers.

### Benefits of good media relations

- ≡ Wider awareness - on the NEB, on the right to equality and how to protect it
- ≡ More awareness on what discrimination is and that if something is unfair, it is not automatically discrimination
- ≡ More victims of discrimination know where to seek protection
- ≡ More potential discriminators aware of equality legislation
- ≡ Stronger relationship of the NEB with partner NGOs
- ≡ Wider public support for equality, our specific goals, and our work in general
- ≡ Less risk in a crisis communication situation
- ≡ Helps mainstream equality

### Possible issues

- ≡ A challenging workload and ineffective workflow
- ≡ Head that doesn't trust the communication team, makes decisions ignoring their expert advice
- ≡ No investment in media relations (staff, education, time)
- ≡ Communication team has
  - no experience in media relations and how media works
  - no authority to talk on topics with media off the record/on background
  - no direct access to information in the NEB

## Objectives of the training

- ☰ Better understanding of how the media works and tools to capitalize that understanding
- ☰ Enhanced media relations that will lead to more visibility of the NEB
- ☰ Skills to train your heads/spokesperson to perform better in statements and interviews

# Four steps to prepare the Equality Body for good media relations

**1**

**Make sure head of NEB understands the value of media relations, all staff is aware**

**2**

**Get to know the media landscape and make contacts with the media**

**3**

**Set a media friendly workflow**

**4**

**Adjust the language in statements, interviews, and media materials**

## STEP 1: Make sure head of NEB understands the value of media relations, all staff is aware

Good relations between NEB and media are built on trust, professionalism, and sincerity. They are based on mutual respect - we have to be aware of the “media laws” (deadlines, timeframes and formats, news worthiness and relevance, working on weekends), and the media has to be aware of our institutional boundaries (not commenting on things that are not our mandates, not always accepting to participate, etc.).

For us to do our jobs well, the NEB needs to **decide** that communication, including media relations, is a strategic activity that supports and helps achieve NEB’s goals, and that the NEB **wants** to do them properly.

### What does this mean?

- ☰ The head (and other senior staff) have to understand
  - the role which communication has in reaching strategic goals of the NEB
  - what you need from them to do your job well
- ☰ All staff must be informed about how to deal with requests from the communication staff (prioritize, cooperate directly when appropriate).

### How does this look in practice?

- you have direct contact with the head/senior staff - they answer your calls, messages, don't need to set a meeting with them to deal with urgent media issues
- the head respects media deadlines and other media needs (language, examples, duration of statement/interview) – and listens to your expert advice on this
- you are well informed on the things happening in the NEB and things NEB is working on, they include you in decisions that might affect media interest (event attendance, title of publication/event, date of publication, exclusivity, etc. that is very important for planning in advance)

- they trust you to be discreet and share most delicate information with you so you have insight in the full context – and can prepare to better react in a potential crisis
- you are authorised to share expert information in first contact with journalists (if you know them – NEBs positions, statistics, recommendations, usual treatment of certain complaints, etc.)
- the head makes his decision on media activities based on your expert advice, not personal assumption or solely based on advice of non-communication staff

## STEP 2: Get to know the media landscape and make contacts with the media

### This will help you answer important questions/doubts in daily work

- ☰ which topic is covered by which media company/journalist
- ☰ is something you want to go public with even good media material
- ☰ which journalists should you contact first (which areas and what issues they report on)
- ☰ is something a potential crisis

### Most common ways to do it:

- Regularly read newspapers, browse websites (who writes what – topic, angles, values, attitudes)
- Follow TV shows
- Identify and occasionally check specialised media
- Identify regional/most influential local media

Many NEB communication experts are very experienced in media relations and probably have dozens of contacts in the media world (meaning – previous contact with journalists and their numbers/emails).

If not, here are some ways you can make first contact:

- Add newsrooms to your press releases list (bcc, not copy)
- Get in touch with journalists to ask if you can add them to your mailing/newsletter list – because they often write on issues you work on
- Invite them to your events (including as speakers/moderators)
- Get in touch with them after they do a story about one of NEB topics – say you have additional statistics, examples, angles and can send it to them if they are interested
- If they did a story on a discrimination victim – get in touch with them to ask if the person would be willing to talk/meet with an expert from NEB so you can take their case/give them useful information or help them in another way, depending on your mandate – however, this should be done only after an internal agreement that such help is possible

## How to do it technically: depends on media culture in your country (calling, writing)

- don't be aggressive/annoying
- don't do it after working hours
- tell them something that benefits them (a story follow up idea, an exclusive information, etc.)

## STEP 3: Set a media friendly workflow

### Media must able to reach you easily and fast:

- ☞ Your contacts are on the website (email and office phone at minimum)
- ☞ Inform your colleagues (who answer the central office phone) to give your mobile phone number to journalists when they call the office and put them through with you directly
- ☞ Your mobile number is in your email signature
- ☞ You call journalists that email you (to talk details, check something, etc.) so they can save your number



- ☰ Be responsive – a quick no is a better answer than a delayed no, or no answer at all
- ☰ Be available – yes, even on the weekends and evenings - but rationally
  - if they call for not urgent matters/deadlines – say you will call them tomorrow morning/Monday
  - you can't and don't have to be available 24/7 – for example, decide whether you want to be close to your cell phone on Saturday/Sunday at 15.30

### You have made the workflow efficient:

- you can easily and fast find information/data/answers (access to the database, casework, colleagues), can quickly check most important elements/newest developments/sensitivities
- you prepare the statement/talking points for the spokesperson, not a non—communication person (easier and faster to fact check a communication friendly content than to adjust the legal language)
- agree on minimal “approval levels” for talking points and statements (if 5 people must look at it, it will probably take too long)
  - ideally only the persons giving the statement
  - the next best solution:
    - if the head is giving the statement, than at least one more colleague
    - if a senior staff member (deputy, head of department etc.) is giving the statement, then include the head of NEB if it is a politically sensitive matter

## STEP 4: Adjust the language in statements, interviews, and media materials

### Look for language use

- ☰ Simple, but not oversimplified (still experts)
- ☰ Clear
- ☰ Watch the length!

## Tips and tricks on building good media relations daily

Basic rules of good media relations:

### Be valuable – a good source of information:

- Offer good content
- Offer it timely
- Offer it in a communication friendly way (clear, understandable, short)
- Offer other resources – data, reports, institutions, external experts (and their contacts)
- Show you are helpful even if it doesn't bring you visibility (background information, contacts of other people, suggestions for story directions/sources)

### Be practical – ask for technical details:

- What is your final deadline?
- How many characters with spaces do you need in the written statement?
- Do you need a photo?

### Be respectful – one professional to another:

- Don't over promise – they will count on it and then have to manage without our help
- Stick to the agreed deadlines, show up on time, start the press conference/event of the event on time
- Don't try to sell them bad stuff (send a boring press release, arrange a bad spokesperson)
- Always be quick in the first response – answer the phone call or message, reply to the email to confirm you received their questions
- Mind the different needs of different media (radio, print, web, TV, podcast)
- Be straightforward if it is not an exclusive (if you are talking to more journalists about the same thing, you must tell them that)

### Be informed - know who does what:

- Read/listen/watch what most influential journalists/shows are doing
- follow them on social media

- If necessary, research their work and social media profiles before reaching out to them/replying to their request

### **Be proactive - reach out to journalists first:**

- Reach out to them to follow up on a story they did (mention you had a similar case, a recommendation for legislation )
- Reach out to ask them help to get in contact with someone they did a story on
- Reach out to inform them on the news you will soon have, in their area of expertise (new report, case, opinion, recommendation...)

### **How to identify journalists that might be interested in your topics? How to increase the chances they will cover your stories?**

- look in advance who wrote about similar or related topics in the past (e.g. when you are preparing a press release, or when working on an action plan to spread a certain topic in the future)
- contact them and let them know you have something interesting to say on a topic they might be interested in (send an e-mail or call in advance)
  - find their number with the help of a mutual contact – easier to break the ice when you call them if you say “this colleague gave me your number”)
- show them how the whole story could look like - who else they can contact, are there any trends involved, international elements
  - saves their time
  - easier to visualise the story, accept the suggestion and present it to the editor(s)
- send them press release in a personal e-mail, address them by last name and add a note about their previous work to explain why you are sending this to them
- offer help/consultation (say you are at their disposal for any additional questions etc.), make a check-up call/email, whether they are planning to publish your topic
- you can work with exclusivity – ask if they want to cover the topic in advance before other media (and if yes – agree on the terms! What does this mean to other steps of your communication process), or you can coordinate the time of publishing their story with the time you publish your press release
- let them know that you and your expert-colleagues are ready to answer their questions now or in the future or give them context (e.g. the impacts of forthcoming legislation)

## How to stay in touch with journalists?

- let them know you are planning to visit the town where they work, offer a quick meeting
- call/write from time to time with a new topic - or even without one, just to ask what they are working on (depending on your relationship)
- include them in your events, as participants, but also as expert speakers, moderators (workshops, conferences)
  - for them it's a branding opportunity and the opportunity to meet other stakeholders related to a topic
  - for you it's an opportunity to work more closely with the journalist

## Why is it good to follow basic media rules and be approachable and easy to access?

- ☰ more likely to come back to you
- ☰ more awareness of your NEB
- ☰ more trust in your information
- ☰ more chances for professional treatment in the time of crisis

Remember: being friendly with journalists **does not mean they will not question you about unpleasant topics**. And you must make sure the heads and other staff know that you can't stop "bad press" and other unpleasant scenarios from happening – the foundation of good reputation is good work as an institution!

But - when journalists are familiar with your **topics, mandate, processes, and context**, they are more likely to understand things are not "black and white" or easy to explain. Also, they will not perceive your explanation as avoiding the answer.

And if you have professional relations with journalists, it is easier to talk with them about uneasy topics, give bad news, say unpleasant things - more chance of them understanding your position/point of views (as a credible institution).

## You are contacted for an interview: now what?

### Collecting basic information:

You will not use all these every time, but custom made depending on the topic, journalist and other things.

When you get a media request, think about these three questions first:

1. What is the occasion and are the questions/topics part of your mandate?
2. Is this request fine with your plans? (exclusivity agreements, new developments, other events in the calendar etc.)
3. Can you meet the deadline?

If all three are yes, tell the journalist:

- what you can offer in this topic
- that you will get back to them soon (the shorter the deadline, the sooner you need to get back) to say if you can accept their request or/and know what you can tell them

### Find out all relevant information that you need to prepare your head/expert:

- what is the occasion – why are they asking you and why now?
- who else (if anyone) is participating in the topic?
- what will be the general questions/angles covered?
- is there anything specific they want/need from you?

After that, you can continue preparing the media appearance.

### Technical questions

#### For print/web media:

- email/call/in person?
- what is the authorisation policy and plan (time; clean version or highlighted changes)?
- Photo (send it? If not and they are taking it - describe how your offices look like and if there is anything appropriate for a photoshoot nearby?)
- a specific number of characters?
- when do they plan to publish it?

### **For TV/radio:**

- live or recorded (if recorded, one take or edited conversation)?
- when will it be published?
- is make up provided?
- how long do you need the conversation to last?
- calls from listeners/viewers?
- is the radio show recorded on video as well (important for clothes, hair and make-up, papers)?

### **Additional information you might want/need to give to the head/spokesperson:**

- Why is this request a good opportunity for your NEB? What would be the damage if we missed the opportunity?
- How does this media/journalist treat this topic/our work/our opinions (agree, disagree)?
- What is the interviewing style of the journalist (types of questions, pace, interruptions etc.)
- What is the setting of the show?
- What are NEB's main messages and who are they for?
- What (not) to wear (small dots and stripes vibrate on TV, too many colours and specific jewellery distract)?
- How long his/her answers should be?
- Where to look (always at the journalist – eye contact; in camera only if talking from a different location like your office or the street to a journalist/anchor in the studio)
- Ticks ruin the performance - minimize gestures and gesticulation (it seems more energetic on camera), smile only if appropriate (depending on the topic)
- Remember to breathe to keep the voice stable

### **Golden rules for media appearances:**

- Only say things you would not mind see published (things you say when waiting for your turn, during commercials or while filming b-roll can be used as well!) – act as if the microphone/camera are always on

- Be clear and straightforward – you are talking to the audience that doesn't use/know the same phrases as human rights/legal experts and doesn't want to hear all the formal details, only the most important information
- Be confident and determined – so you can be trustworthy
- Don't look around – keep eye contact when talking to a person, look at one point if looking at the camera
- Start with answering the question, then elaborate (especially if it's going to be edited)
- Answer in full sentences (editing)
- Summarise or repeat your main points to bring focus on them
- Don't fall for the quiet trick (journalists waiting for the person to continue talking) – if you have said everything you can, stay silent in confidence for 2-3 seconds and then ask if there are more questions
- Don't lose your temper – you lose credibility and might go viral
- Don't repeat the messages you want to rebut and don't agree with
- Go back to the media appearance and analyse how they did – tell them, give them feedback

How to deal with stress: practice, don't overprepare - don't learn sentences, but point; focus on the person you are talking to - imagine it is a student you are explaining something to him/her

## Recognising, creating, and using media opportunities

### What can be a media opportunity:

- Anniversaries – of your office, of laws and strategies, of your services (e.g. Antidiscrimination phone line)
- International/national days
- Upcoming events (voting in the parliament, draft of new laws or strategies, conferences organised by others)
- Joining the train – other initiatives, campaigns, press releases
- Current affairs – a thesis mentioned in the media, an issue widely reported on, a tragedy (if you can bring a fresh voice and angle)
- Periodic review – cases/opinions in the past month/quarter; first year/half of mandate

- Round numbers – first 50 complaints on a current specific issue
- A large number of complaints on a new issue
- A conflict - including a state body ignoring an issue/not answering you

## How to create media opportunities:

Prepare good content (relevant in the moment, numbers, examples, problems/who is responsible, solutions)

### — Most obvious options:

- Press release (short!)
- Press conference

### — Other options:

- Contacting a journalist (about a complaint; a very illogical law proposal; etc.)
- Offer a topic to a certain media company/journalist
- Embargoed publications (annual report, research)
- Newsletter
- Social media post
- Website article (long term strategy)
- Op-ed

### — More tips to increase your chances of succeeding:

- write in statements
- record audio/video statements and make them available for download

## What to do when the mess hits the fan?

### How to train your bosses? He/she/they:

- need to know all the facts, and have no doubts in the information
- need to be realistic, understand the problem and other points of view
- need to have prior media experience - if not, train, train, train!
- need to get in front of the media with clear messages - be able to explain the matter/support the messages in three/four sentences - practice!



- need to answer clearly (yes; no) and whenever possible - don't repeat the negative/false statements, but talk affirmatively (example: we didn't make a mistake in the Roma case vs. this IS a case of discrimination because ...)
- need to sound and look human, sincere - wording, flow
- you need to prepare him for the hard questions - you think about them and prepare answers, practice with them
- no laughter, no raised voices, but not indifferent
- even more careful not to attract attention with clothes, makeup, jewellery
- they have to show they are human

### General rules:

- be informed (risks, threats) - a media person needs to have NEB's vulnerabilities on radar - do you have a system for that?
- be prepared (accurate and clear statements, Q&A's, who, how and when will communicate, and where will that person be e.g. during the weekend) - you need to have direct access to everyone, and a fast checking system
- don't assume - check everything
- be fast - the longer the silence, the higher the suspicion, the less influence on what is out there - ideally within two-three hours
- don't be afraid that you will over communicate - push out the messages you don't want to see in the public
- be straightforward and available
  - if you only send out a press release/post and are not available for clarification, statements etc., it will be suspicious as you will be acting as a closed and irresponsible institution
  - if you have no information/answers and need to investigate - say you are investigating and will go public as soon as possible
- be honest and open, as much as you can
- if you need to apologise - do it sincerely, a false apology will be new page of the crisis - and always say what will you do so it doesn't happen again (concrete steps, not general)

- defensiveness will hit back at you - unless the crisis is made up and you need to debunk everything
- don't hesitate to contact all journalists that have been reporting on the story (to offer statements, give additional context, even ask for details of the wider story if necessary)
- don't forget to communicate with your colleagues internally as well
- follow the news, adjust plans if necessary
- again - be available – even for hours and hours

# Equinet Member Equality Bodies

## ALBANIA

Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination  
[www.kmd.al](http://www.kmd.al)

## AUSTRIA

Austrian Disability Ombudsman  
[www.behindertenanwalt.gov.at](http://www.behindertenanwalt.gov.at)

## AUSTRIA

Ombud for Equal Treatment  
[www.gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft.gov.at](http://www.gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft.gov.at)

## BELGIUM

Institute for the Equality of Women and Men  
[www.igvm-iefh.belgium.be](http://www.igvm-iefh.belgium.be)

## BELGIUM

Unia (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities)  
[www.unia.be](http://www.unia.be)

## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina  
[www.ombudsmen.gov.ba](http://www.ombudsmen.gov.ba)

## BULGARIA

Commission for Protection against Discrimination  
[www.kzd-nondiscrimination.com](http://www.kzd-nondiscrimination.com)

## CROATIA

Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia  
[www.ombudsman.hr](http://www.ombudsman.hr)

## CROATIA

Ombudsperson for Gender Equality  
[www.prs.hr](http://www.prs.hr)

## CROATIA

Ombudswoman for Persons with Disabilities  
[www.posi.hr](http://www.posi.hr)

## CYPRUS

Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman)  
[www.ombudsman.gov.cy](http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy)

## CZECH REPUBLIC

Public Defender of Rights  
[www.ochrance.cz](http://www.ochrance.cz)

## DENMARK

Danish Institute for Human Rights  
[www.humanrights.dk](http://www.humanrights.dk)

## ESTONIA

Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner  
[www.volinik.ee](http://www.volinik.ee)

## FINLAND

Non-Discrimination Ombudsman  
[www.syrjinta.fi](http://www.syrjinta.fi)

## FINLAND

Ombudsman for Equality  
[www.tasa-arvo.fi](http://www.tasa-arvo.fi)

## FRANCE

Defender of Rights  
[www.defenseurdesdroits.fr](http://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr)

## GEORGIA

Public Defender of Georgia (Ombudsman)  
[www.ombudsman.ge](http://www.ombudsman.ge)

## GERMANY

Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency  
[www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de](http://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de)

## GREECE

Greek Ombudsman  
[www.synigoros.gr](http://www.synigoros.gr)

## HUNGARY

Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights  
[www.ajbh.hu](http://www.ajbh.hu)

## IRELAND

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission  
[www.ihrec.ie](http://www.ihrec.ie)

## ITALY

National Office against Racial Discrimination - UNAR  
[www.unar.it](http://www.unar.it)

## KOSOVO\*

Ombudsperson Institution  
[www.oik-rks.org](http://www.oik-rks.org)

## LATVIA

Office of the Ombudsman  
[www.tiesibsargs.lv](http://www.tiesibsargs.lv)

## LITHUANIA

Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson  
[www.lygybe.lt](http://www.lygybe.lt)

## LUXEMBURG

Centre for Equal Treatment  
[www.cet.lu](http://www.cet.lu)

## MALTA

Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability  
[www.crpdp.org.mt](http://www.crpdp.org.mt)

## MALTA

National Commission for the Promotion of Equality  
[www.ncpe.gov.mt](http://www.ncpe.gov.mt)

## MOLDOVA

Council on Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality  
[www.egalitate.md](http://www.egalitate.md)

## MONTENEGRO

Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (Ombudsman)  
[www.ombudsman.co.me](http://www.ombudsman.co.me)

## NETHERLANDS

Netherlands Institute for Human Rights  
[www.mensenrechten.nl](http://www.mensenrechten.nl)

## NORTH MACEDONIA

Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination  
[www.kszd.mk](http://www.kszd.mk)

## NORWAY

Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud  
[www.ldo.no](http://www.ldo.no)

## POLAND

Commissioner for Human Rights  
[www.rpo.gov.pl](http://www.rpo.gov.pl)

## PORTUGAL

Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality  
[www.cig.gov.pt](http://www.cig.gov.pt)

## PORTUGAL

Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment  
[www.cite.gov.pt](http://www.cite.gov.pt)

## PORTUGAL

High Commission for Migration  
[www.acm.gov.pt](http://www.acm.gov.pt)

## ROMANIA

National Council for Combating Discrimination  
[www.cncd.ro](http://www.cncd.ro)

## SERBIA

Commissioner for Protection of Equality  
[www.ravnopravnost.gov.rs](http://www.ravnopravnost.gov.rs)

## SLOVAKIA

Slovak National Centre for Human Rights  
[www.snslp.sk](http://www.snslp.sk)

## SLOVENIA

Advocate of the Principle of Equality  
[www.zagovornik.si](http://www.zagovornik.si)

## SPAIN

Council for the Elimination of Ethnic or Racial Discrimination  
[www.igualdadynodiscriminacion.igualdad.gob.es](http://www.igualdadynodiscriminacion.igualdad.gob.es)

## SPAIN

Institute of Women  
[www.inmujer.es](http://www.inmujer.es)

## SWEDEN

Equality Ombudsman  
[www.do.se](http://www.do.se)

## UNITED KINGDOM - GREAT BRITAIN

Equality and Human Rights Commission  
[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

## UNITED KINGDOM - NORTHERN IRELAND

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland  
[www.equalityni.org](http://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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