



4 December 2014

EQUINET STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2018

*Adopted by the General Assembly of Equinet
Members at the Equinet Annual General
Meeting 2014*



Equinet
European network
of equality bodies

Introduction and Context

National equality bodies are public institutions established by law to promote equality and combat discrimination (on grounds including gender and gender identity, racial or ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief and other grounds).

Equinet¹ is the European Network of Equality Bodies which has a membership of forty one national equality bodies from thirty one countries. It serves as a professional platform for cooperation, capacity building and peer support amongst equality bodies around the legal interpretation and implementation in practice of the EU equal treatment Directives and around the promotion of equality and the elimination of discrimination.

This is the third Strategic Plan of Equinet – the European Network of Equality Bodies, and will guide its work for the coming four years period from 2015 to 2018. It has been prepared in a particular context at a European level that offers opportunities and presents significant challenges for the effectiveness and independence of equality bodies in contributing to the emergence of a more equal Europe.

A moment of renewal and change at European level

Europe has experienced a prolonged period of economic and financial crisis in recent years. Austerity policies have posed particular challenges for equality and non-discrimination and for the work of equality bodies.

There is a momentum of change within European institutions and key European policies.

- Elections have recently been held to the European Parliament for a renewed mandate 2014-2019
- A new college of Commissioners has been appointed for this coming period.
- A new Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014-2020 has been agreed for the European Union, including a new EU Funding Programme *Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme* which supports work on equality and non-discrimination.
- New regulations govern the operation of the Structural and Investment Funds and include a focus on equality and on equality bodies.
- The midterm review of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is being progressed.

An evolving context of protection for equal treatment and non-discrimination is evident.

- The Charter of Fundamental Rights is growing in importance as EU primary law and could evolve as a valuable resource in the work of equality bodies.
- The EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is progressing while accession in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) has set a precedence in this regard.

¹ Equinet was established in 2007 as an independent legal entity (*International not-for-profit Association / Association Internationale sans but lucratif AISBL*) under Belgian law.

- The proposal for a ‘horizontal’ Equal Treatment Directive still promises a widening and levelling up of the protection from discrimination in EU law.
- There is potential for the development or renewal of EU level strategies to advance equality on a number of the Article 19 TFEU grounds.

A moment of opportunity and challenge for equality bodies

There is an ever-growing diversity among the national equality bodies established across the various countries, which is reflected in the range of their functions, the grounds they cover (single and multiple grounds), their legal structures (stand-alone equality bodies and others with a wider remit) and the resources available to them.

Opportunities are opening up for equality bodies and their work.

- There is increasing recognition by the European institutions and international organisations of the valuable role and potential of independent and effective equality bodies to secure implementation of non-discrimination in practice and advance more equal societies.
- Equality Bodies are uniquely placed to contribute to promoting equality and combating discrimination in a context where both these objectives are increasingly understood as a means to move on from and consolidate beyond economic and financial crisis towards recovery and progress.

Equality bodies face significant challenges in ensuring their independence and effectiveness.

- Limited resources undermine the capacity of many equality bodies to be effective in fulfilling their mandate.
- Ongoing change in the institutional architecture for and legal structure of equality bodies requires a reinterpretation of their mandate and way of working to ensure an effective and independent role to combat discrimination and promote equality.
- Barriers to access to justice undermine the impact of equal treatment legislation with high levels of under-reporting of cases of discrimination across all grounds and generally low awareness of rights in a context of persistent inequalities.

These changes, opportunities and challenges underline the need for further developing Equinet as the European network of equality bodies in supporting the development of the capacity, networking and contribution of equality bodies. They also point to the need for European standards for the effectiveness and independence of equality bodies to ensure that their potential can be fully realised in the future.

Vision

Equinet works to a vision of a more equal Europe. This is a Europe where full equality in practice is achieved across grounds such as gender and gender identity, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin age, sexual orientation, and disability and where discrimination on such grounds is eliminated.

An effective equality infrastructure at European and national level (including laws, policies and relevant bodies) has a key contribution to make towards achieving this vision. Independent and effective equality bodies are a central element within this equality infrastructure. This independence and effectiveness is evident in the manner of their establishment and appointment, in the functions, powers and resources granted to them, in the forms of accountability they must engage in, and in the manner in and ambition with which their work is planned and managed.

Equinet offers a network that enables equality bodies build capacity to deepen their independence and effectiveness, a platform that gives voice to the experience, expertise, learning and insights from equality bodies and their work of implementing equal treatment legislation, and a hub that supports the information flows necessary to enable and empower the work of equality bodies.

Mission

Equinet is the European Network of Equality Bodies.

The network promotes equality in Europe through supporting and enabling the work of national equality bodies. It supports equality bodies to be independent and effective as valuable catalysts for more equal societies.

Values

Equinet values and promotes:

- Respect for and recognition of the diversity of individuals and groups in society.
- Equality on grounds such as gender and gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, and age.
- The potential of equality bodies to contribute to positive change for individuals, organisations and institutions, and society as a whole.

Equinet operates in a manner that:

- Reflects a shared ownership and control of the network by its members.
- Relies on the active contribution of the equality bodies that form part of the network.
- Reflects the needs and interests that are common to equality bodies.
- Takes account of the diversity of equality bodies.
- Respects the independence of equality bodies.
- Promotes innovation in the work of its Members

Equinet manages its work in a manner that:

- Mainstreams equality and diversity in all of its work.

- Is open, transparent and innovative.
- Achieves a high standard of excellence and professionalism.
- Implements good practices as an employer.
- Strives to give due consideration to environmental sustainability

Equinet seeks to engage with its partners and stakeholders in a manner that:

- Is based on constructive cooperation and openness
- Reflects the unique and singular position of equality bodies as public institutions that are independent from both civil society and the statutory sector

Strategic Objectives

A. BUILDING CAPACITY AND PEER SUPPORT OF EQUALITY BODIES

B. CONTRIBUTING TO THE EUROPEAN EQUALITY AGENDA

C. SERVING AS A KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNICATION HUB ON EQUAL TREATMENT

D. CONSOLIDATING THE NETWORK AND THE POSITION OF ITS MEMBERS

Areas for Action

A. BUILDING CAPACITY AND PEER SUPPORT OF EQUALITY BODIES

A1 Develop knowledge and skills of staff members of NEBs

A2 Develop strategic and organisational capacity of NEBs

A3 Foster and promote innovative approaches in the work of equality bodies

B. CONTRIBUTING TO THE EUROPEAN EQUALITY AGENDA

B1 Contribute to equality policy and law at European level

B2 Convey an expert voice of equality bodies by sharing their expertise, experience and recommendations

B3 Inform and engage with policy makers and partners

C. SERVING AS A KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNICATION HUB ON EQUAL

TREATMENT

- C1** Inform and engage equality bodies on relevant European developments
- C2** Provide information on equality bodies to external audiences
- C3** Facilitate exchange of information and networking among members
- C4** Generate, collect and communicate knowledge on equal treatment

D. CONSOLIDATING THE NETWORK AND THE POSITION OF ITS MEMBERS

- D1** Support the development of standards for and in the work of equality bodies
- D2** Strengthen the standing of equality bodies in a changing context
- D3** Enhance cooperation with stakeholders
- D4** Ensure the sustainable development of the network and its capacity to respond to the diverse needs of members

Each area for action under the main strategic objectives is detailed below.

A. BUILDING CAPACITY AND PEER SUPPORT OF EQUALITY BODIES

Rationale

Equality bodies have been established in all Member States. Some are of recent origin while others can point to a long tradition. Their structure, mandate, and resources vary from one country to another. Change and evolution in their institutional or legal structures is a feature of the experience of most equality bodies. Equality bodies are challenged to constantly evolve and update their knowledge, skills and perspectives.

Equality bodies break new ground in their work because of their particular role as catalysts for social change in a context of persisting inequality and discrimination. They also break new ground because they are newly established, others because they have recently been merged with entities with other related mandates. Some because they have seen their mandate evolved or extended to include new grounds, others because they have been granted new functions or powers.

Staff members of equality bodies are drawn from and working on a wide range of professional fields. Their professional expertise is built on rich and diverse past experiences of working in equality bodies and in other structures relating to equality, diversity and non-discrimination.

Capacity building for equality bodies and their staff has therefore been and remains a constant priority for Equinet. Providing and facilitating peer support and sharing expertise have been key factors in effective capacity building, which underpin the mode of organisation of Equinet as a network. Innovation is an important goal both in terms of the processes

developed for capacity building and in terms of the knowledge, expertise and skills shared and conveyed within the network as part of this capacity building. The diversity of equality bodies is a resource in meeting these needs of equality bodies, just as it is a challenge in ensuring the varied needs of different equality bodies are met.



Areas for Action

A1 Develop knowledge and skills of staff members of NEBs

Equinet will work to further develop and deepen the awareness, knowledge and skills of staff members of equality bodies. Activities will focus on the capacity of staff to deliver expert work in a manner that independently and effectively fulfils the mandate of their equality body. Activities will further focus on the external environment and the capacity of staff members to engage effectively and creatively with the relevant elements of this external environment.

A2 Develop strategic and organisational capacity of NEBs

Equinet will work to further develop the strategic and organisational capacity of equality bodies themselves. Peer learning and the sharing of expertise and experience between equality bodies will be central to this work. Activities will focus on the management of equality bodies and their work and the implementation of their various functions in a context of realisation of the full potential of equality bodies.

A3 Foster and promote innovative approaches in the work of equality bodies

Equinet will identify, foster and promote innovation in the work of equality bodies. Activities will focus on exploring new ways for equality bodies to conduct their business and to implement their mandate as well as examining the merits of already existing innovative approaches in the work of equality bodies. Learning will be drawn and adapted from other sectors and fields of endeavour.



Indicators

Output Indicators for the Objective

1. The number of staff members of different equality bodies engaged with in the capacity building activities.
2. The number of specific innovations promoted for the work of equality bodies.

Impact Indicators for the Objective

1. The number of staff members of equality bodies making use in their work of the knowledge, skills and learning gained as a result of Equinet activities.
2. The number of equality bodies making use in their work of the knowledge, skills and learning gained as a result of their participation in Equinet activities.

B. CONTRIBUTING TO THE EUROPEAN EQUALITY AGENDA

Rationale

Equality is identified as a foundational value for the European Union. The European Treaties grant powers and capacity to the EU to combat discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, and disability, as well as introduce a requirement to mainstream a focus on non-discrimination in all EU policies and activities. The European Union has developed and continues to develop a broad range of legislation, policies and work to promote equality and combat discrimination on foot of this mandate. The work of equality bodies across the Member States can be placed in the context of these policies and legislation.

Equality bodies are on the front line in the work of promoting equality and combating discrimination. They have developed practical experience, learning and expertise in their implementation of equal treatment legislation in their country. As per the equal treatment Directives, they are empowered to contribute to policy formation at national level by making recommendations on the basis of their work. At a European level, the combined and diverse learning from the work of the various equality bodies has a valuable contribution to make to policies and work promoting equality and combating discrimination, as well as to the mainstreaming of non-discrimination and equality in all policy areas.

Equinet as the European network of equality bodies serves as a platform for equality bodies from the various countries to support and facilitate a coordinated contribution to the further development of equality policy and legislation, to give voice to the combined learning from their work, and to engage with key European stakeholders in conveying and explaining this learning at European level.

Areas for Action

B1 Contribute to equality policy and law at European level

Equinet will work to contribute to the development of equality and non-discrimination policy and law, the inclusion of equality and non-discrimination in particular general policies, and related activities at European level. The focus for these activities will be extracting, analysing and presenting the learning from the work of equality bodies and their experience of implementing equal treatment legislation.

B2 Convey an expert voice of equality bodies by sharing their expertise, experience and recommendations

Equinet will communicate the expert and experienced voice of national equality bodies to European level policy makers and stakeholders. The focus for these activities will be selected contributions to relevant areas of policy formation, developed out of the experience and expertise of equality bodies and their work at national level.

B3 Inform and engage with policy makers and partners

Equinet will inform and engage with policy makers, partners and stakeholders in the field of non-discrimination and equality. The focus for these activities will be communicating the learning from the work of equality bodies and shedding light on their particular relevance to specific policies or activities planned or being pursued at European level.

Indicators

Output Indicators for the Objective

1. The number of contributions made to European level policy-making and activity in the field of non-discrimination and equality.
2. The number of European level policy-makers and stakeholders engaged with on issues of equality and non-discrimination.

Impact Indicators for the Objective

1. Evidence of influence by Equinet contributions in policy and legal documents published by European institutions and international organisations.

C. SERVING AS A KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNICATION HUB ON EQUAL TREATMENT

Rationale

Equinet as the European network of equality bodies serves as a hub for generating, gathering, communicating and sharing information, between and within the European and the national levels. It plays an important role within the overall European Equality architecture and can work as a connector between Equality Bodies and the full spectrum of relevant European level policy makers and stakeholders.

It is important to convey information from and about equality bodies to policy-makers and stakeholders at European and international level. Information about the work, impact, experience and situation of equality bodies can be a resource to these important actors in their work. This information can also mobilise valuable support, solidarity and engagement from European level policy makers and stakeholders in ensuring equality bodies realise their full potential.

A facilitated horizontal flow of information between equality bodies in different Member States also supports their effectiveness. This flow of information is at the heart of peer support, allowing for immediate learning from one equality body to another and supporting joint problem solving where the necessary learning is not available. It further ensures that equality bodies are kept up to date with the latest developments and trends in the work of their peers.

Equality bodies can usefully draw from developments in analysis and understanding of equality and non-discrimination issues and of legislation and policies in this field. Initiatives to generate and gather such knowledge will be key to empower and support equality bodies in their work.

Finally, access to information from key institutions and external stakeholders on European level policy and activity, in the field of equality and non-discrimination and in other policy fields related to the mandates of equality bodies, is important for their effectiveness. It enables equality bodies to engage effectively with these developments both in terms of contributing to their implementation and impact and in terms of benefiting in their work from the potential and influence of these European level policies and activities.



Areas for Action

C1 Inform and engage equality bodies on relevant European developments

Equinet will keep equality bodies informed of relevant developments at European and international level relevant to equality and non-discrimination and will support their appropriate engagement with these developments. The focus for these activities will be equal treatment policy and law as well as general policy and strategy that have links to the mandates of the equality bodies.

C2 Provide information on equality bodies to external audiences

Equinet will provide information on the work, impact, experience and situation of equality bodies to a range of external audiences at European and international level. These audiences include policy-makers and representatives from European institutions, European agencies, civil society and social partner organisations, as well as international organisations. These information activities will communicate the learning from the work of equality bodies, the achievements and impact of equality bodies as well as the barriers they face, the steps that can enable equality bodies to realise their potential and the work and achievements of Equinet.

C3 Facilitate exchange of information and networking among members

Equinet will facilitate exchange of information and networking among its members. The focus for these activities will be to enable peer support and peer learning, and to stimulate solidarity and mutual support between equality bodies.

C4 Generate, collect and communicate knowledge on equal treatment

Equinet will generate and collect knowledge on and relevant to the broad field of equality and non-discrimination. This will include commissioning and conducting research as possible and relevant. It will also involve gathering and making accessible research and reports conducted by other stakeholders as well as relevant developments in case law from the CJEU, the ECtHR and national courts.

Indicators

Output Indicators for the Objective

1. Number of e-newsletters published.
2. Number of research and reports published.
3. Number of meetings and interactions with stakeholders.

Impact Indicators for the Objective

1. Number of unique visitors and other relevant website analytics (e.g. average time spent per page).
2. Number of followers and other relevant social media analytics.
3. Number of opens and clicks in disseminated Equinet newsletters.
4. The number of equality bodies and stakeholders making use in their work of the research publications.

D. CONSOLIDATING THE NETWORK AND THE POSITION OF ITS MEMBERS

Rationale

Equinet's previous work has identified the challenges faced by equality bodies in maintaining their independence and effectiveness. Equality bodies have experienced changes to their legal structure, mandate, powers or their resources that can be seen as challenging their independence and effectiveness. It is important that there are standards against which to assess the manner in which equality bodies are established, operate and provided the means to conduct their work and to fulfil their mandate. It is necessary to build a solidarity that can be available for equality bodies that find themselves under undue pressure as regards their independence or effectiveness.

Equality bodies are working alongside other important actors at national and European level with roles to play in promoting equality and combating discrimination. Cooperation, exchange and coordination between these different actors is essential to ensure progress, coherence of action and to avoid duplication and overlap of activity.

A particular dimension to stakeholder cooperation has emerged as vital with the growing trend for equality bodies to form part of bodies with larger mandates (e.g. National Human Rights Institutions or Ombudsman Offices). This requires a specific cooperation across these different mandates as these are organised at European level, and will build and inform good practice in linking these different mandates.

Equinet provides a source of capacity and a platform that have proven to be valuable for the independence and effectiveness of equality bodies across the countries. It is important that

this network is sustained into the future, and is further strengthened by a status and standing that can underpin the impact of its work.



Areas for Action

D1 Support the development of standards for and in the work of equality bodies

Equinet will continue to support the need for European standards specifically for the establishment and operation of equality bodies. The focus for these activities will be to engage policy makers and key institutions on the need for such standards and mobilise support for their potential development, build consensus among equality bodies as to the approach to such standards and develop relevant material in this context.

D2 Strengthen the standing of equality bodies in a changing context

Equinet will continue to foster the status and standing of equality bodies at national, European and international levels in a changing and challenging context. The focus for these activities will be the achievements, impact and potential of equality bodies and the imperative to sustain their independence and effectiveness.

D3 Enhance cooperation with stakeholders

Equinet will continue to stimulate and engage in cooperation with European level stakeholders. The focus for these activities will be to support coherence and mutual support in the work of European level stakeholders on issues related to the mandate and functioning of equality bodies and to develop deeper understanding of the links between human rights, ombudsman office and equality body mandates, and the potential of these links between the equality and human rights agenda.

D4 Ensure the sustainable development of the network and its capacity to respond to the diverse needs of members

Equinet will continue to promote the sustainable development of the network and its capacity to respond to the diverse needs of its members. The focus for these activities will be the funding for the network, its status and standing, as well as membership engagement within the network.



Indicators

Output Indicators for the Objective

1. Number of meetings with stakeholders that enable coherence and cooperation on shared concerns.
2. Number of initiatives to explore and deepen understanding of links between equality, human rights and ombudsman mandates.

Impact Indicators for the Objective

1. Perceptions among equality bodies that their work has been supported and enhanced by the work of Equinet.

Tools for Action

Equinet will develop and implement annual work plans under each of the strategic objectives using a range of different tools to implement the different action areas:

Working Groups

Equinet working groups are platforms for equality body staff members to develop joint initiatives; to network, exchange experiences and good practices; and to learn from each other and from external experts. Working groups contribute with expert input to selected Equinet publications and events. Annual work plans will determine what working groups operate and the relevant area of work for the different Working Groups, as well as related specific topics to be focused on.

The effective operation of working groups is the responsibility of the moderator and participants (expert staff from equality bodies) and is supported by the Equinet Secretariat. The Board, secretariat and working group moderators ensure that possible synergies between working groups are identified and exploited. The secretariat reports to the Board on the activities and overall progress of the working groups.

The moderator guides the activities of the working group and is appointed by the Board following agreement of the member body where the moderator works. Members of the working group are nominated by Equinet member equality bodies and can evolve in view of the selected topic or focus of the working group. They attend working group meetings and participate in the activities of the working group. Moderators of the various working groups will be given the opportunity to engage with each other and with the Board on a regular basis.

Seminars

Seminars explore key issues and developments in field of equality and non-discrimination at national and European levels with a view to support staff members of equality bodies to learn about, engage with, and develop expertise in these issues and developments.

Seminars provide important opportunities for exchanges and networking between equality bodies and for peer learning and support between equality bodies. Seminars are open to staff members of equality bodies responsible for or working on areas related to the seminar topic.

Conferences

Conferences explore key issues and developments in the field of equal treatment at national and European levels. These high-level events provide opportunities for exchanges between equality bodies, EU institutions and other stakeholders. They raise the profile of Equinet and national equality bodies as expert institutions in the field of equal treatment. Conferences are open to senior staff and experts of equality bodies and to representatives from European organisations and external stakeholders.

Training Events

Training events for staff of equality bodies will provide participants with the opportunities to immerse themselves in a particular topic in a manner that develops and deepens specific skills and expertise. Participants are nominated by Equinet member organisations on the basis of their responsibilities or interests in the topic addressed by the training events.

Publications

Equinet uses a wide range of digital and printed publications (e.g. reports, factsheets, briefings, papers, good practice guides, leaflets, online tools and platforms, etc.) in its work. These are developed under the guidance of the Board and informed by the work and experience of the member equality bodies, with some of the following objectives:

- Collect, share and develop information on and experience of equality bodies
- Provide stakeholders and policy-makers with facts-based analysis and insights based on the work of equality bodies.
- Provide expert input in response to relevant developments in the equal treatment field and the network's strategic priorities.
- Communicate the outcomes of working groups, conferences, seminars, training events, specific research activities, or project initiatives undertaken.
- Promote the network, its activities and the member equality bodies.

ICT and Communications

Equinet deploys communication tools and activities, as part of a communication strategy, to:

- Promote the network, its activities and members.
- Foster closer cooperation with key partners and stakeholders.
- Encourage the sharing of ideas, expertise and information on members' work, issues and practices.
- Explore and develop thinking on innovative and important issues and concepts.
- Provide timely and relevant information to members on legal, policy and funding programme developments at European level.

- Inform members of initiatives being taken by Equinet, by other equality bodies and by institutions at European level.
- Offer an interactive platform to discuss specific issues of concern to members.
- Disseminate the outputs and learning from the network's activities broadly and widen their reach within equality bodies themselves.

Thematic Clusters

Equality body clusters are time limited and task focused working spaces for staff experts and high-level representatives of member equality bodies. They are made up of equality bodies that share a concern to advance a piece of work on a selected theme or issue. Clusters and the particular work and theme they engage in are determined under the annual work plan.

Research

Within resources available, Equinet may commission, conduct and publish research on matters relating to equality, non-discrimination and the institutional setting or work of equality bodies that are of common interest and relevance to the members and other equality stakeholders.

Projects

Equinet implements or supports projects (both within the network and externally) in response to its members needs and with a view to fostering and promoting innovative approaches to promoting equality and combating discrimination.

Engagement – Meetings and Representation

Equinet engages in meetings and high-level exchanges with relevant stakeholders with a view to fostering effective cooperation and promoting the network's strategic priorities and the work of equality bodies.

Equinet conveys and disseminates the shared learnings, positions and perspective of equality bodies on issues of relevance to European level policy makers and stakeholders.

Equinet ensures that the network, its members and their work are adequately and appropriately represented and promoted at key events and meetings at European and national level. This is done through the Board and secretariat as well as through expert representatives from member equality bodies.

Exchanges among equality bodies

Equinet facilitates contacts for and stimulate exchanges for study visits and programmes between member equality bodies, including twinning or bilateral programmes or peer review initiatives.

Governance

Equinet has been established as an independent legal entity (*International not-for-profit Association AISBL*) under Belgian law since 2007.

The General Assembly of Members

The General Assembly of Members is Equinet's highest decision-making body. The Statutes of the Equinet Constitution ensure that members are in full control of the general direction and the main strategic decisions concerning the network through the General Assembly of Members.

The General Assembly of Members meets at least once a year for an Annual General Meeting (AGM) to discuss, decide and vote on issues pertaining to the network's mission and objectives and its strategic management and development. The General Assembly approves the strategic plan, annual work plans and annual budgets at its meetings or where necessary by written procedures. These are then implemented through the Board, the Secretariat and the members.

The Executive Board

The General Assembly of Members delegates the management of the network to an Executive Board. The Board is constituted of nine members who are senior level representatives of equality bodies (member organisations). Board members are elected for a mandate of two years (renewable twice) by the General Assembly. The members of the Board appoint a chairperson and a treasurer for the duration of the Board mandate. As appropriate, the Board can seek the advice of and appoint external expert/s as advisor/s to the Board.

The Board meets on a regular basis to guide and support the implementation by the secretariat of the strategic plan and the annual work plans approved by the General Assembly of Members. The Board has a particular focus on the effective, appropriate and strategic use of the resources available to the network. It is responsible for managing and sustaining the appropriate and necessary relationships with key organisations and for contributing to the representation of Equinet with external stakeholders. The Board reports to the General Assembly of Members at least once a year during the Annual General Meeting. It submits strategic and operational proposals, the strategic plan, the annual work plan, and the annual budget to the General Assembly of Members.

The Secretariat

The secretariat is a professionally staffed structure that has been set up in Brussels including a range of key functions and fields (including an executive director, policy, communications, finance and administration functions). The secretariat is responsible for the effective implementation of Equinet's strategic plan and annual work plans. This work is developed on the basis of proposals made by the secretariat, to be approved by the Board for

implementation. The Board evaluates this work on the basis of regular reports from the secretariat. The work of the secretariat can involve commissioning outside experts, supporting work done by member bodies and direct implementation by members of the secretariat. The secretariat also acts as the point of contact for EU institutions and other stakeholders.

Members

Member organisations (Members) are statutory based equality bodies established on the basis of and fulfilling the requirements of the EU equal treatment Directives. The members delegate representatives to the Annual General Meeting of the General Assembly of Members. Members pay an annual membership fee that constitutes part of the Equinet funding and enjoy rights and duties as defined in the Equinet Statutes.

Observers

Any organisation applying for Equinet Membership, after review and acceptance of its application by the Board can be an observer for the time between the submission of the application and the Annual General Meeting, where the General Assembly of Members will vote on the ratification of their membership. If it deems it to be in the interest of Equinet, the Board can also decide to invite relevant organisations in the field of promoting equality and non-discrimination as observers of Equinet activities.

Evaluation

Equinet has developed indicators for each strategic objective that reflect this understanding of change and of Equinet's potential contribution to this vision of a more equal Europe. These indicators were identified and are listed under each of the four strategic objectives, with a view to measure and track the success of the related activities and work. They include both output and impact indicators.

Equinet will implement an overall evaluation strategy for this strategic plan by:

- Establishing benchmarks and targets for each of the indicators identified.
- Taking responsibility at Board and Secretariat level to ensure that decision making is guided by the strategic objectives and indicators established in the strategic plan.
- Monitoring the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of its indicators of success by gathering data at and securing feedback from all events and activities, giving consideration to progress on outputs and outcomes at each Board meeting, and engaging in ongoing dialogue with members about progress on and impact of the strategic plan.
- Commissioning external independent evaluation of the implementation and impact of each annual work plan through assessment of data gathered during the year, member interviews, a survey of members, and stakeholder interviews.

- Commissioning an external independent evaluation of the overall implementation and impact of the strategic plan in its final year.

In line with this process, a series of overall indicators have been selected that will be used for the final assessment of the implementation of the Strategic Plan:

1. Perceptions among equality bodies of enhanced effectiveness in their operations.
2. Perceptions among equality bodies that they are better equipped to engage with European level policy and activity related to their mandate.
3. Evidence of influence by Equinet contributions in policy and legal documents of the European institutions.
4. Perceptions among European level policy makers and stakeholders that they are better able to appreciate the contribution of equality bodies.
5. Perceptions among European level policy makers and stakeholders that European standards for equality bodies are needed.
6. Adequacy and diversity of funding and other supports for the network.