



High Level Group on Non-discrimination, Equality and Diversity

Mandate

1. Aims and scope of the High Level Group

Equality and non-discrimination have strong foundations in the European Union. The Treaties on European Union identify the value of equality as foundational. They confer a competence on the European Union to combat discrimination based on sex (including gender identity), racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation. They require the European Union to mainstream non-discrimination in its policies, processes and programmes.

The European Union has built effectively on these foundations. Equal treatment directives have been enacted, wide-ranging policies have been implemented to advance equality for different groups, both at national and European level, with the support of EU funding programmes.

The Governmental Expert Group in the field of non-discrimination (2008-2013) represented an important first step in the co-operation and coordination between the Member States and between the European Commission ("the Commission") and the Member States in addressing common concerns and advancing shared objectives. The diversity of Member States approaches to an issue becomes a resource for learning and for the dismantling of barriers, as shown by the various good practice exchanges on public policies organised in the framework of this group.

The Commission consulted the Governmental Expert Group at the last meeting on the ways to improve the work of the group to make it more meaningful and effective. As a result of this discussion and further rounds of written consultations, a first orientation paper was presented and discussed during the High Level Event on Non-Discrimination and Equality in Rome (November 2014)¹.

The mandate of the newly constituted **High Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity** ("the Group") is fully based on these discussions and consultations.

¹ The orientation paper and the conclusions of the event can be consulted at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/hle-2014/index_en.htm

2. Duration

The nature of the Group is informal and as such, the duration of its mandate is indefinite, starting as of 2015.

3. Task

The task of the Group shall be:

- To accompany the development and implementation of policies and programmes at EU and national level aimed at combating discrimination, promoting equality and diversity.
- To deepen cooperation and coordination between Member States' relevant authorities and the Commission on questions relating to achieving diversity and full equality in practice, and eliminating discrimination; in particular through the exchange of experiences and good practices on related issues of common interest to be defined by the Group and the establishing, when appropriate, of common policy objectives
- To deepen the coherence of effort for equality and against discrimination between the members of the Group, the Presidency, the Council, the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.
- Any other topic that may emerge which is found relevant by the Commission and the Group.

The representatives of the Group from the trio of Council Presidencies will update the Group on plans, activities and results of the Presidency in relation to the non-discrimination and equality issues and take feedback on these.

The Group will serve as a resource to the current and future Presidencies in developing and implementing a programme of activities on non-discrimination and equality during their term. Each Presidency may report to the Council on the activities of the Group and any proposals from these activities.

The Group will focus on themes that engage with and are relevant to all the grounds that fall within its mandate, namely sexual orientation and gender identity, racial or ethnic origin, age, religion or belief, disability. The work will also focus on an individual ground where particular opportunities open up for advancing the situation of people covered by that ground or where specific needs or issues arise. For that purpose, in agreement with the Commission, sub-groups may be set up to examine specific questions under terms of reference established by the Group. Such sub-groups shall be dissolved as soon as their mandates are fulfilled. The sub-groups shall report to the Group

Furthermore, there will be occasions where the work focuses on Groups at the intersections between the different grounds. In order to avoid overlaps with the high level

group on gender equality, the Group will not deal with this ground of discrimination as such. It will however, when relevant, create synergies between the two Groups, as well as with other relevant formations, such as the Commission Group on disability.

4. Membership

- a) The Group shall be composed of two representatives per Member State of the European Union.
- b) One permanent representative shall be nominated by the national authorities responsible for policies against discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and the promotion of equality.
- c) The second seat allocated to each Member State will be open for the responsible ministry to invite an additional representative with expertise relevant to the specific agenda points of each meeting of the Group.
- d) Permanent representatives can be replaced by alternate representatives, who will be appointed in equal numbers and on the same conditions as the permanent representatives.
- e) The Group is open for participation of one representative from each of the European Economic Area countries (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein)
- f) Participants from additional countries may be invited by the Commission to participate in the Group, if it is found relevant. This will be decided on a case by case basis.

5. Meetings and organisational aspects

5.1) Secretariat of the Group

The Commission is responsible for providing secretarial and logistic support for all the Group activities and meetings. This includes drafting the agenda in consultation with the "Trio of Presidencies", organisation of travel and accommodation for the participants, drafting and distribution of invitations and documents for the meetings (including good practice exchanges), drafting the minutes of the meeting.

5.2) Meetings of the Group

- The Group meets twice a year (one meeting per EU Presidency): usually beginning of March and beginning of October.
- The Group shall normally meet in the Member State holding the Council Presidency. Having the meetings in the Member States allows a stronger commitment by the

Presidency; a wider participation from the Presidency including in terms of experts in specific subjects, as well as representatives of other ministries when needed.

- When this is not possible, or if the Presidency decides otherwise, the Commission will host the meeting in its premises in Brussels.
- The Commission shall cover the arrangements and cost for travel and, where appropriate, subsistence expenses for participants, experts and observers in connection with the Group's activities. The members, experts and observers shall not be remunerated for the services they render. When a Member State hosts the event, the location of an adequate meeting room is under its responsibility.
- The meeting will normally be held on two half days: starting the afternoon one day and continuing with a morning session the day after. In exceptional cases the meeting can be held in a single day if it is found more appropriate. The duration of the meeting can also be extended to more than one day if necessary.
- The Group shall be chaired by a representative of the Commission, in close cooperation with the Trio Presidencies.
- A pre-meeting (approximately 2 hours long) with the Trio of Presidencies will be organised before the HLG meeting. The Commission prepares the draft agenda, in agreement with the Trio of Presidencies.
- The working language of the Group shall be English.
- The Commission's representative may ask experts or observers with specific competence on a subject on the agenda to participate in the Group's or sub-group's deliberations, if this is useful and/or necessary.

5.3) Good Practice exchange seminars on public policies combatting discrimination

Good practice exchange seminars will be organised every year for the Group by the Commission on topics to be agreed by the Group. These will include a number of representatives of the Group (and/or a relevant official with direct responsibility for the practice area under consideration to be appointed by the representative of the Group) to be agreed by the Group.

5.4) Annual Equality Forum

- One larger annual event/forum including the representatives of the Group, social partner organisations, civil society organisations, equality bodies and other actors will be held including, when appropriate, ministerial presence.
- This could, possibly, be organised back-to-back with a meeting of the Group or an extended/expanded meeting of the Group involving other actors. It will be up to the Trio of Presidencies in close cooperation with the Commission to decide the most convenient semester to hold this larger event, as well as its precise format.