



Brussels, 2 October 2026
(OR. en)

13685/26

SOC 624
GENDER 154
ANTIDISCRIM 89

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject: Delivering Equality in the European Union: our values in practice
- *Exchange of views*

Delegations will find attached a Presidency steering note on the above subject, with a view to the exchange of views at the Council (EPSCO) session on 19 October 2026.

Delivering Equality in the European Union: Our Values in Practice***Exchange of Views***

Equality and non-discrimination are foundational and defining values of the European Union, enshrined in the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Promoting equality and non-discrimination in all aspects of daily life is a key facet of the Union's identity and values.

These principles are realised through the development of a legislative framework¹ aimed at ensuring equal treatment in areas such as employment, education, access to goods and services, pay transparency and equal pay, work-life balance for working parents and carers, accessibility and strengthening the mandate of equality bodies to ensure a common minimum level of protection against discrimination.

Policies and strategies at national and Union level are vital tools for advancing equality and non-discrimination, helping to sustain momentum and to deepen our understanding of existing and emerging challenges and barriers.

Within this context and in light of the recent renewal of the Union of Equality strategic framework² for the period up to 2030, continued commitment to translating equality policy into sustained action and effective implementation will be crucial. This renewed strategic framework builds on the Union's longstanding commitment to equality and non-discrimination and can, if supported and implemented, reinforce a strategic and coordinated approach across a range of policy areas.

¹ Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC), Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC), Gender Equality Recast Directive (2006/54/EC), Goods and Services Directive (2004/113/EC), Self-Employment Directive (2010/41/EU), Pay Transparency Directive (2023/970),), European Accessibility Act (Directive (EU) 2019/882, Directive establishing the European Disability Card and European Parking Card for persons with disabilities (2024/2841), Equality Bodies Directives 2024/1499 and 2024/1500

² Gender Equality Strategies 2026-2030 and 2020-2025, the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, LGBTIQ Equality Strategies 2026-2030 and 2020-2025, the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025, the EU Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030 and the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation 2020-2030.

Whilst significant progress has been made at both national and Union level in recent decades, legislative and implementation gaps remain, and advances continue to be uneven and not always translated into tangible improvements in people's daily lives. Despite strengthening legal and policy frameworks, discrimination remains a reality for many, with persistent inequalities evident across key areas of life such as employment, pay, education, healthcare, housing, the digital realm, access to goods and services, and participation in public life, as evidence collected by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights consistently shows.³ Persistent disparities in outcomes highlight the need to accelerate implementation and deepen commitment, in order to ensure achievement of measurable results.

Differences in enforcement mechanisms, institutional capacity, resources, and policy prioritisation can affect the level of protection available to individuals experiencing discrimination. Strengthening implementation, monitoring and accountability therefore remains a key challenge. To effectively address persistent inequalities and promote equality in practice, a comprehensive and intersectional approach is also required.

Positive developments have been seen in the adoption of national and EU level policies and legislation, as well as in the collection and use of equality data that is essential for identifying inequalities, measuring progress, and informing evidence-based policymaking. Equality bodies continue to play a crucial role in this regard, as well as in supporting victims, raising awareness, promoting compliance with equality legislation, and contributing independent expertise.

³ See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, [Being Black in the EU: Experiences of people of African descent](#) (2023); [Being Muslim in the EU: Experiences of Muslims](#) (2024); [Jewish People's Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism: EU Survey of Jewish People](#) (2024); [LGBTIQ at a crossroads: progress and challenges](#) (2024); and [Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European countries: Perspectives from the Roma Survey 2024](#) (2025).

Advancing equality and inclusion is not only a matter of fundamental rights and shared values, but integral to the Union's long-term prosperity, competitiveness, social cohesion and security, and vitally important for strengthening the resilience of its democratic institutions. Equality is thus a prerequisite for a more competitive and future-ready Union.

At a time of social, economic and geopolitical change, renewed commitment to equality for all, and equality in all of its senses, is needed at both EU and national level. Sustained political leadership, adequate investment, effective enforcement, meaningful stakeholder engagement and a continued focus on outcomes are essential for ensuring that equality is not only guaranteed in law but realised in practice.

The Council's expression of its political commitment to equality, exchange of experiences, challenges and successful approaches can support more effective implementation and help deliver measurable progress across the Union.

Questions for discussion

Against this background, Ministers are invited to reflect on the following questions:

1. What have been the most significant social and economic benefits of progress on equality and non-discrimination in your Member State in recent years?
2. As there is clear evidence of persisting discrimination and inequality within the EU, what actions should Member States collectively prioritise over the next five years to advance equality and deliver measurable results, and how can this be best supported at the EU level?