

MEETING REPORT

FRA - EQUINET- ENNHRI COMMUNICATION MEETING

14 MAY 2014

FRA, Vienna



The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) and the European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet) invited communications officers from the respective institutions and their member organisations to explore ways of cooperating in their communications work. The meeting aimed to enhance existing communication channels and to find new ways of cooperating and mutually supporting each other when communicating fundamental rights at the national and European levels. The meeting was also an opportunity for peer learning and the exchange of good practices.

Welcome and tour de table

Friso Roscam Abbing, Head of the FRA Communication and Outreach Department welcomed participants. Everyone was invited to answer two opening questions which had been given to the participants in advance: Why have you come to the meeting and what are your needs regarding more effective communication? What do you see as the main challenges, and what works well already?

This first session focused on: What type of European-level information is needed nationally? What do European-level institutions and networks need from the national level? How do we ensure more strategic coordination between partners?



“How to prioritise issues from a vast amount of information?”

“To hear about experiences and examples of how to communicate at national, regional and European level.”

“There is a need for strategic communication at the international level. How can we make it work?”

Expectations from the meeting and the needs regarding more effective communication

- To know about good practices and to get inspiration.
- To share experiences, e.g. on how to best help survivors of hate crime.
- How to use social media?
- To get to know all of you, to listen and learn.
- To share ideas, to know how others are managing their communications activities.
- How to “sell” an annual report?
- How to maximise our work at the national level? How to communicate fundamental rights in an environment of economic crisis? How to deal with a hostile media?
- How to encourage potential victims to lodge a complaint?

- How to address the issue of publishing complaints, e.g. reporting on violations when there could be concerns of confidentiality?
- How to use media for awareness-raising?
- How to enhance the exchange of information between the national and the European levels?
- How to make the best use of limited resources?
- How to balance human rights issues and the Ombudsman's other responsibilities?
- How to put good news in the media?
- Could we create groups on Twitter for joint communication activities?
- To discuss the establishment of a joint Linked-In group.
- To get to know FRA, Equinet and ENNHRI better.

What is needed nationally from the European level? What can the European level offer?

- It would be good to have regional events where, for example, FRA findings would be presented and discussed.
- Press releases in all EU languages.
- Advance embargoed information from FRA concerning new publications is useful.
- To receive assistance for communications work nationally.
- How to communicate better with partners and members of the networks?
- Regular physical meetings are important. Email exchanges are not sufficient.
- European-level organisations should have a joint strategic approach towards the national level, e.g. by coordinating the publication of different products.
- It would be good to organise regional cooperation activities with contributions from the European level in order to help implementation nationally. Training and capacity-building activities could be included.
- To share FRA's communication plan with the national institutions.
- Thematic alerts/news would be useful, since not all national institutions are working on all thematic issues.
- In order to communicate a European/international issue effectively nationally, domestic issues need to be linked to it.

What is needed at the European level from the national level? What can the national level offer?

- European-level networks can facilitate capacity-building, sharing of knowledge, but they need to know their members' needs.
- How to cooperate in relation to country monitoring?
- Joint planning of national follow-up actions of the products/publications of European-level organisations.
- A mapping of mandates and activities of Equality Bodies', NHRIs' and Ombudsmen's mandates: FRA and ENNHRI have each done such a mapping that can be shared with participants, but not for publication. Equinet is currently preparing an online directory of Equality Bodies.

Peer exchange: How can we enhance positive messaging for human rights and equality? How do we make it newsworthy in a constructive way? How do we deal with a challenging media and political landscape?



How to make human rights newsworthy?

News content

- 'Work for the journalists', as content producers, preparing news in a media style.
- Use research-based statistics to make stories clear, more politically neutral, and easier for media to pick up.
- Concentrate on an event, not an issue.
- Turn the 'abstract' (violence against women) into the 'concrete' (a survivor of gender violence tells her story), but with due consideration of individual choices and avoiding re-traumatisation.
- Use celebrities, including from minority groups, to give popularity and visibility.
- Use empowering terminology, such as 'survivors' instead of 'victims'.
- Don't always present minorities as 'vulnerable'
- Educate journalists on language usage, such as FRA's Diversity Toolkit for Media.
- Turn a negative into a positive; for example give a state body the opportunity to address negative research through committing to positive action before going to press.
- Use breadth of mandate to find different stories to appeal to different groups.

Timing

- Choose the right time of the year (summer is often quiet).
- Use 'the international day of ...' as a focus, although beware of some fatigue.
- Choose the right time of the day for the type of media targeted.

Personal media relations

- Good personal contacts are essential.
- Organise events for journalists, such as breakfast or lunch seminars.
- Launch journalism competitions, training or workshops on human rights.
- Embargo material, where appropriate, for exclusive coverage and time for deeper background research.
- Use spokespeople effectively.

News delivery

- Permanent blog, for example in a newspaper.
- TV programme to present weekly cases.
- With due sensitivity, publish a case or 'success story of the month' online.
- Ensure reach to specific demographic groups, such as:
 - younger urban readers through social media;
 - older rural readers through local papers.
- Avoid long periods with no press releases or direct media communication.

How to deal with a hostile environment?

- In some jurisdictions, the media environment is not hostile to human right stories.
- In other jurisdictions, media is sceptical of or even hostile to human rights narratives, including negative or inaccurate commentary.
- Try to control the message:
 - Ensure the substance of the message is effectively communicated to media.
 - An emphasis on the human interest can help communicate the underlying meaning of human rights.
- Correct any errors in reporting:
 - Any factual errors must be corrected as quickly and consistently as possible.
 - Take any opportunity to provide further information or quotes.
 - Use the 'right to reply' to correct any misleading reporting on human rights stories.
- Ultimately, the media cannot be controlled, and so don't use too much time on journalists that are unlikely to provide a positive message on human rights.

Next steps

- Use exchange of information, to apply techniques at home.
- Always be considered in the context of improving the human rights situation on the ground.
- Use social media and information from NGOs more effectively.
- Exchange good practice EU wide (e.g. through EU-wide reports including national and regional statistics).
- Exchange human rights-based educational materials that could be used for training, seminars or workshops for journalists.

Peer exchange: How can we use social media efficiently to share and promote our work?

Which channels do you use?

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Blog
- YouTube
- Website
- Google +
- RSS feed

Why and for what purposes do you use social media?

- Publish new projects, activities, opinions, meetings and conferences / to spread information and press releases.
- In general social media is not used to solve people's complaints but to direct people towards the website where there is a complaints procedure.
- To inform citizens on their rights and on where to turn for help.
- Inform stakeholders and experts about projects and research.
- Post information or articles on discrimination and equality.
- Engage discussion on a specific topic.

What are the main challenges?

- The lack of resources to hire additional staff to take care of social media.
- Absence of access to the internet in some countries.
- Convince management to use social media.
- Lack of resources to respond to Facebook comments which can have a negative impact on the general public and can create frustration.
- Finding content which interests the general public, how to find resources to regularly update the website.
- To inform vulnerable groups about their rights when they don't have access or don't use social media.
- How to convey messages on how equality bodies work.
- Learning how Facebook and other social media tools work.
- Use of a more informal tone to target young people.
- Keeping up with changes in Facebook.
- Problem of translation of information in different languages → lack of resources.
- Videos are produced but there are difficulties with the dissemination.
- Work on cooperation nationally → put the organisation's priorities first.

What are the main fears in the use of social media?

- Fear about the amount of complaints they would have to respond to.
- Fear of hostile comments on Facebook / Fear that Facebook could become a hate crime forum.

What are your objectives?

- To use social media to promote the mandate of the institutions and to inform the public on their rights.
- To use social media to attract the public to our website.
- To use social media to promote our institution.
- To communicate and cooperate with other organisations through social media.



What are the best practices?

- Invite famous people to talk about a specific project in order to produce a video.
- Invite famous people to publish on their account articles related to discrimination and equality.
- Develop a F.A.Q. tool to meet expectations of the general public.
- Use of Facebook and Twitter increases the visibility of the institution and can drive traffic to the website.
- Use of social media as a way to contact journalists.
- When a complaint has been posted on Facebook, send a reminder in order to direct the person to another communication channel.
- Publish on Facebook the results of a case which has been solved.
- Combine the use of social media with the use of radio, TV and newspapers.
- Work with external partners which can fund/sponsor projects.
- Use NGOs' agenda to feed into the debate.
- Online discussion with other institutions and individuals.
- Cooperate with NGOs in panel debates and put the information on social media.

What are the next steps?

- Create a LinkedIn group where reports, best practices, etc. could be shared.
- To help and promote each other on social media.
- To better communicate with equality bodies and other institutions.

Will LinkedIn be useful to share information?

- It is a professional network.
- Tracks can be kept from the information posted.
- Useful for posting information on best practices focused on international obligations, public consultations, and to be informed on the biggest human rights topics in each EU country.
- The participants underlined that FRA should regularly animate the LinkedIn group with reminders.

Peer exchange: Ensuring effective communications by appealing to the right values that people have: how values work; advice on how to put an understanding of values and message framing into practice; indicators for good and bad practice of equality bodies in this area.

This peer exchange session was based on a report commissioned by Equinet exploring how an understanding of values can provide a new perspective on the work of equality bodies in Europe.

The report was commissioned in 2012 after Equinet's training event called "Tackling Under-Reporting of Discrimination through Better Communications". This event included a workshop facilitated by the Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC). This workshop sought to explore an innovative perspective on communication work for equality bodies seeking to contribute to a culture of acceptance and respect. The workshop drew attention to the crucial role of values in such work: understanding how communications could engage particular values and be both more effective and aligned with the principles of the organisation. The report informing the exchange session was a follow-up project from the workshop. The report is available on the Equinet website at <http://equineteurope.org/Using-values-to-create-a-more>.

A snapshot of why this work is relevant for communications practitioners in the equality, human rights and non-discrimination fields:

- Values are important.
- When people value community, social justice and freedom, they tend to be less discriminatory.
- Across Europe we see a positive picture: people view these values as most important.
- So why are people still not treated equally?

Patterns of prejudice and inequality in Europe are linked to the weight people place on these values compared with others. The influence of values is clear and consistent from attitudes towards minorities with people in leadership positions to the rate at which people report discrimination.

These values are not static; they can be engaged and strengthened. European equality bodies and other organisations can actively work to bring the sense of respect and care for others that every person already holds within them to the fore.

Communicating these values is therefore an important consideration for these organisations. We explore the values these organisations may express in their work, and how these could be better aligned with the values that will ensure that people across Europe are motivated to live in acceptance of one another, free from discrimination, and in peace.



What are the challenges associated with ensuring effective communications by appealing to the right values that need to be addressed?

- In the time of budget constraints in almost every EU member state it can be a challenge to establish dialogue with governments concerning funding for human rights initiatives.
- To communicate effectively on tolerance and non-discrimination with an emphasis on tolerance being a value in itself.
- With the economic crisis, one of the rising value is nationalism, hence the question on how to deal with it, what response we should give when it becomes a negative phenomenon (especially towards migrants and refugees).
- The abstract nature of some of the value concepts makes it difficult to communicate and use them in a conscious way, since people are using them unconsciously.
- As values are not necessarily linked to everyday work, it makes it difficult to reach people on those topics.
- Difficulty to reach journalists in terms of possibly sensitive topics. How to reach a balanced approach on reporting on difficult topics?
- Complexity concerning my/our/'the correct' values. Who says/defines those are my/our values (governments, politicians, voters, media, ECHR)? Does Europe really have shared values? How have those values changed over time?
- To impact policies; to change policies.
- The culture of rights still needs to be built and there is a long way to go.

What is working well with ensuring effective communications by appealing to the right values? What were the success factors?

- In response to situations such as the rise of nationalism, FRA looks at the rule of law and highlights existing legislation and reports, without adopting political points of view.
- No need to be explicit (and to use the word 'value') while communicating about values. You can remain implicit and focus on a sensitive and delicate approach.
- Real-life example of a micro-campaign in the countryside, South Greece: a 5-day festival dedicated to rights. Message communicated: 'respect the others because they are human, and do not judge them on their differences'.

What would be the next steps?

- To establish dialogue with private businesses who are already voluntarily engaged in the field of human rights.
- Try to use different approaches to reach different audiences.
- To link fundamental rights issues with everyday issues concerning the majority population. E.g. in Finland people worry about basic issues, such as having a job and a salary, hence when communicating about fundamental rights those issues should be in focus.
- To empower people already thinking in terms of human rights and values. To communicate about equality by encouraging people to be active.
- Equality bodies should assume their role, act as institutional leaders, and set up an agenda on specific issues, especially nationally. They should try to change people's values to be more positive and human-rights oriented.
- We should consciously involve and integrate values while building our communication agenda and strategy.
- Development of a communication toolkit taking into account the impact of values.
- To study/map out what kind of impacts the value-based communications of equality bodies have, in order to continue with the project.

Closing session

The closing session focused on possible follow-up activities. The participants were asked: What will you take from this meeting?

- The idea of splitting reports and messages to media throughout the year.
- The participants' list of this meeting will be very useful for future cooperation.
- Equinet's study on values, networking, contacts.
- How to use third party reporting.
- Messages for journalists.
- Knowledge on how to focus on specific audiences.
- To follow-up on FRA's CLARITY project.
- I learned about social media work.
- How to change negative news to positive news.
- It was the first time for me at FRA and I hope I can come soon again.
- Let us form an online community/forum.
- Personal contacts are important. To keep in touch with the participants.
- It is important to know national contexts.
- I got ideas for communication in my everyday work.
- How important it is to have a communication strategy and a communication officer.
- Positive thinking and energy.
- The work between networks is important. It is important to share experiences.
- I got something to bring back from each working group.
- I learned more about equality bodies.
- FRA will start facilitating information dissemination on selected EU-level legislative and policy developments.
- FRA will regularly share its publication and events schedule.
- The messages that we communicate must go to individuals.

"It would be good to plan joint follow-up activities at the national level for European-level work. In order to do this it is necessary to receive information well in advance."

"I got the face for FRA and the CoE."

"National human rights bodies are important stakeholders nationally."

"I got motivation. I am not alone."

"I need to convince my office that we need a communication officer."

"We must cooperate in an operational and practical way."

"To bring the outcomes of this meeting to the upcoming CoE-FRA-Equinet-ENNHRI thematic platforms."