



CoE-FRA-ENNHRI-Equinet Platform on Hate crime

A meeting between FRA, the Council of Europe, Equality Bodies, National Human Rights Institutions and Ombudsperson Institutions

Riga, 30-31 March 2015

MEETING REPORT

Compiled by FRA, CoE, Equinet and ENNHRI¹

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The platform is a joint initiative of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Networks of Equality Bodies (Equinet) and of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI). It aims to address gaps in combating hate crime, to contribute to a better understanding of the nature of hate crime and to contribute to improving the recording and reporting of hate crime. The platform also aims to enhance coordination, cooperation and exchange of information between national institutions, and European institutions and structures, as well as to facilitate cooperation between national institutions.

A call for joining the platform was initiated in 2014. Initially, 16 national institutions expressed their willingness to take part in the platform, and the work plan of the platform was adopted in February 2015. The focus areas of the work plan are: hate crime reporting, hate speech, victim support and preventing hate crime.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of the meeting was to start the implementation of the agreed work plan. Most of the topics were related to the focus areas of the work plan and selected by the organisers with the inputs from the Platform members:

- The role of NHRIs, Equality Bodies and Ombudsmen in combating hate speech
- Sharing experiences and information on current projects among the Platform members
- The role of NHRIs, Equality Bodies and Ombudsmen in victims' support and third party reporting

The second day (a half day meeting) was a joint meeting with the FRA Working Party on hate crime. The Working Party brings together 27 Member States, the European Commission, the Council of Europe's Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), ODIHR and FRA.

¹ **DISCLAIMER:** Please note that this report is a compilation of the outcomes of the meeting including views and opinions of the participants. Thus, the views or opinions expressed therein are not the official opinions of the FRA, the CoE, Equinet or ENNHRI.

DAY 1

The thematic sessions of the first day were the following:

The role of NHRIs, Equality Bodies and Ombudsmen in combating hate speech

This session focused on highlighting examples of work done by NHRIs, Equality Bodies and Ombudsmen in combating hate crime. Presentations were given by UNAR, Italy on the project PRISM – Preventing, Redressing and Inhibiting hate speech in new media, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission, UK on the publication Guidance to Freedom of Expression.

The role of NHRIs, Equality Bodies and Ombudsmen in victims' support

The discussions in this session concentrated on exchanging information and experiences in awareness-raising work done by national and European/international participants. A victim experience video produced by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) was presented. The Défenseur des Droits, France presented a project plan aiming to prevent and combat racism and other forms of intolerance, as well as promoting complaint mechanisms. The project will be a cooperation project including Equality Bodies from several EU Member States. The Institute of Women and for Equal Opportunities, Spain, informed the meeting about their experiences in the field of victim support.

All the presentations were sent to the participants after the meeting.

Key messages

Understanding context

- Focus on the context of hate crime
- More research needed in this area
- Monitoring – essential to ensure political will and leadership from public bodies
- Intersectional nature, and relevance of perceived separate topics, e.g. Violence against Women, Roma (motivation and experience of hate crime).
- Cyber-bullying is international. Therefore it is important to address it at transnational level.
- Addressing extremism
- Addressing issues related to integration.

Prevention is the first step

- Links to policies of non-discrimination
- Research, training, working with perpetrators

Reporting and convictions

- State needs to ensure accessible, flexible and comprehensive reporting system – multiple criteria, clear definition, details of each incident (time, place, etc.)
- Underreporting and low conviction rate is a great concern.
- Training of law enforcement agencies – legal framework and supporting victims to report.

Other responses

- Reporting is not the only response; consider other options in addition to reporting/repressive measures.
- Awareness-raising, training, developing other tools
- Sufficient resources essential
- Facilitating victim-centred approach
- Victim support
- A person can be a victim even if incident cannot be prosecuted
- Cooperation essential – at national level; NGOs, NHRBs, police, etc.
- Important to mobilise all stakeholders – not only public bodies, also CSOs, ISPs, transport, etc.

Stronger legislation

- ECRI Recommendation No. 7 – should be specific offences, not only aggravated circumstances / sentences.
- Challenge of restricted mandates of bodies concerned.
- Reinforce protection of victims, and ensure effective and efficient avenues for their voices to be heard by public authorities.
- Research into different mandates and legislations in different states: what works well?
- Governments must listen to NHRBs to learn what changes, if any, are required (including resources).

Next steps in the Platform cooperation

It was agreed that the Platform members will start sending information on upcoming events, conferences, studies and publications relevant for the Platform. FRA as the coordinator of the Platform will compile this information and send it out as an email newsletter to the Platform members and include it in a dedicated website section of the FRA website. The aim is that the Platform will inform participants of experience, lessons learnt, and good practice, and inspire for future work and cooperation.

DAY 2: Joint meeting with the FRA Working Party on Hate Crime

Exchange focused on strengthening the role of national human rights bodies in third-party reporting, and monitoring and improving their cooperation with public authorities in any given Member State. Current practices of well functioning cooperation models were presented by the Belgian Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities and The Equality and Human Rights Commission, UK. Presentations were sent to all participants.

Key messages

- Importance and value in meetings: connecting key people at national and European level.
- EC's expert group on Victim Right's Directive relevant to the participants.
- Inter-service group on racism and xenophobia: mapping all relevant initiatives of the EC, including funding.
- Annual colloquium on fundamental rights (Brussels on 1-2 Oct) organised by the EC, topic: tolerance and respect: combatting anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim (hate speech).
- Information on EFTA Norway Grants, which has a focus on combatting racism, xenophobia, hate crime, hate speech (16 beneficiary states). Grants operate in 5 year cycles, 2009-2014 cycle currently. 1.8 billion euros have been set aside in this cycle.