

PRESS STATEMENT

European Commission recommends stronger equality bodies in Member States

“Discrimination has no place in the EU. We must ensure that our national equality bodies are independent, with the resources to do what they do best. They are the watchdogs of justice, ensuring all citizens are given equal rights and equal opportunities”, according to Věra Jourová the European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality.

Equality bodies are independent organisations assisting victims of discrimination, monitoring and reporting on discrimination issues and working to promote equality. On 22nd June 2018, the European Commission recommended a set of measures for Member States to ensure that equality bodies effectively protect citizens and fight discrimination.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), being one of such equality bodies across the EU, alongside the European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET) which encompasses forty-six (46) equality bodies from 34 countries across Europe, welcomes these standards.

As with other equality bodies NCPE was established by law, more precisely by Chapter 456 of the Laws of Malta (2004). Its remit was developed further during the years to cover the grounds of sex/gender and family responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, and gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, as well as freedom of movement for EU workers.

The first point of contact, for those seeking to make a claim of discrimination and for reference on matters related to equal treatment and discrimination, is generally the equality bodies in their respective country. In this context, the European Commission adopted a Recommendation on standards concerning their mandate; their independence and effectiveness; as well as on coordination and cooperation; with the objective to further harmonise the work of the equality bodies across the EU and to enhance their standing in society.

The independence of equality bodies is crucial for their effective functioning and for achieving a stronger impact on society. The standards recommend that greater independence can be ensured through their administrative structure, the allocation of their budget, their procedures for handling resources and the procedures for appointing and dismissing staff.

Adequate financial, human and technical resources are another standard imperative to achieve the true effectiveness of an equality body. These resources are fundamental in carrying out their functions, including: providing independent assistance to victims and handling of complaints; publishing independent surveys and reports; making recommendations on legislation, policy, procedure, programmes and practices; as well as the promotion of equality.

In addition, equality bodies are urged to engage in dialogue and cooperate effectively with other entities, including equality bodies, at national, European and international levels.

These standards should be the building blocks for the continuous development of equality bodies. In Malta, work is underway to strengthen the NCPE through its transformation into a Human Rights and Equality Commission (HREC) covering the protection of equal treatment and human rights. In line with the recommended standards, its mandate will be widened, its independence and effectiveness will be further strengthened, and its coordination and cooperation will be broadened.



National Commission for the Promotion of Equality

Through these standards, the European Commission urges the empowerment of equality bodies and the continued implementation of equality legislation that makes a difference in the quality of life of everyone, all over the European Union.

For further information –NCPE: equality.gov.mt

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