

Equinet Communications Training – Summary Using Communications to Tackle Under-reporting 26-27 September, Valletta (Malta)

The Equinet training on tackling under-reporting by better communication was jointly organized by Equinet and the Maltese equality body – The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE). The event was attended by equality bodies' representatives with an interest and/or role in communication strategies and activities. Two successful days of learning and fruitful exchange of information are summarized below.

DAY I

Session 1 (Plenary) – Concepts and practices for tackling under-reporting

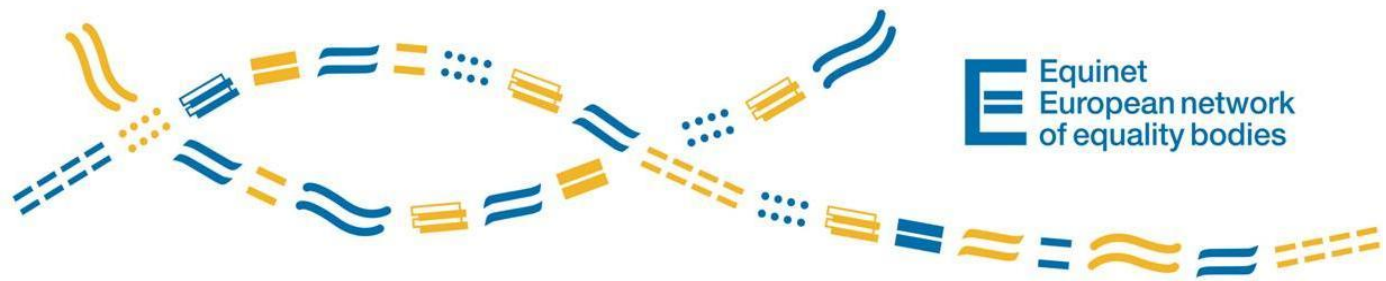
Dr Jana Gajdosova from FRA gave the introductory lecture to participants, setting a framework for the debate in the following two days. She summarized the core reasons for not reporting discrimination and then moved on to presenting the preliminary findings of FRA's sociological study on access to justice through Equality Bodies. She highlighted the obstacles experienced by NEBs in their communication work, brought out the factors for success and gave an overview of strategies that work in practice.

The second half of the plenary focused on learning from the experience of equality bodies. Representatives of two NEBs presented various successful strategies they have employed in their work.

Marco Buemi from the Italian NEB shared a practice of tackling under-reporting that is used in Italy. In case low reporting on some specific grounds is detected, they start a targeted campaign in order to raise awareness and encourage reporting. Since access to jobs is considered central by their NEB, they have created several campaigns promoting diversity in workplaces and run projects of recruiting employees from disadvantaged categories. Moreover, innovative ways of communicating on the topic of anti-racism were presented: shopping bags with anti-racist prints, educational videos tackling racist stereotypes etc.

Northern Ireland contributed with an overview of the approach their NEB uses for addressing under-reporting. The presentation given by *Libby Kinney* stressed the importance of using research to develop better understanding on the issues and building good relations with connectors¹ and NGOs in order to create a wide network of support. A significant part of her presentation was devoted to the person-centred approach that the Northern Irish EB uses, thus moving away from mere legal redress and towards tailor-made assistance and flexible services. The person-centred approach could be observed in the 2 case studies she went into detail with.

¹ These are individuals or groups who can play a role in connecting you to your target group or who can relay your message to them. This group will have a relationship of trust with your target group. It may be that connector networks will provide a cost-effective way to reach your target audience. The connector networks can be used alongside or sometimes instead of other communication channels (for more information on connectors you can download the [Equinet Good Practice Guide on Communications Principles](#)).



World Café

The first workshop of the day used the World Café method for sharing ideas and insights. Participants rotated between different tables that discussed the topics of their interest. The participants shared their experience on building the knowledge of rights in groups that experience discrimination and discussed the means of developing confidence to exercise those rights. They also broadened the scope of discussion by thinking of ways of contributing to the culture of rights in the wider society. The topics provoked a lively debate and the results of this rich learning experience can be read in a forthcoming Equinet publication on using communications to tackle under-reporting.

Session II (Plenary) – Building trust with (potential) victims of discrimination

The second half of the day focused on effective communication with people and groups that are especially vulnerable to the effect of under-reporting: LGBT people, older people, the Roma, and people with disabilities. Representatives from four different NGOs presented their experience and engaged in discussion with each other and the audience. The session achieved the goal of mutual enrichment by NEBs and NGOs working in the field of anti-discrimination. Below you can find the main issues that were raised in the panel discussion:

Malta Gay Rights Movement

Gabriella Calleja gave a short overview of the current state of Malta Gay Rights Movement and the communications issues they have been struggling with.

The key problems identified:

- No target group is homogenous – diversity in LGBTQI community
- Visibility of the target group is crucial for reaching out to them
- Lacking political interest, mainly personal motivation for addressing discrimination
- Some level of harassment is taken for granted
- Due to Malta's size, people are afraid of victimization
- Miscommunication has led the community to believe there is more protection than actually covered by law (e.g. no protection for goods and services)

What has worked:

- Identifying a person with organization helps to build trust, establishing personal contact
- Follow-up work is essential, ongoing support throughout the process
- Fast processing of complaints
- NEBs have access to spaces where NGOs are not welcome (schools, public education)

Zivot 90, Czech Republic

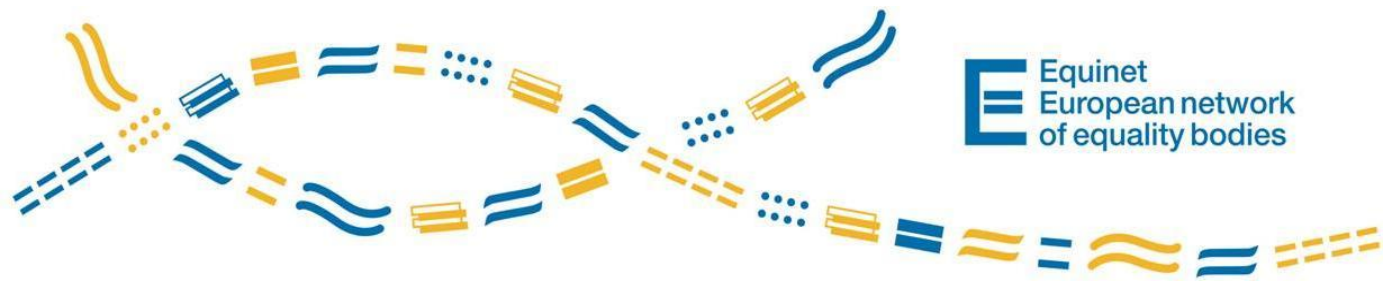
Klara Cozlova from an NGO focusing on the wellbeing of older people shared the principles, actions and strategies they use in their everyday work.

The key points outlined:

- Age usually intersects with other axis of discrimination,
- Complainants refrain from building a case because they aim for a change in their situation, not for legal redress

What has worked:

- Internet is not a useful tool, brochures and leaflets work best.
- Personal approach and counselling



- More trust towards lawyers than social workers

Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Spain

Javier Saez spoke from the perspective of an organization working with anti-discrimination of Roma people in Spain, with a focus on difficulties encountered in the communication process.

He listed the main barriers that hamper communication:

- Complexity of language used by experts
- Using the wrong channels
- Physical barriers (segregation, distance)
- Normalization of discrimination
- Lack of visibility for resolved cases
- Long processing is discouraging

Factors that can undermine confidence:

- Feeling that no action will be taken after filing a complaint
- Historical mistrust (e.g. between Roma and the Police)
- Some acts not interpreted as discrimination
- Fear that building a case would have consequences

Legambiente, Italy

Giulia Grazioli was careful to explain the correct usage of the term “persons with disabilities” instead of “the disabled” or “the handicapped”, as a person is more than their condition. She pointed to the specific issues that need to be taken into account when communicating with or about persons with disabilities:

The key difficulties identified:

- Denial of correct treatment when the disability is not obvious
- Fear and lack of knowledge on how to act towards people with disabilities

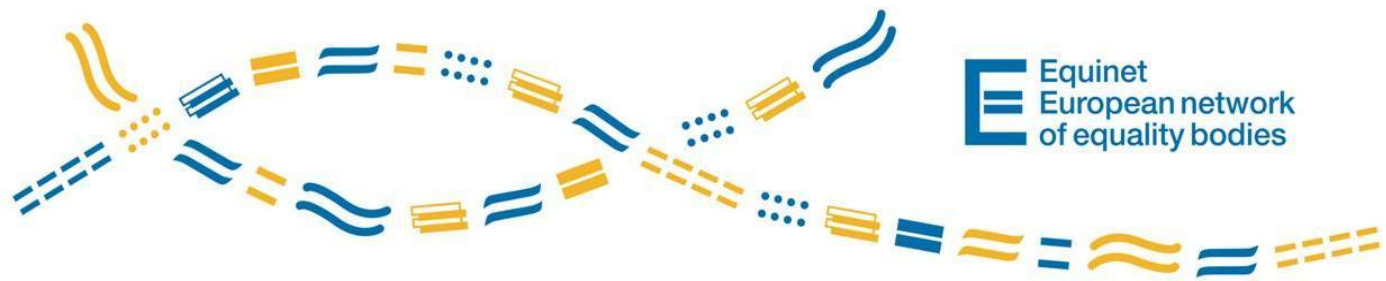
What has worked:

- The point of departure should not be pity, empathy or ignorance but respect
- Leaflets and info desks are effective, unlike digital campaigns
- Making the successful cases public

Innovative communications workshops

The final part of the day was dedicated to workshops on innovative ways of communicating with vulnerable communities. Again the participants rotated between different workshops, this time hosted by particular NEBs who shared the projects they have carried out in order to improve communications. The topics included using the right language/channels to reach target audiences (Belgium), communicating through mutual education (Sweden), using connectors to gain access and build trust (Northern Ireland) and building partnerships with civil society and other institutions (Austria).

Their presentations, as well as the ones delivered earlier in the day, are available on the [dedicated webpage](#) of the event.



Day II

(Plenary workshop) – Engaging our audiences more effectively to contribute to a culture of rights

The second day featured an experimental way of holding a workshop - *Richard Hawkins* from the Public Interest Research Centre and Common Cause was giving a presentation and interacting with the audience via Skype video call. It was the first time Equinet has used this new and exciting method of remotely facilitated workshops.

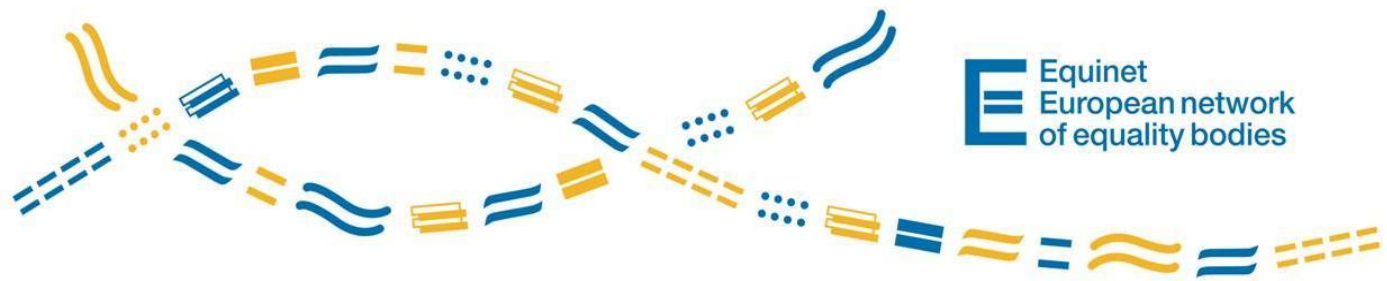
Niall Crowley facilitated the workshop on Equinet's side and was responsible for running two exercises that encouraged the participants to start considering the values that are promoted in their communication work. The participants were asked to name the key arguments their equality bodies make for equality and to state the key objective of their communication work for a culture of rights. **The systematized notes from this exercise are also attached or can be found on the [dedicated webpage](#) of the event.**

The goal of this workshop was to provide a different angle from where NEBs could approach their work and to encourage them to pay attention to the values that motivate people instead of the more customary focus on legal mechanisms.

Richard Hawkins introduced the concept of values and provided a generous amount of background information and scientific studies on how values work and how they connect issues. An essential point of learning was abandoning the binary model of values that tends to be widely spread. The general way of understanding values is that one either cherishes a value or not. Instead, values should be conceptualized as universal – everybody holds the same values but the extent and importance of those values differ from person to person. People hold values as individuals but those individual values add up on the national level. In order to change the culture and behaviour of people, it is necessary to engage with values and create a base for building the culture of rights in the wider society.

The question of whether the NEBs should attempt to change behaviour or values was raised in the audience. Hawkins' reply to this question was that the two approaches are equally valid, but it depends which values are associated with the intended change in behaviour. He differentiates between intrinsic values (values that are inherently rewarding to pursue) and extrinsic values (values that are centred on external approval or rewards). Every goal can be framed in different ways, either triggering intrinsic or extrinsic values. To illustrate his point, he gave an example from environmental activism. If the anticipated change in behaviour - people saving more energy - is framed through the incentive of saving money, then the extrinsic values like personal profit and individual wellbeing are triggered, leaving no space for environmental concerns. But in case saving energy is associated with intrinsic values, saving energy would be valued "for its own sake", as it simply is the right thing to do. Thus the same change in behaviour can be achieved by sending different messages but one has to be aware of the consequences to the general value-base of society.

Applying value-based thinking to equality undermines the usefulness of the "business case" for equality. This perspective faced resistance from the audience, as many representatives questioned the feasibility of non-economic argumentation. Some members of the audience expressed the opinion that since business is inherently different from the rest of the society then the messages targeting this audience would have to be tailored according to the values that are relevant to this group. Some referred to law as something to be taken for granted: something that also the



business world has to follow, thus placing legislation in the centre and rejecting the importance of value-based arguments.

Mr Hawkins's reaction to this feedback was that the laws certainly help but they are not central to combating discrimination. There is an elaborate system of laws in place in most countries without major increase in equality. Changing people's attitudes and behaviour cannot rest on law entirely but it depends on a broader level of shared cultural values. Moreover, he stated that economic arguments for equality entail much collateral damage, as they unintentionally trigger values that NEBs would initially not want to promote. Is anti-discrimination a question of rights, equality and justice or is it about saving money and time? The way messages are framed has a profound impact on cultural values. The direct implication for NEBs is that relying on legislation might not be the most effective way of tackling discrimination and inequality but one should also target the value-base of society.

Further information on this Equinet training, the detailed training programme, speaker's presentations and other materials can be found [here](#).