



Equality Package: Commission proposes to strengthen equality bodies to fight discrimination

Brussels, 7 December 2022

Today, the European Commission adopted [two proposals to strengthen equality bodies](#), in particular their independence, resources and powers, so they can combat discrimination in Europe more effectively. Equality bodies are essential in assisting victims of discrimination and making sure that EU law on non-discrimination is implemented on the ground. This new legislation will ensure that equality bodies can achieve their full potential. It will better protect victims of discrimination and contribute to the prevention of discrimination.

Empowering equality bodies

Existing EU rules on equality bodies leave a wide margin of discretion to the Member States as regards their set-up and operation. This has resulted in significant differences across Member States, in particular, regarding the powers, independence, resources, accessibility and effectiveness of equality bodies. The Commission is proposing a set of binding rules to strengthen the role and independence of equality bodies:

- **Enhanced competences:** The proposals extend the competence of equality bodies to two existing Directives, the Employment Equality Directive and the Gender Equality Directive in the field of social security.
- **Independence:** There will be a legal requirement for equality bodies to be free from external influence, in particular as regards their legal structure, accountability, budget, staffing, and organisational matters.
- **Sufficient resources:** Member States will have to provide equality bodies with the human, technical and financial resources necessary to exercise all their competences effectively.
- **Accessibility for all victims:** Services of equality bodies will have to be free and accessible to all victims on an equal basis, including for persons with disabilities. Equality bodies will also have to provide complainants with a preliminary assessment of their case.
- **Consultation on law- and policy making process:** Public institutions will be required to consult equality bodies in a timely manner and to consider their recommendations on matters related to discrimination and equal treatment; equality bodies will also cooperate with other relevant stakeholders to share knowledge and create synergies.
- **Enhanced powers in discrimination cases:** Equality bodies will be able to investigate cases of discrimination, issue opinions or binding decisions (depending on the choice of Member States), and act in court in discrimination cases. Equality bodies will also be able propose an alternative dispute resolution mechanism, such as conciliation or mediation, to the parties in a complaint procedure.
- **Awareness raising:** Member States and equality bodies will step up their efforts aiming at prevention of discrimination and promotion of equality.
- **Sharing expertise:** Equality bodies will produce regular reports on the state of equal treatment and discrimination and be able to make recommendations.

Today, there is no common formal monitoring of equality bodies. The proposal stipulates that the Commission will establish common indicators to assess the effects of the proposed measures and ensure comparability of data collected at national level. The Commission will issue a report every 5 years on the situation of equality bodies across the EU.

Background

Equality is one of the EU's founding values. EU law requires Member States to set up equality bodies under the [Racial Equality Directive \(2000/43/EC\)](#), the [Gender Equality Directive in the field of goods and services \(2004/113/EC\)](#), the [Gender Equality Directive in the field of employment \(2006/54/EC\)](#), and the [Gender Equality Directive in the field of self-employment \(2010/41/EU\)](#). [The Employment](#)

[Equality Directive \(2000/78/EC\)](#) and the [Gender Equality Directive in the field of Social Security \(79/7/EEC\)](#) do not include such provisions.

Equality bodies are public institutions that provide assistance to victims of discrimination and issue reports and recommendations. They are part of the institutional checks and balances in a healthy democracy. Strengthening equality bodies is about safeguarding equality and ensuring non-discrimination in people's everyday lives.

To strengthen the powers and operation of equality bodies, the Commission adopted a non-binding Recommendation on standards for equality bodies in 2018. However, only some Member States undertook reforms to address issues highlighted in the Recommendation, while most reported either no change at all or no major reforms. In 2019, 59% of [Europeans still believed](#) that discrimination based on ethnic origin is widespread in their country. For sexual orientation, religion, disability and age, the numbers are 53%, 47%, 44% and 40% respectively. With these high levels of discrimination across the EU, public awareness about victims' rights and knowledge of discrimination is limited.

The public consultation in March 2022 confirmed that a majority of stakeholders are in favour of additional EU rules establishing standards for equality bodies.

The initiative consists of two essentially identical proposals for directives. The reason for having two proposals is that the six Directives concerned by the initiative are based on two distinct legal bases requiring different adoption procedures.

For More Information

[Factsheet](#)

[Proposal for a Council Directive on standards for equality bodies](#)

[Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and the Council on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities between women and men in matters of employment and occupation](#)

[Webpage on Equality Bodies](#)

[RightHereRightNow campaign – non-discrimination](#)

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Quotes:

Equality bodies directly support victims of discrimination and help them safeguard their rights. They are essential to the health of our democracies. Our proposals will strengthen their independence and empower them further as vital enforcers of EU non-discrimination law.

Věra Jourová, Vice-President for Values and Transparency - 07/12/2022

We are building a Union of equality where all of us, regardless of gender, religion or belief, ethnicity, age, disability, or sexual orientation, can live free from discrimination. In this process, strengthening of equality bodies is key to prevent and tackle discrimination, for the benefit of individuals and society at large. Our proposals will empower equality bodies to become independent, well resourced and hubs of expert knowledge on equality.

Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality - 07/12/2022

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