

Equinet webinar summary

A living conditions affair: Accessibility, infrastructure & habitat

27 February, 2024



Co-funded by
the European Union

Quick recap

The meeting discussed the challenges faced by older and disabled people in accessing transport and public services. The team emphasized the importance of accessibility infrastructure and the necessity for training and awareness programs. They also highlighted the need for clear legal provisions linking age and accessibility discrimination and the importance of staff training. The discussion also focused on the role of Equality Bodies in promoting accessibility and inclusive infrastructure for older persons and persons with disabilities. Towards the end of the meeting, the Accessibility EU initiative was discussed, which aims to support the implementation of the European Accessibility Act. The meeting concluded with a discussion on the importance of mobility and the need for a collaborative approach between public administrations and end users.

Agenda

Host: Jone Elizondo- Urrestarazu, Senior Legal and Policy Officer, Equinet

09:30 – 09:40 **Welcome remarks**

Martina Bianco, Communication trainee, Equinet

09:40 – 10:00 **Presentation: International legal and policy framework on accessibility and inclusion of older people and persons with disabilities**

- Nena Georgantzi, Human Rights Manager, Age Platform Europe

10:00 – 10:55 **Panel I: Built environment**

- Anete Ilves, Head of Discrimination Prevention Division at the Ombudsman's Office of the Republic of Latvia
- Daniel Casas, Accessibility Policy Officer, European Disability Forum
- Julia Wadoux, Policy Manager on Healthy Ageing and Accessibility, Age platform Europe

10:55 – 11:05 **Coffee break**

11:05 – 11:25

Presenting AccessibleEU

- Guillaume Dufresne, Technical Expert – European Accessible Resource Centre, Fundacion ONCE

11:25 – 12:20

Panel II: Mobility

- Lloyd Watkins, Senior Associate, Equality and Human Rights Commission, Great Britain
- Daniel Casas, Accessibility Policy Officer, European Disability Forum
- Amanda Warren, FATEC (Spain)

12:20 – 12:30

Closing remarks

Daris Lewis Recio, Legal and Policy Officer, Equinet

Summary

Disability and Aging Policies: A Need for Intersectionality

Nena Georgantzi, Human Rights Manager at Age Platform Europe. presented on an intersectional perspective, which Jone acknowledged as complex and thanked Nena for contributing. Nena discussed the current frameworks surrounding ageing and disability, noting that disability has more legal references and policies to rely on, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In contrast, there is no specific policy framework for ageing at the EU level, although there are some international plans of action. Nena emphasized that accessibility infrastructures are not new to the disability frameworks and should be applied to ageing contexts too. She pointed out that the concept of accessibility under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is based on the social or human rights model of disability, focusing on addressing societal barriers. Furthermore, she reiterated the importance of the concept of inclusive equality, Nena also highlighted the need to recognize the intersectionality of age and disability and the importance of applying the CRPD standards to older persons with disabilities.

Accessibility and Age Discrimination in Latvia

The discussion then transitioned to a panel led by Jone, which included Anete from the [Ombudsman's office in Latvia](#), Daniel from the European Disability Forum, and Julia Wadoux stepping in for John Kirstein, Chair of AGE Platform Europe on age-friendly environments and Board Member of DaneAGE.

Anete shared about her office's work on equality in the built environment. Anete discussed issues with the accessibility of a bookstore ramp and a city street designed for people with disabilities, highlighting a potential lack of understanding of the needs of people with disabilities if they are not involved in the planning. She also shared the Ombudsman office's experience with handling complaints regarding accessibility issues, including a case involving an elderly woman who faced accessibility difficulties at a hospital, exemplifying the important role Equality Bodies can play in improving accessibility. Anete emphasized the need for clear legal provisions linking age and accessibility discrimination and the importance of training staff in accessibility. She concluded by highlighting the current status of accessibility in Latvia, focusing on physical, digital, and service accessibility, and the need for significant improvement.

Accessibility in Daily Life, Climate change and the need for efficient enforcement

Daniel, following Anete's presentation, highlighted the daily struggles faced by people with disabilities and the importance of understanding accessibility beyond physical accessibility. He underscored that accessibility is a continuous process and therefore emphasised the necessity for training and disability awareness. Daniel expressed concerns about the lack of remedies, sanctions, and enforcement of accessibility regulations. Julia emphasized the significance of accessibility in various aspects of life, including in the digital sphere. Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of linking accessibility to affordability and availability. Brankica Janković, from [the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality](#) of Serbia gave several examples of how their office is working towards architectural accessibility and informational communication accessibility for all citizens in social life. Participants also discussed the accessibility of public services in rural areas for older persons and the need for adjustments due to climate change. Daniel pointed out the opportunities

and challenges of transforming society to be more sustainable and resistant to climate change, emphasizing the need to ensure accessibility is not compromised.

Jaka Vatovec, from the [Advocate of the Principle of Equality](#), Slovenia, shared experiences from their special report on the accessibility of public facilities for persons with disabilities. In accordance with the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act, public facilities in Slovenia must be adapted for persons with disabilities by the end of 2025. Nonetheless, they report that a relatively large proportion of public facilities are not accessible to persons with disabilities and will not be able to adapt by the statutory deadline of December 2025. The reasons for that are several, including lack of financial resources or funding, limited awareness of the above-mentioned Act, and a lack of understanding of their duties.

Nino Valikovi, from the [Public Defender \(Ombudsman\) of Georgia](#) emphasized the need for an effective body to monitor and impose sanctions, considering that while Georgia had approved accessibility standards in 2021, currently new infrastructures and buildings are found not in line with those standards. Training professionals is essential even if when architects say they comply with standards it is often not true. In their experience training provided by Zoom simply does not work.

Accessible EU Initiative: Building Inclusion Across Europe

Guillaume discussed the [Accessible EU initiative](#), a project by the European Commission aimed at supporting the implementation of the European Accessibility Act. The project involves a consortium of partners and seeks to create a culture shift towards inclusion and accessibility through training and engaging new professionals. The project involves 34 national experts from 27 member states and collaborates with various organizations. The project's aim is to support the implementation of legislation related to accessibility and to build capacity and connect different stakeholders. The project also involves organizing events across Europe, including awareness-raising, training, and networking events. Guillaume also mentioned the creation of an online library designed to collect and share information and best practices on accessibility. Guillaume emphasized the importance of national experts' contributions to urban environment design and the creation of a community of practice for knowledge sharing.

Urban Design, Mobility, and Accessible Transport in Wales

The discussion then shifted to mobility, with Lloyd Watkins presenting. He highlighted the Equality Body's role in promoting equality, diversity, and human rights in Great Britain, and their focus on accessibility. Lloyd shared findings from their research on public transport accessibility in Wales, noting that many rail stations were inaccessible to disabled people. He stressed the need for public bodies to develop and implement actions to make public transport more inclusive and accessible. Lloyd also discussed the findings of the study on public transport strategies in Wales, pointing out a lack of consideration for equality and a lack of engagement with disabled and older people. He suggested that gathering evidence through quality impact assessments could help align with Article 9 of the CRPD and provide clear equality indicators for monitoring. Lloyd discussed the challenges faced by older and disabled people when using public transport. He emphasized the need for improved disability awareness and assistance training, and better staff training. Lloyd highlighted issues with staff behaviour and accessibility, including inadequate planning, inaccessible stations, unreliable passenger assistance, and lack of enforcement of priority seating. He also pointed out problems with taxi and private hire vehicles. Lloyd concluded that the public transport system in Wales was inadequate and did not support inclusion and independent living. He highlighted the importance of integrating equality into transport strategies and policies, and recommended evidence-based interventions and meaningful engagement with older and disabled people.

Inclusion and Collaboration in Mobility Solutions

In reaction to Lloyd's presentation, Amanda emphasized the need to involve the target user group from the start of research and planning. She also highlighted the importance of a golden triangle, involving policy makers, users and support groups as well as businesses in accessibility considerations. Daniel stressed the importance of a collaborative approach between public administrations and end users. He pointed out that it is vital for public procurement to take into account accessibility considerations to leave the vicious cycle of non-accessibility in the future.

Jaka Vatovec, shared that the Equality Body in Slovenia also prepared [two special reports](#):
Inaccessibility of public inter-urban bus service for persons with reduced mobility / with sensory disabilities which showed that persons with disabilities are not guaranteed access to public transport even though this is required by the CRPD. The webinar concluded by highlighting not only the importance of accessibility in built environments and mobility but also of restoring autonomy, dismantling ageist and ableist stereotypes and recognising diversity.

Equinet Member Equality Bodies

ALBANIA

Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination
www.kmd.al

AUSTRIA

Austrian Disability Ombudsman
www.behindertenanwalt.gv.at

AUSTRIA

Ombud for Equal Treatment
www.gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft.gv.at

BELGIUM

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

BELGIUM

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

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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

BULGARIA

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

CROATIA

Office of the Ombudswoman
www.ombudsman.hr

CROATIA

Ombudsperson for Gender Equality
www.prs.hr

CROATIA

Ombudsman 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
ncpe.gov.mt

MOLDOVA

Equality Council
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
bip.brpo.gov.pl

PORTUGAL

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

PORTUGAL

Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment
cite.gov.pt/web/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.snspl.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.inmujeres.gob.es

SWEDEN

Equality Ombudsman
www.do.se

UKRAINE

Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights
www.ombudsman.gov.ua

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.*



| © Equinet 2024



Co-funded by
the European Union

www.equineteurope.org