

PRESS STATEMENT:

Equality issues under the spotlight

Equality bodies and non-governmental organisations working in the field met in Brussels to celebrate the tenth anniversary of The *European Network of Equality Bodies* (EQUINET). EQUINET brings together 46 organisations from 34 European countries. These bodies are empowered to counteract discrimination across a range of grounds such as age, disability, gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

Today's challenges require new approaches to achieve equality in society. This statement was made by Evelyn Collins, Chair of EQUINET Executive Board, when reviewing EQUINET's achievements over its first 10 years describing them as a valued contribution to advancing equality in Europe. She said that the role of equality bodies needs to be recognised at European level in order to ensure the implementation of equality legislation in member states.

Cases of discrimination need to be showcased in a concrete manner at European level, said First Vice-President of the European Commission, Mr Frans Timmermans. He emphasised the need to highlight cases on gender gaps, women in the labour market as well as cases of sexual harassment.

Vera Jourova, EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, addressed the participants at an evening reception organised to mark this occasion. She emphasised that much more work needs to be done to achieve equality in our societies.

The work of equality bodies in progressing equality and non-discrimination over the past decade was underscored. The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), as a member of EQUINET, participated in this Conference with the theme '*Together for an Equal Europe*'. Progress made and the current challenges in the field of equality continued to be discussed the following day during EQUINET's Annual General Meeting.

Since its establishment in 2007, Equinet has been promoting equality in Europe by supporting and enabling the work of the national equality bodies. It supports equality bodies to be independent and effective as valuable catalysts for more equal societies through its platform for peer learning for these bodies, whereby they share their expertise, experience and recommendations to strengthen their work on the development of equality and non-discrimination policy and law.

Equality bodies are at the front line in the work of promoting equality and combating discrimination, with practical experience in implementing equal treatment legislation at a national level and thus requiring such empowerment. Cases of discrimination are investigated and decided; assistance is provided to victims of discrimination; research, surveys and reports on discrimination issues are carried out; good practice for achieving de facto equality is promoted; and awareness raised on rights and responsibilities of a society that values equality.

This work also forms part of the remit of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), as Malta's equality body, that has been a member of EQUINET since its establishment. NCPE actively participates in the network's initiatives by being part of its working groups on different topics, namely on gender equality, policy formation, legal aspects and communications. Participation in EQUINET's mutual learning activities including meetings, seminars and conferences enhances NCPE's internal capacity building; collaboration includes replies to surveys, questionnaires and requests for information shared among EQUINET members; contribution to discussions; giving feedback to documents developed; and utilisation of tools and resources developed by EQUINET when required.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Equinet, NCPE recognises the important role of this network in providing valuable opportunities for capacity building, mutual learning, exchange of knowledge, experiences and support. NCPE's membership in EQUINET thus contributes to enhance the effectiveness of NCPE's work to further safeguard equal treatment for the benefit of various stakeholders, the general public and especially victims and potential victims of discrimination.

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