

# EQUINET RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE “EU 2020” STRATEGY

## INTRODUCTION

Equinet welcomes this opportunity to provide a response to the European Commission on the proposed “EU 2020” strategy. Equinet is the European network of specialized equality bodies. This opinion draws from the work of the specialized equality bodies in implementing equal treatment legislation at Member State level. In particular, it draws from the experience of the equality bodies in promoting equality and combating discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of gender, age, disability, religious belief, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

## MAKING THE CASE

Equinet presents this opinion in light of the economic, business, and societal case that has been established for equality over recent years.

Research commissioned by the Swedish Presidency of the European Union into the contribution of gender equality to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was presented at a European Union conference in October 2009. This research found that a gender equal labour market would contribute an average 27% to the GDP of the Member States across the European Union.

The business case for investment in workplace equality and diversity systems covering a range of different grounds has been well established. A range of research reports attest to this case including research work commissioned by the equality bodies themselves. Investment in such equality and diversity systems has been shown to increase labour productivity, workplace innovation and employee retention. This enhancement in organizational performance should be a particular priority in a time of economic and financial downturn.

Research published in the United Kingdom under the title ‘*The Spirit Level*’ establishes the societal case for equality. The authors, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, compare income equality data in twenty three of the richest countries of the world and in fifty different USA states. Levels of trust between people, life expectancy, educational attainment and social mobility are all found to be lower in the more unequal states and counties. Mental illness rates, use of illegal drugs, obesity levels, teenage pregnancy, levels of violence and rates of imprisonment are all found to be higher in the more unequal countries and states.

## CONCERNS

Equinet is concerned that the consultation document of the European Commission does not identify equality as a driver for competitiveness, innovation and prosperity. The objective of a creating a smarter, greener, more competitive economy should be developed to an objective of creating a smarter, greener, equal, inclusive and more competitive economy. This would better reflect the societal, business and economic cases that has been made for greater equality.

The consultation document contains little reference to discrimination as a barrier to labour market participation and to business performance. This barrier of discrimination, covering the six grounds in Article 19 of the new Treaty, is readily evident from the work of the equality bodies in all Member States. There is only limited and inadequate reference to the role of equality in enhancing economic growth, business performance, and individual progression in the labour market.

The consultation document demonstrates no evidence of the implementation of equality and non-discrimination mainstreaming on the Article 19 grounds. This diminishes the quality of the document and fails to address requirements established in Article 10 of the new Treaty.

## PROPOSALS

### Recommendation One

Equinet recommends a new and specific focus on equality and non-discrimination in the labour market under the Theme on 'Empowering People in Inclusive Societies. Labour market equality should be identified as one of the 2020 aims under this theme. This specific focus on equality and non-discrimination could involve:

- Programmes of positive action at Member State level to create more equal labour markets. These programmes should target women, people with disabilities, Black and minority ethnic people, gay and lesbian people, people from religious minorities, older people and young people where there is evidence of under-representation in access to education and training credentials, in access to labour market services and in workplace presence and participation.
- Investment programmes to support businesses, in particular small and medium sized companies, to put in place effective and robust workplace equality and diversity systems.
- Programmes to support the elimination of discrimination experienced on all six Article 19 grounds.

Equinet welcomes the focus under this theme on the need to factor the potential of migration more fully into policy making at EU and national level. This could usefully be further developed in the final strategy to encompass both the potential and the challenges of migration including so as to encompass both access systems for migrant workers and integration policies for the development of integrated societies and integrated workplaces.

### Recommendation Two

The focus in the consultation document on ‘Establishing clear governance to make the new strategy effective’ could play an important role in underpinning this focus on equality and non-discrimination in the strategy.

Equinet recommends that the practice of equality and non-discrimination mainstreaming at EU and Member State level should be identified as a key part of this governance. This mainstreaming should be implemented at all key points in the strategy – in the preparation of, reporting on and evaluation of the strategy, as well as in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of Member State programmes in response to the strategy.

Equinet welcomes the focus on stakeholder support in this area of governance. This could usefully be further developed to identify the equality bodies as one such stakeholder. The equality bodies could provide valuable support to the focus on equality and non-discrimination in the implementation of the strategy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Equinet looks forward to a positive reaction from the European Commission to this response. Equinet hopes that it can continue to contribute to the development of the new “EU 2020” strategy through deepening the analysis and detail of the recommendations made in this response where this is found to be useful and through engaging in ongoing dialogue with the European Commission on the implementation of the new strategy.

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