European
Commission

Roundtable
on equality data
30 September 2021

Event report

Report

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Welcome address, Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality

Commissioner Dalli (HD) welcomed participants to the Roundtable on Equality Data and reminded participants that equality is enshrined under Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. The EU has an advanced legal frameworks for equality and all Member States transposed it into respective national laws. HD stated that, without sufficient statistical evidence, it is impossible to track discrimination and the absence of data prevents us from reaching out to the most vulnerable in our societies. The importance of equality data is highlighted in the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, the EU Roma Strategic Framework and the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025. HD acknowledged the potential sensitivities around collection of equality data but highlighted the fact that, if collected in respect of the relevant legal framework, data can serve in the design of anti-discrimination measures in Member State. She underscored the need to move towards a harmonised approach to equality data collection to advance towards a more equal society that leaves no one behind.

Introduction – Equality data: debunking the myths, *Michael O'Flaherty, Director of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)*

Michael O'Flaherty (MOF) stated that gathering of data is at the heart of the work of the Fundamental Rights Agency. He went on to expose six common myths related to equality data. The first myth is that we don't need dedicated gathering of data because of big data that we can mine. This is untrue and potentially dangerous, as using Artificial Intelligence at this stage in its development is risky and could lead to mistakes. MOF said that 'big data' is vast and does not answer the specific questions we should be asking. There are also ethical concerns when it comes to drawing content for unintended purposes, and we must consider privacy and ensure purpose-limitation.

The second myth is that evidence already exists from limited data sets, for example in incident reports on violence or discrimination. This is not the case, as reported evidence is always a tiny fraction of the actual incidents, since we know that 1 in 10 incidents of violence and discrimination are reported. Therefore, the true scale of discrimination is not accurately captured in official statistics.

The third myth is that with regards to certain marginalised groups, it is impossible to collect equality data. This is untrue, as while it is indeed challenging and sometimes costly and requires concentrated efforts, it is nevertheless possible to capture equality data through clearly established methodologies and engaging with key partners and the concerned groups themselves, e.g. with the Roma population. Methodologies must be carefully considered but it is possible.

The fourth myth is that equality data can be collected through simplistic vertical data gathering, that is in silos, group by group and in a systematic pattern. In reality, this approach ignores intersectionality and is dangerous and misleading, as it does not take into account diversity of experiences. Data must

be systematically disaggregated by all the relevant discrimination grounds, as experiences vary greatly.

The fifth myth is that GDPR precludes equality data. This is a dangerous myth, which is sometimes instrumentalised and used as an excuse. GDPR is actually a more sophisticated instrument than assumed and it is critical to consult with data protection authorities in crafting policies around data collection.

The sixth myth is that data gathering must be done for people not in partnership with people. The quality of data gathered will be poor if affected groups are not involved in the development of methodology.

MOF concluded by stating that FRA will continue to support the Commission and stakeholders in collecting data and in the important work in assuring equality for all marginalised groups.

Looking back: How data help building successful gender policies, *Carlien Scheele, Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)*

Carlien Scheele (CS) stated that well informed gender sensitive policy making is impossible without data. She said that sex disaggregated data is needed in all areas of life across Europe, since it helps to measure success against the benchmarks of other countries as well as progress from the past. CS spoke about intersecting identities, as an aspect of social organisation that shapes the lives of women. She gave the example of women with disabilities being more at risk than able bodied women or disabled men. If you add to this limited language skills, the barriers are even higher.

CS said that EIGE is supporting further monitoring of progress on the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. But faced with limited disaggregated data, it slows down the process. A lack of data prevents us from seeing the different experiences of people trying to access services. For example, there is a gap in data on violence against homeless women, migrant women, women with disability. There is also a lack of data on the urban-rural divide, which is an important fault line. Equality data is needed to implement gender mainstreaming in practice.

EIGE conducts its own surveys and is working with data providers to advise on disaggregation of data. She highlighted the importance of asking certain questions at the beginning of data collection, not just disaggregating data at the end. She stressed the need to systematically disaggregate data by gender as standard.

Reality bite: No data, no policies, *Dan Christian Ghattas, Executive Director of Organisation Intersex International Europe (OII Europe)*

Christian Ghattas (CG) highlighted the experience of intersex people, who remain invisible from society and face discrimination and violence. According to the Eurobarometer on the social acceptance of LGBTIQ people in Europe, intersex people are among the most vulnerable groups in society. CG spoke about the lack of data on harmful medical practices, such as intersex genital mutilation in infants who are of so-called 'indetermined sex'. The lack of data has proven extremely detrimental as it has led to the notion that these practices are no longer being carried out. The claims that there has been a decrease in interventions needs to be proved and data on the subject is important to monitor positive developments. CG underscored the point that if you cannot prove

something then changes to policy and legislation are impossible. He also said that increasing data also increases awareness of an issue and, by extension, acceptance in society.

High-Level Discussion: WE NEED EQUALITY DATA

Anna-Maja Henriksson, Minister of Justice, Finland

Anna-Maja Henriksson (AMH) stated that Finland is committed to strengthening systematic collection of equality data on hate crimes. Finland has a long history of developing its anti-discrimination system, which was set up in 2008 to advance data collection on discrimination experiences. AMH said that there is increasing awareness of the need for data when planning and developing policy, as well as the obligations under Finland's international human rights commitment. AMH said that equality data is needed to prove the efficiency of policies, to policy makers themselves and against international commitments, but also to the vulnerable groups the policies are in place to protect. She said the Ministry of Justice is committed to raising awareness of data collection in the mainstream. There have been challenges, for example due to privacy restrictions, but also improvements. The MOJ is participating in the EU Subgroup on equality data and is committed to the common work on this issue. Finland is also coordinating an EU project, called the No Equality project, to strengthen the systematic collection of equality data.

Roderic O'Gorman, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Ireland

Roderic O'Gorman (ROG) spoke about the state of play in Ireland, saying there is still a lot to do, and systemic collection of equality data is needed to drive policy. There is a push for ethnic equality monitoring across public services and, as of this year, twelve government departments are reporting on equality metrics. The government adopted a pilot approach to equality budgeting and there is information available on how budgetary decisions impact specific groups in six policy areas. This has been coupled with a newly established interdepartmental equality budgeting network. The Central Statistics Office has carried out an audit on collection of equality data and there are 107 data sets available relevant to equality. ROG reiterated the need for new strategies to have a firm evidence base for policy making and for a systematic approach to equality data collection to be applied. Ireland is still in learning mode and early on in the process but making progress on building awareness and building skills across its public sector to develop and use equality data to inform policy.

On challenges encountered, ROG spoke about the early stages of the process and technical challenges encountered and the need for harmonisation. He stressed the need for standardization of classification of metrics to be able to compare across different bodies. Skills gaps were also a challenge, particularly regarding gender analysis, and getting state bodies and agencies on board. ROG said that GDPR has also posed a problem, as the uncertain consequences and risk of legal action have had a chilling effect on data collection and sharing by agencies. He mentioned that Ireland's equality body, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, is monitoring action on commitments. The National Anti-Racism Committee is working on an action plan and has highlighted a lack of ethnic identifiers in data sets.

Pierrette Herzberger Fofana, MEP, European Parliament

Pierrette Herzberger Fofana (PHF) stated that equality data reflects commitment on equality efforts and endeavours. She said that with the publication of the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan, the EU has finally decided to step up its fight against racism. However, without good data, we cannot measure

any potential success and there can be no good law making and policy measures without extensive evidence. PHF cautioned that collecting data in the current climate of racism and xenophobia is a challenge and there is the potential for policy misconduct and ethnic profiling. She said however that lack of data should not be used as an excuse to avoid action and that disaggregated data is key. The EU is pro data, but data on its own is not enough. What is needed is better data and more efficient action, coupled with outspoken condemnation of racism and discrimination by EU leaders. PHF called for the scope of the Racial Equality Directive to be extended. She said that implementation of policy on equality data is difficult, and efforts need to be focused at national and EU level. More and better data is needed in support of effective action and evidence-based policy making.

PHF said that there are 15 million people of African descent living in Europe, but that this figure does not include children of migrants who self-identify as being of African descent. She spoke of the importance of collecting data disaggregated by racial origin, as there are large groups of people who remain invisible and are not properly considered in policy making. She said that the conclusion of the anti-racism hearing proposed by the LIBE Committee will feed into a new resolution on equality budgeting.

Tena Šimonović Einwalter, Chair of EQUINET

Tena Šimonović Einwalter (TSE) said that the question of "how much discrimination is there?" is asked in all MS and is asked *to* and *by* equality bodies, governments, agencies, public sector. The question also comes up of how much discrimination there is in employment, in education, access to goods and services. She spoke of the variation of equality data across the EU and different protection measures.

TSE said that national equality bodies are key to making equality a reality in Europe. These bodies also collect their own data, through surveys and opinion polls. They also collect valuable data on discrimination complaints and produce data files to monitor the situation on specific groups. This data is used to advocate for change at the national level and affect policy and legislative changes.

She said that while EU level data is important, it is crucial to have equality data at national level in parallel. Equality data should be disaggregation by the full range of discrimination grounds, going beyond the six EU grounds of discrimination to allow for the intersectionality of experience.

In terms of challenges, TSE spoke about the lack of effective resources to carry out surveys and polls and reliance on EU funding rather than national funding. She called on the European Commission to send clear messages to MS on the importance of collecting equality data. She also said that underreporting by disadvantaged and vulnerable groups is rife because of social exclusion and lack of trust in institutions. So, independence of equality bodies plays an important role here and therefore needs to be properly resourced and have adequate powers. Equality bodies across the EU are very diverse, with differing mandates, functions, grounds of discrimination, some well-resourced and some not. Equality bodies need to do better to build trust.

TSE called for ambitious and legally binding standards at EU level, adequate resourcing, and a regulatory framework to drive equality collection, ideally on a mandatory basis. She underlined that GDPR should not preclude collection of equality data.

Reality bite, *Els Keytsman, Director of Unia*

Els Keytsman (EK) presented Belgium's one year programme on improving quality data, carried out by UNIA, Belgium's equality body. The project is based on the Guidelines on improving the collection and

use of equality data by the EU Subgroup on equality data. She explained that Belgium has a fragmented landscape when it comes to data, with data available in some domains but dispersed across different bodies, making it difficult to compare. There is little to no data on some specific groups. The project included a mapping of data equality sources, based on the FRA mapping tool, from which gaps were identified and recommendations published in a Gap Analysis. Another objective of the project was to make equality data more accessible to the public and civil society. To that end, the mapped data sources were consolidated on an online hub, searchable by different metrics. The project used a participatory and human rights-based approach and an Advisory Committee made up of experts, civil society and academia guided the process.

EK said that there were significant challenges, including a lack of knowledge on the legal frameworks on personal data and of GDPR. She said there is more work to do to increase participation. The creation of the Data Hub was a huge piece of work but essential and now that data sources are centralised, they must be used correctly. The Data Hub needs to be kept up to date and discrimination grounds need to be expanded, to include for example disability. EK recommend the establishment of a consultative body on equality. Overall, the project was an ambitious one, which brought many insights into the state of play of equality data in Belgium and created a positive dynamic. The project is now looking for political support to continue driving the collection and use of equality data.

Panel Discussion: WE (CAN) COLLECT EQUALITY DATA

Emanuele Baldacci, Director of Resources Eurostat

Emanuele Baldacci (EB) said that equality data can be used to counter the misinformation that is rife these days. He said that availability of data per se is not the answer, but that the quality of the data is just as important, otherwise it can lead to poor design of policy. EB spoke of the importance of comparability and proper definitions so that results can be trusted, and of harmonised information across EU. He said that collection of equality data should be based on a strong legal framework, and EU security and privacy. There is a need for more granular data to understand different phenomenon like discrimination and equality.

EB spoke of a need to invest in solid public sector data infrastructure. He highlighted the launch of the European Commission public consultation on the revision of legal frameworks for the collection of statistics on population. He encouraged participants of the roundtable to take part in the public consultation by the Commission. EB mentioned the 2021 Census which is collecting individual information about the totality of the population, which is of vital importance as it provides a starting point for successive surveys. He said that we must go beyond the six EU grounds of discrimination and collect data that could feed into other dimensions of equality and look at the cross-cutting and intersectional elements.

EB talked about the use of proxies in surveys, i.e., entities used to model a variable where we are asking the next closest thing to the question we can't ask, e.g. foreign background, rather than actual racial background. He said that proxies are a good approximation of a phenomenon that may not be well known or measured. But to use proxies correctly, there must be solid research to demonstrate that the proxy is indeed related to the phenom you are trying to capture or measure. Having more than one proxy to measure the phenomenon, is a way to maximise the correlation pointing to the phenomenon you want to measure.

On the issue of safeguards, EB emphasised the need for consultation with experts outside of statistics, such as psychologists, civil society actors, etc. to ensure that the way we frame survey questions are non-discriminatory themselves and to avoid revictimization of people.

Michal Czerniawski, Police officer, EDPB

Michal Czerniawski (MC) echoed comments made by Els Keytsman about a tendency to misunderstand GDPR. He said that EU data protection rules do not stand in the way of statistical research and the collection of equality data. On the contrary, the rules allow for the correct processing of data while ensuring the respect of fundamental rights. Data on race, origin, and sexual orientation, are considered sensitive data and therefore protections need to be granted to individuals under GDPR. However, there are many ways to process data while staying within the parameters of GDPR.

MC explained that under GDPR, there are so-called 'sensitive categories' of data, rather than equality data. On this basis sensitive data can be processed if it is in line with national law. Exceptions, such as statistical research, limit the most burdensome obligations of GDPR. Moreover, for equality research, bodies don't need personal data but can process data in its aggregated form or anonymised form without knowing whose data they are processing. In this case, GDPR does not apply as the data being processes is not personal data. MC highlighted the need for data minimisation, i.e., not collecting more data than is needed and rather limiting collection to specific parameters related to the research topic.

On whether a guidance tool on GDPR is being developed, MC said the European Data Protection Board, which ensures consistent interpretation and application of GDPR across the EU, is working on guidelines on research. These guidelines, to be published next year, are not specifically about equality data, but about the processing of different types of data related to research.

On proxies, MC said that the least intrusive measures are important and that collection of proxy data has its place. There are ways for a body to collect data and then create nicknames with an encryption key stored elsewhere to anonymise the data. But the safest way is to process data anonymously, in which case GDPR does not apply at all.

Sylvie Le Minez, Head of the demographic and social studies Unit, INSEE

Sylvie Le Minez (SLM) explained that in France equality data is controversial, and could potentially be misused and reinforce 'communitarianism', while others acknowledge its usefulness to uncover discrimination. France has included a question on country of birth in all major surveys in France for the past several years, to collect data on immigrants, and first and second generation. There were 26,000 respondents to the Trajectories and Origins Survey, which contains a wide range of questions on different dimensions of origin and belonging. It also includes subjective questions on discrimination in various areas of social life, such as access to housing, education, goods and services, etc. The survey was authorised by the Constitutional Council and National Data Protection Commission, who recognised the public interest angle.

SLM said that when official surveys are carried out, the national council for statistical information organises consultations with the users of statistics. She highlighted the challenges faced by statisticians in creating categories, which unfortunately don't always capture all the information. She stressed the importance of consulting with affected groups and stakeholders when agreeing on definitions and terminology. She agreed that data is vital to feed into the development of policy.

Reality bite: Making anti-Muslim hatred visible through data, *Dunia Khalil, Legal Consultant in field of anti-racism and online hate speech, Documentation and Counselling Centre for Islamophobia and anti-Muslim Racism, Austria*

Dunia Khalil (DK) presented her organisation, which offers legal and psychological counselling to victims of anti-Muslim racism. It is the only such organisation working in collecting data on anti-Muslim racism in Austria. DK highlighted the issue of underreporting of cases of discrimination and the fact that it is mostly witnesses who report cases. She said the number of unreported cases is very high, and it is important to document cases for reference. This data feeds into the organisation's campaign work, and every year a Racism Report is published which highlights trends, to raise awareness. She said the work of the organisation has started a conversation about the subject of anti-Muslim racism in Austria, where historically there has been a lack of recognition of this form of racism. DK said that it was vital to combat the root causes of hate speech and acknowledge that Islamophobia is not just limited to the far right, but deeply engrained in Austrian society, which in turn shapes the development of policy. She flagged a project called I Report, which has created a common database between Austria and Germany on data on anti-Muslim racism and has built a network of organisations working on the issue.

Working together to advance equality, *Irena Moozova, Director for Equality, DG Justice and Consumers, European Commission*

Irena Moozova (IM) reiterated the Commission's commitment to stepping up equality data. She said the need for reliable and comparable data has been stressed in all EU initiatives relating to equality, such as the Gender Equality Strategy, the LGBTIQ Equality strategy, the EU Roma Strategic Framework, the Disability Strategy and the recent Anti-racism Action Plan. The Anti-racism Action Plan sets out several concrete measures to encourage the collection of data for informed policy development. She outlined how, in February 2018, the EU High Level Group on Non-Discrimination and Equality and Diversity had set up the Subgroup on equality data to help Member States to improve the collection and use of equality Data. The Subgroup is composed of experts from all over Europe dealing with equality, national statistical institutes, equality bodies, as well as EIGE, Eurofound, and FRA. The Subgroup is an important forum for MS but also EU Institutions and other stakeholders, to discuss the challenges and opportunities to improve the collection and use of data. There is now a cohesive group of 23 MS in the Subgroup who take part in the varied activities, which include periodic meetings, country visits, and written consultations. Building on the FRA's expertise, the Subgroup has produced several key policy documents to step up the collection of equality data. It has also developed a set of non-binding guidelines, compiling practices implemented at national level, and a 'diagnostic mapping tool' with which to assess the quality of data collection tools.

IM said that based on the successes of the initiative, the mandate has been extended to 2025 to support the European Commission's efforts on a consistent approach to equality data collection. To achieve this goal, the Subgroup has committed to producing practical guidelines on improving the collection of data disaggregated by racial and ethnic origin.

Presentation of the Guidelines on improving the collection and use of equality data, *Iris Elliott, Head of Policy and Research at the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and member of the European subgroup on Equality data*

Iris Elliott (IE) spoke about the European Subgroup on equality data, saying that it has been an important forum to create a rich and diverse peer network. She said that relationship building is hugely important, as well as developing a long-sighted view of what can be achieved together. Within the group there are significant variations of experience, expertise, progress, and focus. The Subgroup has delivered an impressive body of work, including the essential Guidelines on improving the collection and use of equality data. The Guidelines are informed by the sharing of experience on what has gone well, what has proved difficult, and what has been successful. IE underlined that the Guidelines are intended to be a 'real word', applied resource, and provide different entry points depending on the historical context of the country, and the political and policy context.

The Subgroup has two main strands of work: institutional and operational. The institutional strand has focused on the themes of mapping audits, interinstitutional cooperation, data hubs, capacity building, and the effective use of available data. While the operational strand has focused on comprehensiveness, mainstreaming of surveys, data collection, validity and reliability, representativeness, and comparability. IE gave a brief snapshot of developments, which include mapping activities such as audits in Ireland and Croatia, developments of indicators in Croatia, cooperation on gender in the Baltic states, development of a gender database in Portugal, capacity building with the involvement of civil society in Malta. Discrimination surveys were carried out in Croatia, Germany, Italy, Slovenian and Spain, as well as initiatives to address data gaps Italy.

In Ireland, some of the challenges are related to legislation (e.g., interpretations of GDPR), infrastructure (overwhelm of building an infrastructure), resources (costs involved in creating equality data system), and relationships (prioritising data subjects rather than the State).

Panel discussion: HOW TO COLLECT EQUALITY DATA

Thomas Liebig, Senior Migration Specialist, OECD

Thomas Liebig (TL) stated that there is a clear need for disaggregated data by category of migration. He said that we need to disentangle immigrants and their native-born descendants in data analysis. Migrants and their native-born descendants are often 'lumped together' in the same category as 'migrant background' or 'first and second generation', but the native-born descendants often reject this identification. He underlined the importance of differentiation of these categories of people, as their experiences and the issues they face are very different. Younger generations have been brought up in very different contexts and there are differences in, for example, the transferability of their qualifications, language skills, education, etc.

TL spoke about the importance of surveys on subjective, perceived discriminations, while not objective can reveal other important elements. He explained that native-born descendants of migrants may have a stronger feeling of being discriminated against as they have grown up with different expectations and are less likely to accept this type of treatment. TL raised the point about self-reported data on perceptions of discrimination and the need to examine the mechanisms behind structural discrimination.

Erle Inderhaug, Senior Advisor at the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs

Erle Inderhaug (EI) presented the Norwegian experience, where collection and dissemination of equality data is being done through a Data Hub. The project included the publication of short articles on different topics related to the Data Hub to publicise it and make the data accessible to a wide audience. She said that the creation of the Data Hub was in response to a need identified by stakeholders for a centralised data source, to provide a solid knowledge base to national and local policy makers. Previously data sources had been fragmentary.

EI said that there is currently no official registered data on sexual orientation and ethnic origin, so researchers and policy makers must rely on different parameters, using proxy variables, such as statistics on living conditions or immigrants and LGBTIQ people. She clarified that categorisation of LGBTIQ people is based on self-identification.

Dovilė Galdauskaite, Senior specialist at Statistics Lithuania

Dovilė Galdauskaite (DG) spoke about Lithuania's Interactive Map on Gender Equality in Municipalities. She said that there are many varied sources of equality data in Lithuania and that equality data is a powerful tool to fight discrimination. Speaking about the development of the Interactive Map, DG said that it was done in partnership with the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman as an entry point and a way to formulate a broader objective, rather than just collecting data for the sake of it. Therefore, the Map was done to examine whether there are equal opportunities for women and men in Lithuania. The Map identified forty relevant indicators, such as democratic participation, access to services, health, domestic violence, access to labour market, etc. DG said that common categories and definitions are now being used across municipalities and the Map has been disseminated across stakeholders as an easy an accessible tool. She said the model for the Map could be transposed to other organisations.

Marcel Coenders, Researcher at the Netherlands Institute for Social Research

Marcel Coenders (MC) spoke about the example in the Netherlands of discrimination testing. Discrimination testing can be used to test for actual discrimination in the labour market. He gave the example of a situation of a job opening where two candidates apply with the same skills, but one has a foreign name. He said that these types of studies have been conducted since the 70s but there are now more advanced designs, which pinpoint the reasons behind discrimination. For example, if an employer has more information about candidates, through reference letters. MC said the Dutch Government has been commissioning this kind of research for the last decade. Data gathered from this research serves to monitor the amount/level of discrimination; it helps to open up a dialogue with employers by having evidence to back up the fact that discrimination is taking place; and finally, it serves to develop tools to counteract prejudice that leads to discrimination.

Reality bite: Afro Census' in Germany: Black lives count, *Daniel Gyamerah, Chairman at Each One Teach One (EOTO) and Division Lead Citizens For Europe (CFE)*

Daniel Gyamerah (DG) talked about the Afro Zensus in Germany, the largest survey conducted among people of African descent in Germany. There are approximately one million People of African Descent (PAD) living in Germany and communities face anti-black racism daily. Yet, there is still a lack of policies and programmes that take the specific situation and experience of PAD into account. He stressed that there is not a single Chair at any university on Black Studies in Germany.

The Afro Zensus survey was conducted in German, English and French and composed of quantitative and qualitative research, which included an online questionnaire, focus groups and expert interviews. The topics of the online survey included social engagement at home and abroad, experiences of discrimination, legal awareness, trust in institutions, need for action, demography, health, and education. DG said that approximately 6000 people participated in the survey, which allowed for intersectional analysis. He said that community-based research is needed, and a deeper engagement of institutions on anti-black racism.

Presentation of the new the guidance note on the collection of equality data based on ethnic and racial origin and case-study on Roma data

Rossalina Latcheva, Programme manager Fair & Equal Societies at FRA, member of the subgroup on equality data

Rossalina Latcheva (RL) presented the Guidance note on the collection of equality data based on ethnic and racial origin. RL said that equality data varies broadly across MS and only a few collect this type of data, while others deliberately refrain from collecting it or use proxies. She explained that the Subgroup had agreed to develop this note to identify challenges, and to highlight good practice and provide practical guidance on how to collect data. The Guidance note builds on earlier work of the Subgroup and the expertise and experience of FRA. Its target audience is public or private bodies involved in collecting or using data racial or ethnic origin.

RL presented the eight guiding principles of the Guidance note. First, map existing data sources that provide information on racial and ethnic discrimination, setting up a baseline for a more systematic approach and identify gaps. Second, carry out a needs assessment of potential users of equality data disaggregated on racial and ethnic origin. The needs assessment should be carried out every few years. Third, alignment of definitions and mainstreaming of data into national surveys to ensure a uniformed approach. Fourth, collect and use equality data in accordance with GDPR and national data protection rules. Fifth, provide detailed information on how to collect data on self-identification. Sixth, if this is not possible, clarify the use of proxies. Seventh, collect data on different experience, using a variety of different perceived experience. Eighth, provide sufficient resources and budget at national and regional level to carry out surveys by a competent body.

Ursula Till-Tentschert, Deputy Head of Unit Technical Assistance & Capacity Building at FRA, member of the Roma Working Party

Ursula Till-Tentschert (UTT) described how the Roma Working Party was set up to develop comprehensive indicators and exchange best practice. This set of core EU indicators are valid for all MS, and they are comparable, have standardised definitions, and are compatible with the Eurostat surveys. She stated that the indicators have been developed in consultation with civil society.

UTT highlighted the plight of the Roma, who are the largest minority in the EU but face discrimination and remain invisible because of lack of data. She said that FRA collects data in fourteen MS and that increasingly some MS are carrying out their own data collection. The approaches taken by MS are very diverse, with some MS collecting data on ethnic origin, while for others it is a very sensitive issue. She gave the example of France, which has good data sources, such as municipal listings of Traveller/Roma sites. Other MS are developing innovative methodologies to reach out to these groups. However, trust in the authorities is very low among Roma communities, so it is crucial to build trust and develop methodologies in consultation with the affected communities.

Panel discussion: Zoom-in on equality data based on ethnic and racial origin

Lilla Farkas, European Equality Law Network

Lilla Farkas (LF) congratulated FRA on the 2021 Guidance note on the collection of equality data based on ethnic and racial origin. She said that the European Parliament is well placed to step up efforts in equality data, since it is mandated to approve Eurostat's work plan and can effectively ask Eurostat to directly intervene in this area. Eurostat is dependent on national statistical offices but does have some regulatory powers, which could be extended. LF said that it is important to realise that data is not only important for research, but that we need specific guidelines for complaints data. She stated that the European Commission should issue recommendations on equality data collection, including mechanisms for complaints data.

Joana Malta, Statistics Portugal

Joana Malta (JM) presented a pilot questionnaire, which is being launched in Portugal on ethnic origin and experience of discrimination related to county of origin. There is no experience in Portugal on this kind of surveys related specifically to ethnic and racial origin, and the survey will be carried out on a small scale. The survey will test a question, the formulation of which was developed using focus groups. The question includes elements of general classification, such as phenotype, region, country of birth of parents and grandparents, and ethnic self-identification. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, the survey is not mandatory. The survey will also include intersectional aspects of experience of discrimination, such as sexual orientation. The questionnaire has been translated into English, as well as all the classifications. The methodological document is only available in Portuguese, but JM can provide additional information to those interested.

Vanessa Ioannoni, Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT)

Vanessa Ioannoni (VI) stated that building trust in equality data collection takes time and involves multiple steps. She said that in Italy, official statistics are not disaggregated by racial and ethnic origin, so there is no clear picture of the number of Roma people living in Italy, nor the experience of Roma, or their housing conditions. She explained that ISTAT was asked to contribute to the design of a survey as part of the implementation of the National Plan for the Inclusion of Roma. The Strategy is divided into sectors, such as access to employment, education, housing and healthcare. A Statistical and Information Working Group on Roma Population was set up to foster inter-institutional cooperation in the collection and use of Roma equality data, and to be the reference point for all parties involved in the implementation of the Roma National Strategy. A first-step survey was carried out, outlining the housing transition projects for the Roma. This will be followed by interviews with Roma families on their experiences.

Wrap up and close, *Věra Jourová, European Commission Vice-President for values and transparency*

Věra Jourová (VJ) thanked participants for the fruitful discussion throughout the course of the day. She said the discussion had highlighted the need to adopt evidence-based policy making. For policies to be inclusive, we need accurate and comparable equality data. Without it, she said, we cannot assess the situation and define clear policy objective, or measure whether we are doing well. We risk dealing in assumptions, bias, myths, or estimates, which sometimes disguise the depth of an issue. Comprehensive, reliable, and regular data are needed to assess the needs of the affected groups. Data should be systematically disaggregated on the basis of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation. VJ acknowledged that achieving this goal is not straight forward, and that there is a lack of standardised methodology and divergence between MS, making it difficult to compare over time or across countries. She spoke of the myths and fears around equality data and the fear of violating GDPR. She stressed that it is possible to collect equality data and be in full compliance with GDPR. Indeed, the aim of GDPR is to protect, not to work against peoples' interests.

VJ highlighted the need for a harmonised approach to equality data collection, analysis and use. She said it must be grounded in the humanitarian principle of 'do no harm' and should not result in or reinforce discrimination. Stakeholders must work together and involve the affected groups. She said this Round Table marks a clear commitment to equality data at the highest level. VJ spoke of Eurostat's plans to step up collection of equality. She said the initiatives derived from the Subgroup on equality data show that a standardised approach to data collection is possible. VJ drew attention to the European Commission's own first survey on Diversity and Inclusion, in which staff took part during March this year, as a first step to assess the state of play of diversity of staff within the Commission. She said she hoped initiative would set an example for others to follow and that the Commission is committed to building better policies that leave no one behind.