

Rebuilding societies after the Covid-19 pandemic

Over the last few months the coronavirus pandemic has threatened the health of millions of people around the world and it has completely changed the way individuals live their lives. Currently, many countries around the globe are thinking ahead about how life should look like in the post Covid-19 pandemic.

In this regard, the European Commission is discussing the EU's social funding programmes to tackle social and employment challenges in the post-crisis era. As the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit said, *“Making Europe more resilient, sustainable and inclusive in the future means investing in its people now, and especially the younger generations. Our priority is to quickly overcome the social and economic shock caused by the coronavirus crisis and to ensure that no one is left behind”*.¹

As the weeks pass, stakeholders and politicians are eager to reopen businesses and return to workplaces.² The public health crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic and the measures taken by governments to tackle it are not neutral as they affect some more than others, with disproportionately negative effects on certain groups often already in a disadvantaged socioeconomic position and at risk of discrimination.³ Government measures in response to Covid-19 must protect the rights of all people without discrimination.⁴

In this context, the European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET) deems that there is a clear risk of a serious economic downturn and social crisis hitting Europe over the coming months and years and that this can increase discrimination and inequalities without strong pro-equality policies, the mobilization of necessary resources and action at European, international, national and local levels. To mitigate such developments, EQUINET published the *Recommendation for a fair and equal Europe: Rebuilding our Societies after Covid-19*⁵ to be used as a minimum standard based on laws and common European values in the measures to be taken following this pandemic.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9686>

² <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/statements/statement-recovery-must-lead-to-a-different-economy,-an-economy-of-well-being>

³ https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/equinet_rebuilding-recommendation_A4_03-web.pdf

⁴ <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/covid19-rights-impact-may-1>

⁵ <https://equineteurope.org/2020/11-recommendations-for-a-fair-and-equal-europe-rebuilding-our-societies-after-covid-19/>

Europe must do better than restoring the pre-crisis situation. EQUINET recommends that EU and national actions should aim at eliminating systemic problems of inequality and building fair and equal societies grounded on solidarity. This should include promoting equality, including in education, as a shared value and as a key characteristic which underpins the response to the economic and social crisis.

Positive action measures and legislation can also improve the situation and experience of marginalised groups. Hence, EU member states should put in place and finance such measures while strengthening their equality legislation in a way that confirms equality as a central value. Such legislation should demonstrate an ambition to achieve equality in practice. This includes widening the scope of equal treatment legislation to cover discrimination on all grounds and in all fields of life.

Finally, EQUINET recommends that EU member states should strengthen national equality bodies and allow them to fulfil their potential in monitoring and enforcing equality legislation, promoting equality in society and policy making, and collecting and analysing data and evidence to provide expertise. This should entail widening the mandate of equality bodies to all grounds and fields of discrimination, ensuring their independence, accessibility and a sufficient level of resources.

In Malta, this recommendation has been on the government's agenda for some time with the aim of transforming the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) into a Human Rights and Equality Commission (HREC). With this transformation, Malta's legal framework on human rights and equality will be strengthened with the widening of NCPE's remit and sanctioning powers.

In the meantime, the NCPE has continued working on various initiatives including awareness raising in relation to the Covid-19 crisis and its implications for equality. In this regard, an article on equality in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic was published, social media posts were created and a newsletter highlighting various aspects of equality in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic was also published. This [newsletter](#) gives an overview of the pandemic's impact on the grounds of gender, family responsibilities, age, race and ethnic origin, religion and belief as well as sexual orientation and gender identity. Reference is also made to teleworking; the benefits and challenges of teleworking, the role of equality bodies and the



NCPE on-going work. The NCPE is also carrying out research on the distribution of work in households across Malta and Gozo during the pandemic.

As the world begins to look at what it will be like to live life with the coronavirus or the threat of future outbreaks, it is important that the values of equality and non-discrimination continue to be safeguarded.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2295 7850 or equality@gov.mt or our Facebook page.

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