

Terms of Reference

Training: Communicating in hostile environments: hate speech, polarization, misinformation, and politicisation of equality

23-24 September 2025, Madrid, Spain

Background

Equinet is the European Network of Equality Bodies, a membership organisation bringing together 47 Equality Bodies from across Europe, including all EU Member States. It promotes equality in Europe by supporting and enabling National Equality Bodies' work.

Equality Bodies are independent public organisations contributing to an awareness of rights and a societal valuing of equality, assisting victims of discrimination, and monitoring and reporting on discrimination issues.

Equinet's Working Group on Communication Strategies and Practices gathers communication experts from Equality Bodies, who would be the participants of this training, besides the staff from Equinet Secretariat.

To support the work of an Equality Body, the communication staff might engage in several activities, including (but not limited to) developing awareness campaigns, engaging in media relations, copywriting content for different media, and social media management.

Context

The increasing prevalence of hate speech especially on social media, amplified by the spread of misinformation and disinformation, poses significant challenges to equality and non-discrimination across Europe. Hate speech dehumanises and stigmatises already vulnerable individuals and groups when they are targeted based on characteristics such as age, disability, ethnicity, race, language, religion, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Moreover, equality issues have become a common trope in extremist speech that seeks to polarize and divide societies.

The Training

This training is aimed at 2 different groups of Equality Bodies professionals:

- Policy experts



- Communication experts

The overall program will be delivered by trainers from the Council of Europe's Hate Speech, Hate Crime and Artificial Intelligence Unit (CoE). They will be in charge of the an initial general session for all participants where we will explore some background and context on the current political and societal climate regarding hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation.

Following this common first session, the training will continue into two thematic modules targeting each of the groups (policy and communication) . The policy module will be delivered by the same trainers from the Council.

These terms of reference concern the communication module only, which will build upon the CoE overall program.

Communication Module

Communicating in hostile environments: hate speech, polarization, misinformation, and politicisation of equality

Equality Bodies play a key role in raising awareness of increasing hate speech, misinformation and disinformation, and how they affect equality. On top of that, they communicate and raise awareness about equality in a climate of increasing hate speech, misinformation, polarization on and politicization of equality matters. Equality Bodies' awareness-raising efforts are often challenged by increasingly bold tactics by opponents of European values of equality and non-discrimination.

Through this module of the training, communication experts will build their capacity on how to carry out their fundamental communication work in such hostile environments. They will reflect on the role of National Equality Bodies in such a climate, their challenges, and opportunities. Moreover, the training will help participants to identify strategies to respond to misinformation and hate speech, for instance by developing alternative narratives that carry equality values and put forward convincing arguments as to why equality and non-discrimination must be promoted and respected in society; or by using strategies building on behavioral theories.

Objectives

- Learn how to create positive narratives
 - Promoting long-term cultural shifts toward fairness, equality, and shared belonging.
 - Creating opportunities to affirm fundamental rights and strengthen democratic inclusion.
- Provide practical tool to address hate speech
 - Do Equality Bodies need/should respond to hate? How effective can we be in any given hostile environment?

- Strategies and tools to address hate speech, misinformation and disinformation

Target audience: Members of the Equinet Working Group on Communication Strategies and Practices

To deliver this module, some collaboration with the trainers from the CoE might be required to synch the introductory session and existing materials on strategies and tools to address hate speech.

Expected outputs

- A 1-day practical training for 20 communication experts from Equality Bodies.
- A summary document containing a checklist with main considerations and strategies available.
- Good practices collected by members of the Working Group on Communication Strategies and Practices.

Expertise requirements

The selected expert(s) or team to be chosen is expected to demonstrate:

- Proven knowledge and experience in:
 - developing positive narratives that promote cultural shifts;
 - developing strategies and tools to address and counter hate speech.
- An understanding of how to apply these to the fields of equality and human rights and for a public organisation.
- Excellent drafting and presentation skills in English.
- Knowledge of the work of National Equality Bodies and their diversity is desirable.

Selection process

The Equinet Secretariat and a task force of the Working Group on Communication Strategies and Practices will select the winning application. In the selection process, the following criteria will be taken into account:

- Quality and content of the proposal
- Demonstrated expertise in the field
- Cost

Indicative time frame

- **18 June:** Call for proposals closes
- **17 July:** Result of the selection process
- **Week of 28 July:** Start of the work based on kick-off meeting with Equinet & Working Group representatives

- **23-24 September:** Training
- **17 October:** Delivery of guidelines/checklist from training

Budget

Equinet has a budget of **3.630 euros** to deliver the training & written materials.

We will hold this event in person in Alcala de Henares (outskirts of Madrid), Spain, and will cover the trainer's travel and accommodation, as well as local travel and subsistence expenses.

Proposals

Your application should include:

- Brief approach, methodology and timeline proposal
- Letter of motivation explaining your interest & relevance for this training
- CV of the trainer(s)
- Proposed budget

Please **send your application by 18 June** to Chiara D'Agni, Equinet Communication & Policy Officer (chiara.dagni@equineteurope.org), with the subject 'Trainer Application – Tackling Hate Speech'.

Preliminary Agenda

Tuesday, 23 September

- Morning: joint session delivered by CoE with members of both the Communication Working Group and the Policy Formation Working Group to give an overview of the current climate of rising hate speech, misinformation, polarization, and politicization of equality in which Equality Bodies operate.
- Afternoon: parallel training for communication module and policy module
- Dinner

Wednesday, 24 September

- Morning: continuation of the parallel training for communication module and policy module
- End of the training