

ANNUAL SEMINAR WITH EQUALITY BODIES ADVANCING EQUALITY IN AN ERA OF DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING



23 - 24 October 2025
Strasbourg, France

EVENT REPORT

European Commission
against Racism and Intolerance

ECRI
Commission européenne
contre le racisme et l'intolérance

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

ANNUAL SEMINAR
WITH EQUALITY BODIES
**ADVANCING EQUALITY IN AN ERA
OF DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING**

Event Report
prepared by the ECRI Secretariat

Council of Europe

French edition:

*Séminaire annuel avec les
organismes de promotion de l'égalité:
FAIRE PROGRESSER L'ÉGALITÉ DANS UNE
ÈRE DE REcul DE LA DÉMOCRATIE*

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About the Annual Seminar

The annual seminar with equality bodies is organised once per year by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), in close cooperation with the European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET) and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). It brings together representatives of national equality bodies from Council of Europe member states, alongside European and international partners, experts, and civil society actors.

The seminar focuses on themes of direct relevance to the mandates, challenges and day-to-day work of equality bodies, while remaining firmly anchored in ECRI's activities. The topics addressed reflect key trends, risks and developments identified through ECRI's and CERD's monitoring work, ensuring strong links between standards, findings and the practical implementation of recommendations at national level.

Designed as a dynamic and participatory platform, the seminar provides space for the exchange of experiences, peer learning and the sharing of promising practices. Through a combination of plenary sessions and interactive working formats, participants are encouraged to engage in open dialogue on relevant longstanding and emerging challenges, including those linked to democratic backsliding.

Beyond substantive discussions, the annual seminar plays an important networking function. It strengthens cooperation between equality bodies and European and international monitoring mechanisms, fosters mutual understanding of respective roles and tools, and supports the development of coordinated and complementary approaches. By facilitating connections across relevant bodies, institutions and countries, the seminar contributes to reinforcing the collective capacity of equality bodies and their partners to advance equality, counter the phenomena of racism and intolerance, and uphold democratic values across Europe.

THURSDAY

23 October 2025



Opening session

1. The opening session set the scene by **underscoring that democracy, human rights and the rule of law are increasingly challenged across Europe and beyond, with shrinking civic space, growing political polarisation and independent bodies and institutions, including equality bodies, being particularly challenged.** In this context, equality and non-discrimination principles were defined as essential pillars of human rights and democracy. **Strong and independent equality bodies at national level were described as vital safeguards, providing the first line of defence for people at risk of or experiencing discrimination and ensuring that equality laws are meaningfully applied in practice.**

2. Recent developments at European level were highlighted as important progress. Such progress includes the adoption, in 2024, of a new European Union (EU) legislation on common standards for equality bodies, which aims to guarantee clear mandates, adequate resources and full independence across all EU member states. The need to ensure proper transposition, in 2026, and adequate implementation at national level was strongly emphasised. Participants also welcomed closer co-operation between European and international actors to reinforce protection against discrimination, hatred and democratic backsliding.

3. Key thematic priorities were underlined, notably when it comes to addressing racism and intolerance affecting Roma and Travellers, people of African descent, Jews, Muslims, migrants and other foreign nationals, LGBTI persons and other groups exposed to various forms of hatred or discrimination. The discussion drew attention to the rise of hate speech and disinformation, including online, where harmful narratives spread rapidly. Ensuring effective oversight and safeguards in the digital sphere, including in relation to the development of artificial intelligence systems, was identified as a growing human rights imperative.

4. Across the interventions, a shared message emerged: **resilience must be built together. Equality bodies, European and international human rights bodies and institutions, civil society actors and democratic institutions must reinforce one another through solidarity, shared expertise and co-ordinated action, ensuring that equality remains at the heart of Europe's democratic future.**



14:22

Berti
LUTTER

Javier
GURCHYEV

Robert
GAJDA

Yan
FELDMAN

Oliga
BULM

Sibilla
ETHELOVIT

Samuel
ENGBLOM

Iuliana
COZMA

Alexandra
PISLARU

David
DESSIN

Panel discussion I

State of racism, intolerance and related forms of discrimination in Europe: trends and challenges

5. The panel examined the current landscape of racism, intolerance and related forms of discrimination in Europe, noting how democratic backsliding and shrinking civic space are exacerbating inequalities and undermining protections for people belonging to racialised communities and other groups of concern to ECRI, CERD and equality bodies. It was underlined that Roma and Travellers, people of African descent, migrants and other foreign nationals, members of religious communities, and LGBTI persons, among others, continue to face discrimination, hate speech and violence in various areas of social life.

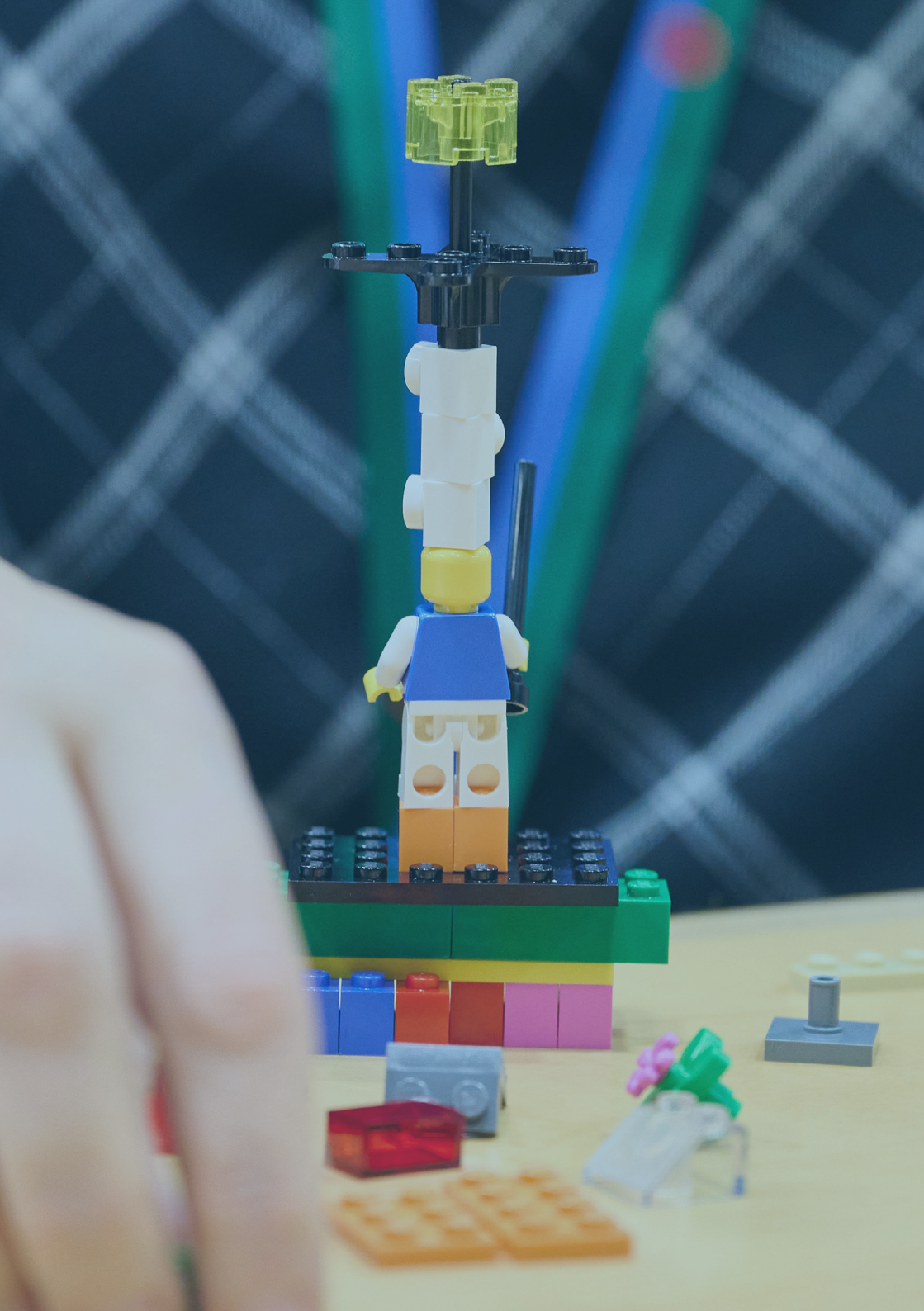
6. The discussion also stressed the persistence of institutional or structural forms of racism and racial discrimination affecting equal rights to housing, employment, education, and healthcare, with women, children and LGBTI persons experiencing multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination. Growing antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, in particular online, were highlighted, alongside a surge in ultranationalistic and racist narratives in political and other public discourse that reinforces harmful stereotypes against migrants from non-European Muslim-majority countries. Participants expressed concern about under-reporting of hate crimes and weaknesses in the collection of appropriate data on inequalities or hate incidents.

7. A strong focus was placed on the specific situation of Roma and Traveller communities, described as one of the largest minorities in Europe, all too often facing stigmatisation, segregation, marginalisation and exclusion. Persistent antigypsyism, including by institutional actors, was identified as a major barrier to accessing rights and justice, particularly for Roma and Traveller women and young people. The need to protect and strengthen equality bodies' engagement with Roma and Travellers was stressed on several occasions to ensure visibility of discrimination against Roma and Travellers and their confidence in the existing complaints mechanisms.

8. Speakers also examined emerging challenges linked to digitalisation and artificial intelligence, noting that any biased data and deployment risks may “automate” discrimination, especially in policing, employment, and access to essential services. Reference was made to legal frameworks being developed at European level, which offer opportunities to embed equality and human rights safeguards into technological governance.

9. The panel reflected on the role of democratic and judicial institutions in breaking cycles of inequality. Strategic litigation was also presented as a driver for advancing effective equality and human rights protections and responding to structural forms of discrimination, including through stronger recognition of positive obligations and intersectional harm.

10. The exchange concluded with a call for more co-ordinated action across various monitoring and equality bodies, civil society organisations and authorities, to protect those most at risk and to ensure better accountability and meaningful participation for all communities affected by racism and intolerance in Europe and beyond.



Labs

Lab #1: Safeguarding the independence and effectiveness of equality bodies in a highly polarised political environment: risks, responses and strategies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

11. Lab #1 brought together over 35 equality body representatives from Council of Europe member states operating in increasingly polarised and politically sensitive environments. Participants shared concrete experiences or scenarios of various types of pressure, interference, and delegitimisation, as well as strategies they employed or would employ to protect their independence and effectiveness. The discussions not only revealed visible threats but also deeper political and social dynamics, which affect the ability of equality bodies have to act independently and effectively. This report brings together these insights, offering a panoramic understanding of the challenges faced today and the ways equality bodies are learning to respond.

1. The changing political landscape: a panoramic view of emerging threats

12. A recurring thread throughout the discussions was a single central theme: **the political climate surrounding equality and human rights has fundamentally shifted**. Many participants described a sense of living in a new era shaped by rising social and political movements whose messaging is simplistic, misleading and even harmful: giving easy and wrong answers to complex issues, constructing “traditional” moral values and developing an adversarial narrative pointing to so-called “enemies” (both external and internal), thereby affecting people belonging to migrants and certain minorities in particular. Participants spoke of public discourses where empathy and nuance have been replaced by stark notions of strength and dominance.

13. **Participants also felt that direct political interference in the work of national bodies and institutions tasked with promoting equality and human rights is being “normalised”**. Several participants described situations in which senior members of government or other political actors publicly belittled equality bodies (and national human rights institutions), dismissed their decisions, or portrayed them as obstacles to government policy or national identity. Some indicated that **insufficient independence of equality bodies at institutional level made them vulnerable to political moods**. Others shared how their work was openly mocked in parliament or in the media, undermining public trust in these bodies and leaving equality body staff members demoralised. In online spaces, attempts to delegitimise the work equality bodies (and national human rights institutions) carry out spread even faster: some bodies and institutions experienced targeted campaigns designed to tarnish their reputations. These attacks created a climate in which defending equality and human rights is portrayed as an elite or “ideological” activity.

14. **Financial pressure** emerged in the discussions as a recurring method of control. Participants recounted severe budgetary cuts, not necessarily as part of austerity measures, but as deliberate attempts to limit financial autonomy. In some cases, the gap between the resources needed and the resources which were made available to equality bodies was said to have grown so large that, even when appropriate funds were available on paper, they became practically inaccessible.

15. **Administrative reforms** were also reported as contributing to uncertainty, particularly where they led to the “fragmentation” of one or more equality bodies into separate, different components, leaving those in need unsure of where to turn to and potentially weakening the equality bodies’ unified voice. At the same time, the “merger” of equality bodies (or the “merger” of equality bodies with national human rights institutions) without proper consultations and without providing the national human rights institutions concerned with adequate resources for the implementation of the equality body mandate may also be an issue.

16. Another major theme that emerged as an issue was the **shrinking of civic space**, notably as a result of **legal or procedural restrictions**. Participants spoke about rapid reforms in highly sensitive areas, such as surveillance and criminal law, which they considered to have been introduced without proper consultations. The lack of or insufficient, meaningful, monitoring powers, particularly over law enforcement agencies, is said to have left equality bodies unable to prevent and combat discrimination effectively. Meanwhile, proposals for controversial laws illustrated how targeting certain populations, on the grounds of their religion or sexual orientation for instance, is also used for political mobilisation gains rather than for genuine public debate.

17. Across the Council of Europe area, **racism** and **intolerance** clearly appear to have regularly been turned into a **political currency**. Participants described how political actors exploit fears related to migration, housing shortages, economic insecurity and threats to national security to scapegoat certain segments of society. Muslims and migrants coming from non-European countries were frequent targets of policies framed as protecting so-called national values, or national identity or security.

18. Finally, participants noted that many citizens now live inside information bubbles shaped by ultranationalistic media ecosystems. These environments make it increasingly difficult for equality bodies to reach communities with accurate information or alternative, evidence-based, narratives. As a consequence, there is a growing disconnect between institutional work and how it is perceived by the public, which certain social and political movements exploit with precision.

2. Responding to pressure: strategies and solutions

19. Despite these challenges, participants proposed a broad set of strategies, with various legal, policy and other measures as well as changes in the equality and human rights narrative. One of the most striking examples came from member states that succeeded in embedding its equality body directly into the constitution. This shift not only constitutionally shielded the equality body from political interference but also required the creation of a dedicated budgetary line managed through parliament. This protective measure transformed the equality body's capacity to act more independently, proving that constitutional safeguards can be a decisive defence method in the current geopolitical landscape.

20. **Transparency** emerged as another powerful tool. Several equality body representatives described how making their work public, whether through reporting to parliament, openly sharing the threats they receive with the media, or documenting case outcomes, strengthened **institutional legitimacy**. Transparency, in this sense, should not only be seen as a communication strategy but also as a form of protection against the instrumentalisation of equality bodies' work and manipulation in the media and in the political sphere: political and other actors are less likely to undermine a body or institution whose activities are visible and widely understood by the general population.

21. The importance of building **alliances** between equality bodies and their close partners was repeatedly emphasised. Partnerships with civil society actors, populations in vulnerable situations, and other relevant bodies and institutions would create a network of resilience. Several participants described such alliance- or coalition-building processes as a way of "elevating" their mission above political fluctuations and ensuring that society as a whole, not just institutional actors, takes ownership of their work.

22. **International co-operation** plays a similarly crucial role. Participants called on organisations such as the Council of Europe and its European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the United Nations (UN) and its Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the European Commission (EU) to speak with a unified voice, within their respective roles, when equality bodies come under attack. Some suggested establishing a **Europe-wide "protection" or "shield" for bodies and institutions established to promote equality**, a co-ordinated front capable of rapid reaction initiatives.

23. Others highlighted the importance of **peer-to-peer support**, proposing expert networks that could be activated quickly in crisis situations or the organisation of thematic webinars enabling relevant bodies and institutions to share expertise across borders.

24. A particularly creative dimension of the discussions revolved around communication. Participants noted that “authoritarian narratives” have often been successful, not only because of their content but also because of their aesthetic simplicity: they are easy to grasp emotionally. Equality bodies, therefore, must invest in ways of telling their own story more effectively, through visuals, human-centred storytelling, and narratives that highlight the strength of equality and diversity. This approach requires moving beyond what is often seen as technical language and reconnecting equality with everyday life experiences.

Conclusions

25. Taken together, the discussions from Lab #1 provide an overview in which national equality bodies operate in a period of significant democratic stress. **Pressure from governments, or members of government, on equality bodies is less and less episodic; it is becoming systemic, emerging from multiple directions at once. In such an environment, institutional and structural independence cannot solely rely on tradition or goodwill but requires legal, administrative, financial and other forms of reinforcement as well as more robust narratives.**

26. The views and information shared during the Lab underscore that constitutional entrenchment, and dedicated budgets are among the most effective protections available. However, legal tools alone cannot be considered enough. It is believed that **equality bodies (and national human rights institutions) must cultivate broad alliances, communicate clearly and creatively, and position themselves as trusted actors whose purpose is understood by the public.**

27. Another aspect which also clearly emerged from Lab #1 was that addressing inequalities is increasingly transnational. No equality body can withstand political pressure alone. **European and international actors must act quickly and decisively, providing visibility, legitimacy, and political weight.** In turn, equality bodies should embrace solidarity across borders, learning from one another and, where possible, acting collectively.

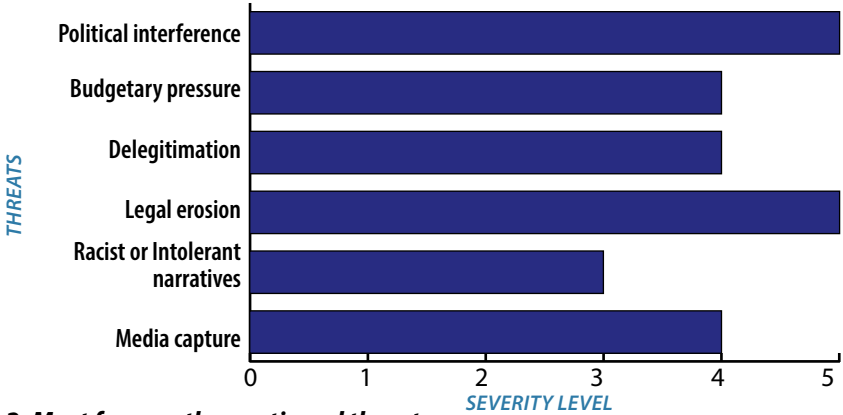


Comparative matrix – problems and solutions

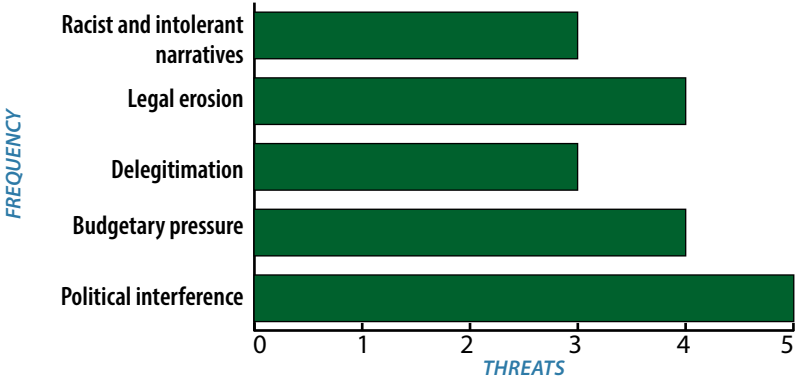
Problems	Description	Potential solutions
Political interference	Public undue criticism, attempts to control or marginalise equality bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • constitutional safeguards; • transparency; • alliances between equality bodies
Budgetary pressure	Budgetary cuts or restrictions used to sanction or control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific parliamentary budgetary lines • public reporting
Delegitimation	Online defamatory attacks or misleading statements about equality bodies or their representatives leading to reputational harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • civil society and other forms of support • visibility campaigns
Legal erosion	Reforms that reduce oversight and other powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advocacy • stronger legal powers
Racist or intolerant narratives in the media and the political sphere	Racism and intolerance used for political gains, particularly during electoral campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alternative, evidence-based, narrative strategies • community partnerships
Media capture	Information bubbles limiting public understanding of equality issues and equality bodies' work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • innovative outreach • storytelling

Visual overview – threats and solutions

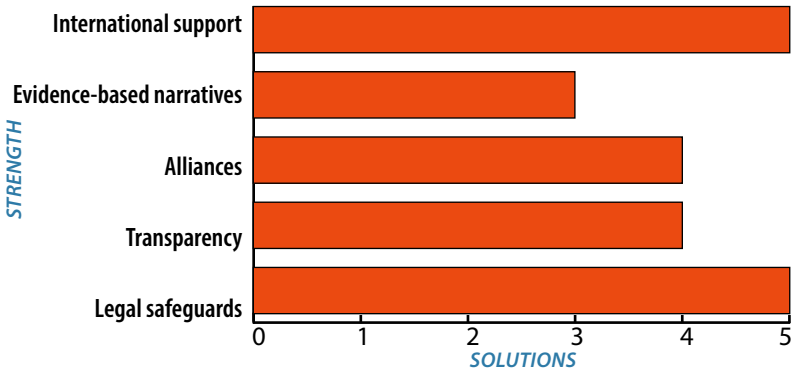
1. Severity of key threats



2. Most frequently mentioned threats



3. Most frequently mentioned solutions





Tiina VALONEN

RAMA MID

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Labs

Lab #2: From recommendations to results: strengthening co-operation between equality bodies, ECRI and CERD for greater impact at national level

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

28. Lab #2 examined how equality bodies can engage more effectively with ECRI and CERD, focusing on both co-operation with these European and international monitoring bodies and the strategic use of their recommendations at national level. Participants highlighted that equality bodies already employ a variety of tools, most commonly by integrating recommendations into their annual or thematic equality body reports, parliamentary submissions, staff training, and CERD shadow reporting. However, these practices remain uneven, and the potential of ECRI and CERD outputs is not yet fully embedded in national advocacy and monitoring work.

29. The results showed broad consensus that equality bodies should use ECRI and CERD recommendations more proactively, particularly in opinions on draft laws, parliamentary interventions, and professional training for public officials and members of the judiciary. Participants also stressed the importance of expanding media work and national thematic events to raise public awareness and generate broader political visibility. While several equality bodies reported success in influencing government strategies or legislative reforms using ECRI reports and CERD concluding observations, persistent obstacles, including limited resources, weak state co-ordination or institutional resistance, and restrictive political environments continue to hinder implementation.

30. Lab #2 also explored synergies between equality bodies, ECRI, CERD, relevant EU institutions, and European networks such as EQUINET. Participants identified joint capacity-building, shared priority-setting, and data-system alignment as the most effective co-operation channels. Existing institutional dialogue platforms, such as ECRI's annual seminars with equality bodies, were recognised as valuable and should

be reinforced. At the same time, joint communication and co-ordinated advocacy efforts remain underused despite their strong potential to amplify visibility and support equality bodies facing political headwinds.

31. Overall, the exchange highlighted a shared aspiration for a more coherent, better resourced, and strategically aligned ecosystem of co-operation. Equality bodies see European and international recommendations not only as policy tools but also as anchors of legitimacy in increasingly challenging political environments at national level. Strengthening internal integration of these recommendations, enhancing co-operation, and addressing obstacles to effective work on equality matters could significantly increase the impact of ECRI and CERD recommendations and reinforce national, European and international equality agendas.

1. How have equality bodies used ECRI and CERD recommendations?

32. The Mentimeter results reveal that equality bodies employ a variety of methods to integrate European and international recommendations into their work at national level, but with strong disparities in emphasis and ownership.

33. The most common approach is the inclusion of ECRI and CERD recommendations in equality bodies' thematic or annual reports. Around 40% of participants pointed to this as their primary method, suggesting that these reports remain the most established interface between European and international monitoring work and implementation at domestic level. These reports offer visibility, credibility, and institutional grounding, making them the natural entry point for European and international material.

34. A second cluster of practices includes presenting recommendations to relevant parliamentary committees (30%) and/or integrating them into training or capacity-building materials (20%). These reflect attempts to move from passive documentation to active persuasion, bringing European and international recommendations into the spaces where decisions are shaped and where practitioners develop their understanding of equality law.

35. Smaller but notable practices include using ECRI and CERD recommendations in legislative or policy submissions (5%) and organising national thematic events (5%). It was subsequently indicated during the discussion that these lower numbers do not necessarily reflect a lack of interest. Rather, they point to context-specific constraints on public advocacy or political sensitivity around equality law and policy in some national settings.

36. A striking finding is the relatively high use of CERD shadow reporting (36%) as a tool to draw attention to gaps in both law and practice and to help maintain international pressure for implementation. This suggests that CERD remains, for many equality bodies, a powerful body for advancing concerns that may otherwise not necessarily gain traction domestically.

37. Finally, participants noted that discussions with civil society (18%) and media work (18%) remain important channels, but are not yet fully harnessed. The potential for joint messaging, narrative-framing, and public mobilisation appears significant, yet underdeveloped.

2. What do equality bodies believe they should use more proactively?

38. When participants were asked which tools their bodies and institutions should use more proactively, a different picture emerged, one that points towards ambition and unmet potential.

39. The strongest message was the need to use ECRI and CERD recommendations more systematically in equality bodies' own reports. While reports are already the most frequently used tool to integrate them, participants believed there was room for a much deeper and more structured embedding of European and international standards.

40. There was also a strong call to integrate recommendations into **public consultations, opinions on draft laws, and parliamentary interventions**. Participants recognised that the persuasive power of these recommendations was amplified when brought directly into the arenas where reforms are negotiated.

41. Training also emerged as an underused, yet highly promising, domain. Many equality bodies indicated that ECRI and CERD recommendations could be more proactively woven into **training programmes for public officials and members of the judiciary**, helping to establish a shared understanding of equality obligations across different sectors of the state.

42. There was also a clear interest in **expanding media engagement** and organising **national thematic awareness-raising events**. These tools were perceived as having significant potential to translate recommendations of a rather technical nature into wider social and political awareness.

3. Successful areas of implementation: where have European and international recommendations made a difference?

43. Participants identified several areas where recommendations made by European and international monitoring bodies have already been successfully used or have shown notable impact.

44. The strongest example is the **incorporation of recommendations into national anti-discrimination or equality policies**, with nearly half of respondents citing this as a success story. This reflects a recognition that national strategies provide an ideal vehicle in aligning domestic priorities with European and international standards.

45. Participants from several countries also reported success in changing legal framework, either through **constitutional or legislative amendments**, or through **secondary legislation**. While these numbers were lower (20% and 7% respectively), they represent significant achievements within highly diverse political contexts.

46. Participants also highlighted political polarisation (7%) as an area where recommendations had been used strategically. In these cases, equality bodies used ECRI and CERD outputs as **“shields” against some forms of political pressure or as tools to resist what could be described as regressive narratives**.

4. Obstacles limiting the implementation and use of recommendations

47. Participants identified several obstacles that continue to hinder the effective use of recommendations made by European and international monitoring bodies.

48. The most significant barrier is related to **insufficient resources**, cited by 36% of respondents. Equality bodies often have insufficient capacities to develop extensive nationwide monitoring systems, consultative processes, or advocacy campaigns around European and international recommendations.

49. **Resistance from law enforcement officials and other criminal justice actors** was cited by 29% of respondents, suggesting entrenched institutional cultures or limited awareness of equality obligations in these sectors.

50. A further challenge is the **exclusion of equality bodies or civil society actors from reform processes** (14%). Without having a say in appropriate fora, it becomes difficult for representatives from equality bodies to support the translation of European and international recommendations into domestic policy commitments.

51. **Mandate overlaps or gaps** (7%) also hinder co-ordination, reinforcing the need for clearer institutional structures and better channels of co-operation.

52. Finally, in several national contexts, a (polarised) **media environment** (20%) and **weak state co-ordination mechanisms** (60%) were seen as major deterrents, thereby creating fragmented or hostile environments for equality advocacy.

5. Opportunities for strengthening co-operation: synergies that work and synergies that need further investment

53. Two types of synergies between equality bodies, ECRI, CERD, the EU, and networks such as EQUINET stood out as particularly effective and promising: joint capacity-building and training activities on the one hand and policy co-ordination and priority-setting on the other.

54. As regards **joint capacity-building and training activities**, half of participants considered this as the strongest area of co-operation. Joint training activities involving equality bodies, European and international monitoring bodies, and practitioners appeared to create a shared language, shared expectations, and a sense of community around common equality standards.

55. As concerns **policy co-ordination and priority-setting**, 42% of respondents recognised that when ECRI, CERD, EQUINET and relevant EU structures co-ordinate their priorities, whether implicitly or explicitly, it gives equality bodies a powerful and aligned reference point for advocacy at domestic level.

56. Another promising synergy lies in **shared data systems**, identified by another 44% of respondents. Better alignment of indicators, reporting methodologies, and data categories could reduce duplication and strengthen the evidence base used by different actors.

57. **Institutional or thematic dialogue platforms**, such as ECRI annual seminars with equality bodies, were also cited by 44% of respondents, thereby indicating that these exchanges are valued but could be expanded and rendered more strategic.

58. **Joint communication and advocacy** remain underdeveloped according to a number of respondents (11%), despite their potential for amplifying visibility and countering political narratives. This suggests a domain where future investment could yield significant results.

Conclusions

59. The results of Lab #2 paint a clear picture: equality bodies value ECRI and CERD as well as other relevant European and international bodies as allies, sources of legitimacy, and amplifiers of national priorities in the areas of equality and human rights. They use their recommendations in multiple ways, but not yet as systematically, strategically, or collaboratively as they could.

60. Three overarching needs emerge from the “collective intelligence” of the Lab:

- ▶ Greater “internalisation” of ECRI and CERD recommendations within the operational and reporting practices of equality bodies.
- ▶ Stronger co-operation structures that enable ongoing dialogue, joint training activities, and harmonised priority-setting at national, European and international levels.
- ▶ Better resourcing and support, including for communication, legislative advocacy, data collection, and participation in European and international monitoring processes.

61. Lab #2 demonstrated that co-operation between equality bodies and European and international actors is not only possible but is also already happening. At the same time, with clearer structures, shared tools, and stronger networks, this type of co-operation could become a transformative force for national, European and international equality agendas.



Panel discussion II

Council of Europe/European Union co-operation projects in the field of anti-discrimination in Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership region

62. This presentation highlighted how co-operation activities translate ECRI standards into tangible national reforms by supporting equality bodies in exercising their mandates more independently and effectively. It pointed to examples of work on legal alignment and implementation in Montenegro, Armenia and the Republic of Moldova, including through legislative amendments, to ensure proper functioning and to strengthen competencies for equality bodies, in line with ECRI's general policy and other recommendations.

63. Furthermore, the importance of continuous capacity-building and peer learning across institutions was also underlined. For instance, recent exchanges with equality bodies in Azerbaijan and Montenegro helped to strengthen understanding of equality standards and to support the fulfilment of equality bodies' mandates. At the same time, analytical co-operation with the Ukrainian Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) and his Office contributed to identifying the needs of groups in situation of greater vulnerability, including Roma communities, and to guiding targeted responses at regional or local level.

64. The value of strengthening dialogue with communities and improving practical access to equality mechanisms was also highlighted. This was illustrated by awareness-raising activities with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination in Albania, which directly led to individual applications and targeted problem-solving. Regional networking and exchanges among equality bodies from Council of Europe member states aspiring to EU accession were also presented as sustained platforms to learn about appropriate data collection, reporting and hate crime responses.

65. Overall, this presentation emphasised that co-operation efforts serve as a bridge between standards and practice, reinforcing equality bodies' resilience in increasingly polarised contexts.

Enhancing multi-stakeholder responses to hate speech and hate crime

66. The new Mission-Driven Initiative (MDI) funded under the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway Grants was introduced. The objective of the MDI is to improve implementation of Council of Europe standards on combating hate speech and hate crime, including in relation to the human rights of LGBTI persons and Roma and Travellers. The initiative is anchored in recent standard-setting developments, notably Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on combating hate speech, Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)4 of the Committee of Ministers on combating hate crime, and upcoming Council of Europe guidance on artificial intelligence (AI) and equality.

67. This MDI was outlined as a multi-stakeholder co-operation model involving relevant authorities, including law enforcement agencies and prosecution services, equality bodies, national human rights institutions and civil society actors across 15 beneficiary and three donor states. Activities in the framework of this MDI include the development of a practical manual on criminalised hate speech, training to prevent and respond to online hateful content and hate crimes, and exchanges regarding digital challenges and AI-related discrimination risks.

68. As this discussion drew to a close, equality bodies were encouraged to actively join this network by designating focal points and participating in regional events, including during the No Hate Speech Week in June 2026. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the resources and tools to be produced will benefit a wider European audience, therefore complementing existing Council of Europe efforts in the anti-discrimination co-operation sector.

FRIDAY

24 October 2025



Panel discussion III

Protecting and empowering equality bodies in times of democratic backsliding

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

69. This discussion examined how equality bodies can remain resilient and effective despite rising political pressures and shrinking democratic space. Speakers emphasised that European standards, including [ECRI's General Policy Recommendation \(GPR\) No. 2 \(revised\)](#) on equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level and [EU Directive 2024/1499](#) on standards for equality bodies, provide crucial legal protections, but their real impact depends on strong implementation, sustained co-operation with civil society, and active engagement with European and international human rights mechanisms. Cross-border solidarity and strategic action were identified as essential to ensuring that equality bodies can continue protecting those most exposed to racism and discrimination, even where institutional resistance grows.

Introduction: a challenging environment

70. The panel opened with the recognition that Europe is facing a period of democratic backsliding, marked by restrictions on independent institutions. Equality bodies, which act as bridges between legal protections and victims' real experiences, are directly impacted. Shifts in the political climate increasingly affect their mandates, resources and visibility, limiting their capacity to effectively combat racism and intolerance.

Legal and policy standards

71. Participants highlighted that equality cannot be defended without strong institutional guarantees. ECRI's GPR No. 2 defines the standards needed for equality bodies to fulfil their role autonomously, emphasising independence, sufficient funding, and responsibility for tackling structural discrimination.

72. This direction has been significantly reinforced through EU Directive 2024/1499, which transforms recommended practice into binding requirements in EU Member States. It mandates that states guarantee independence and provide equality bodies with the authority and capacity necessary for enforcement. It also stresses accessibility for all victims, ensuring that formal rights can be exercised in practice by groups who face the greatest barriers.

73. Meanwhile, the forthcoming EU Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030 promises to further embed action against racism and racial discrimination within national and EU-level governance. It should help to develop a suitable policy framework against racism to complement the legal foundations now in place.

Persistent inequalities and racism

74. The panel stressed that the implementation of the above standards is urgently needed because discrimination remains deeply rooted. Roma communities continue to face institutional or structural forms of racism, with major gaps in reporting, access to justice and trust in public authorities. Bias in policing and stigmatisation or exclusion in public discourse were highlighted as particularly harmful areas of concern. In response to these realities, new operational guidance focuses on practical measures such as strengthening diversity within institutions, systematic co-operation with communities, and strategic litigation to ensure that rights are not merely symbolic but transformative.

Co-operation as a protection against the backsliding of human rights

75. Co-operation between equality bodies was described as a vital form of protection. When equality bodies and human rights institutions are attacked or politically constrained, solidarity across borders may act as an early-warning system and bolster resilience. Collaboration also helps ensure that the promotion of equality and the protection of rights is more consistent across jurisdictions. Civil society alliances were recognised as equally essential. Organisations working directly with communities exposed to racism and intolerance bring forward cases, evidence and community perspectives; this strengthens legitimacy and makes institutional isolation less likely.

Leveraging European and international human rights mechanisms

76. The discussion also focused on the importance of using European and international recommendations strategically. Equality bodies can shape CERD monitoring processes through updates and shadow reporting, ensuring that urgent issues, including those not covered in state submissions, receive attention. They can also support dissemination and follow-up of CERD concluding observations so that commitments made internationally lead to concrete changes in national policy or practice. The potential to trigger early warning and urgent action procedures was highlighted.

Conclusions

77. The panel closed with a clear message: equality bodies are central to protecting democratic principles. Ensuring their independence, strengthening co-operation between them, and using European and international standards as leverage are necessary steps to preserve rights and dignity for all.

78. The convergence of recent legal and policy developments creates an opportunity and a responsibility to ensure that these institutions remain strong enough to safeguard those most exposed to racism and intolerance. In doing so, not only the rights of people belonging to communities at risk are protected, but democracy itself is also effectively defended.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY-MAKERS

1. Secure the legal and operational independence of equality bodies

The standards set out in ECRI's GPR No. 2 and EU Directive 2024/1499 should be effectively implemented in order to ensure that equality bodies can operate autonomously, free from political interference, and with strong guarantees for stable leadership and suitable, protected, budgets. The implementation of these standards is essential for equality bodies to remain effective in politically hostile environments.

2. Provide sustained resources and strong mandates capable of tackling racism and intolerance

Equality bodies must receive multi-year financial, human and technical resources that reflect the **scale and complexity** of racism and intolerance today. Their mandates should include powers to address proactively institutional or structural forms of racism, intolerance and related discrimination, including issues affecting Roma communities, rather than being limited to individual complaints.

3. Institutionalise co-operation with civil society to strengthen legitimacy and accountability

Strong partnerships with organisations representing those most affected by racism and intolerance are essential to ensure early identification of discrimination and maintain public trust in equality bodies. Engagement should be formalised through regular consultation and joint follow-up of equality measures.

4. Strengthen cross-border solidarity and co-ordinated support

European equality body networks should be used proactively as **mutual-support and early-warning mechanisms** when bodies and institutions tasked with promoting equality and protecting from discrimination come under political pressure. Shared learning and strategic alignment may ensure more consistent access to justice for victims of discrimination across borders and reinforce institutional resilience.

5. Use European and international standards as actionable tools for national change

Recommendations from ECRI, CERD, EU institutions and other mechanisms should be actively leveraged to advance reforms at national level, including through shadow reporting, litigation, and systematic follow-up with authorities on implementation. These standards must be treated as **practical instruments**, not theoretical reference texts.



Panel discussion IV

Algorithmic bias and racial profiling - safeguarding equality in the age of artificial intelligence

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

79. Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly moved into the everyday operations carried out by public authorities, particularly in areas such as law enforcement and migration management. Equality bodies across Europe warn that algorithmic systems, often introduced in the name of efficiency and objectivity, risk replicating and amplifying racial and other discriminatory profiling if not properly supervised.

80. During the 2025 ECRI annual seminar, equality bodies and civil society representatives examined how discriminatory dynamics already present in policing and migration management may become embedded in digital infrastructures. The discussion recognised the positive potential of emerging legislation, notably the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (EU Regulation 2024/1689 of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence). It also highlighted persisting gaps in data, resources, institutional capacity and meaningful community involvement.

81. The panel's principal message was that equality must guide digital transformation. Protecting human dignity requires ensuring that systems intended to improve security do not instead reinforce longstanding inequalities or normalise surveillance of racialised groups.

Introduction

82. The conversation was framed around the accelerating use of algorithmic systems to improve public security and border control. The digitalisation of state decision-making has moved faster than the mechanisms needed to oversee it, creating at the same time serious risks for human rights protection.

Current context: racial profiling and algorithmic risks

83. Racial profiling by law enforcement and other public officials is still considered to be widespread across Europe. In this context, AI does not emerge into a neutral environment, it absorbs the inequalities already present in data, procedures and institutional culture.

84. It was indicated that, in Finland, equality impact assessments, which are legally required under national law, are often not completed before AI/automated systems are introduced in public services. The relevant authorities may underestimate the risk of discrimination because such tools appear impartial. In the Netherlands, various agencies design and use AI differently, meaning risks cannot be dismissed or generalised. In the area of law enforcement, systems trained on past policing patterns may consider discriminatory practices “effective”, reinforcing the very behaviour they should help eliminate.

85. Multiple speakers also raised concerns about broader political developments. The growing emphasis on national security and effective border control has led to legislative reforms expanding state access to data. While presented as necessary, these policies can increase surveillance of people belonging to racialised groups and migrants in particular, often without adequate transparency or public debate.

86. AI and automation may therefore pose a dual threat: they can widen the reach of racial profiling while making its effects harder to detect or prove.

Developments of new European legal frameworks and their impact

87. Participants discussed recent European instruments, which aim to clarify and enforce human-rights protections in relation to AI.

88. The Council of Europe Framework Convention on AI, which was opened for signature in Vilnius in September 2024, offers an important channel for rights protection, although concerns remain about exceptions granted to national security and migration policies, precisely the areas where profiling is most entrenched.

89. The EU Artificial Intelligence Act, in its Article 77, marks a significant milestone by recognising powers to equality bodies and other authorities protecting human rights in EU Member States to access documentation on high-risk systems, request testing, and participate in oversight alongside market surveillance bodies and data protection authorities.

90. This integration of national equality bodies and human rights institutions into AI governance frameworks is a major advance. However, speakers stressed that legal authority alone is not enough. The implementation phase will determine whether equality bodies (and national human rights institutions) can use their new powers effectively. Many bodies and institutions lack technical expertise, and no additional resources have been guaranteed. Another concern is that a narrow interpretation of risk levels leads authorities to overlook ongoing discrimination in lower-visibility systems, such as automated flagging tools or backend decision support.

Access to justice and protection

91. The panel stressed that enforcement models reliant on individual complaints are not equipped to handle algorithmic discrimination. Those most affected by racial and other discriminatory profiling often do not report it. The reasons for this are complex: fear of reprisal, normalisation of unequal treatment, and mistrust of institutions. When algorithmic decision-making is involved, additional obstacles emerge, including not knowing that a decision was automated, or not being able to understand why it occurred.

92. To overcome these barriers, equality bodies must be empowered to address discrimination systemically. This includes being able to launch investigations without a named victim and to participate actively in litigation on matters of public interest. The opacity of automated decisions must not become a breeding ground for discriminatory practices.

93. Speakers also stressed that automation does not absolve human actors of responsibility. Algorithms may support decision-making. However, public authorities remain accountable for the outcomes.

Looking ahead: developing fair artificial intelligence systems in Europe

94. A coherent vision emerged from the discussion about what is needed to ensure that AI serves equality rather than undermines it.

95. Equality should not be an option or an addition to digital innovation. Impact assessments must be carefully conducted before AI systems are deployed, not only as a technical exercise to assess algorithmic performance, but also as a substantive evaluation of how design choices may reinforce or institutionalise discrimination. Where a system is found to generate or deepen discrimination, non-deployment should be a legitimate and expected outcome.

96. Training for law enforcement officials and other relevant public officials (dealing with migration matters, for instance) is likewise essential. Discriminatory impacts often stem from misunderstanding that such a form of discrimination is a particular form that does not generally rely on intent. Public officials must be trained to recognise how technology interacts with pre-existing inequality.

97. Finally, oversight must include those affected directly. Racialised communities possess crucial knowledge about how discriminatory systems operate in practice. Their participation builds trust, reveals hidden harms, and strengthens accountability.

98. These measures are not simply technical fixes but part of a broader commitment to effective equality in the digital age.

Conclusions

99. Certainly, AI has become a powerful tool potentially increasing efficiency in public administration, policing and migration management. However, without vigilant oversight, it risks entrenching racial profiling on a scale that has not been seen in previous decades. Equality bodies stand ready to meet this challenge. They nevertheless require political support, expertise and resources.

100. The panel closed with an urgent reminder: digital transformation must be guided by respect for equal rights and dignity for all. The credibility of equality law, and of democratic institutions themselves, depends on active leadership to ensure that new technologies strengthen, rather than fragment, the promise of equal treatment for all.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY-MAKERS

1. Mandate equality and human rights impact assessments

Ensure that any introduction or use of AI systems affecting individuals, particularly in policing, border control and migration management, and public services in social welfare, healthcare, education, employment, housing or other key areas of social life, is preceded by a robust equality impact assessment. These assessments must demonstrate that the system will not generate, reinforce or deepen discrimination. Where a risk of discriminatory impact is identified, deployment should be halted or prohibited.

2. Reinforce the mandate and capacities equality bodies have

Provide equality bodies with adequate resources, including staff having appropriate legal and technical expertise, and clear enforcement powers. Strengthen their ability to access documentation, conduct independent testing, initiate investigations ex officio, and pursue redress in the public interest.

3. Improve equality data collection and governance with participation of affected groups

Support the responsible collection and use of equality data to identify and prevent discriminatory patterns in automated systems. Governance of such data must fully comply with human rights standards and be developed with the meaningful involvement of people belonging to communities at risk to ensure trust, legitimacy and fairness.

4. Institutionalise co-operation between equality bodies and civil society

Establish structured and regular co-operation frameworks between equality bodies and civil society organisations with expertise in equality issues and digital rights. Civil society's proximity to affected communities is essential to identify emerging harms and supporting early responses to any discriminatory AI practices.

5. Build knowledge and competence of non-discrimination

Ensure that all public authorities using or procuring AI systems, especially law enforcement, border management and migration agencies, receive mandatory training on anti-discrimination law, intersectionality and the ways in which algorithmic tools can perpetuate historical inequalities. Understanding both intentional and unintentional discrimination is necessary for responsible AI use.

6. Guarantee the participation of people belonging to groups at risk throughout the AI lifecycle

Adopt inclusive governance approaches to ensure that racialised communities and other groups at risk of discrimination are actively involved in defining the purpose, risk criteria, testing parameters and redress mechanisms of AI systems. Their experiential knowledge is necessary to detect harms invisible to purely technical evaluation.

7. Limit over-reliance on technological solutions and uphold human accountability

Recognise that technology cannot replace legal responsibility or ethical judgement. Establish clear accountability rules to ensure that decision-makers remain responsible for discriminatory outcomes that emerge from AI or automated systems. Human oversight and proportionality assessments must remain central in all security- and migration-related uses of AI or automated systems.

Appendix - Programme of the event

ADVANCING EQUALITY IN AN ERA OF DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

Thursday | 23 October 2025

Afternoon Session: Identifying Challenges & Solutions

13:00 – 14:00 | Security clearance

14:00 – 14:30 | Opening Session

- ▶ Moderator: **Bertil COTTIER**, ECRI's Chair

Speakers:

- ▶ **Michael O'FLAHERTY**, Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights (*video message*)
- ▶ **Katerina ŠIMÁCKOVÁ**, Judge & President of Section, European Court of Human Rights
- ▶ **Hadja LAHBIB**, European Union (EU) Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management (*video message*)

14:30 – 16:00 | Panel Discussion: State of Racism, Intolerance and related forms of Discrimination in Europe – Trends & Challenges

- ▶ Moderator: **Anne-Françoise TISSIER**, ECRI member in respect of France

Keynote and Introductory speeches by:

- ▶ **Bina D'COSTA**, Chair of the UN working group on people of African descent (*online*)
- ▶ **Sara HAMOOD**, Chief, Anti-Racial Discrimination Section, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- ▶ **Claudia LAM**, Deputy to the Director of the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe - Crossroads of Discrimination: the human rights situation of Roma and Travellers in the Council of Europe area
- ▶ **Evgenia GIAKOUMOPOULOU**, Head of SOGIESC Unit of the Council of Europe, Intersecting Inequalities: LGBTI Communities in Europe's Human Rights Landscape
- ▶ **Kristin HENRRARD**, Professor of International Law, Migration, Diversity and Justice Centre BSoG - Brussels School of Governance (*online*)

15:15 – 16:00 | Q&A

16:00 – 16:30 | Coffee Break

16:30– 17:30 | LABs : Tackling Key Challenges

Lab. #1. Safeguarding the Independence and Effectiveness of Equality Bodies in a Highly Polarised Political Environment: Risks, Responses and Strategies (Rooms G.04 and G.06)

- ▶ Facilitators (Lego® Serious Play® methodology) **Petra HARTMANN-QUINET** and **Julien QUINET** (*lively.work consulting*)

Lab description

This lab will explore how political polarisation affects the independence and effectiveness of equality bodies, identifying concrete risks and sharing strategies for institutional resilience. Through peer exchange, the session will focus on building collective responses and safeguarding mechanisms, including legal protections, strategic partnerships, and coordinated advocacy. It will also consider how cooperation with international actors like ECRI and CERD can help strengthen equality bodies under threat.

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

- ▶ *Have equality bodies experienced any form of political pressure or interference, and, if so, what type of pressure and how have they responded?*
- ▶ *What safeguards or resilience strategies have proven effective in preserving EB independence and authority?*
- ▶ *What types of collective support mechanisms or coordinated actions among equality bodies and international partners would be most useful in politically challenging times?*

Lab #2. From Recommendations to Results: Strengthening Cooperation Between Equality Bodies, ECRI and CERD for Greater National Impact (Room G.03)

- ▶ Moderators: **Niklas HOFMANN**, Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (Germany) and **Ioulietta BISOULI**, Director of the European Implementation Network (EIN)

Lab description

This lab will explore how equality bodies can more effectively engage with ECRI and CERD, both in terms of cooperation and in the practical use of their recommendations to influence positive developments at legislative or policy level while focusing on how equality bodies can integrate ECRI's General Policy Recommendations (GPRs), CERD's General Recommendations (GRs), and country-specific recommendations into their advocacy, reporting, and monitoring work. It will also identify ways to ensure that the cooperation between equality bodies and international bodies is sustained, strategic, and respectful of their respective mandates.

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

- ▶ *How can equality bodies better integrate ECRI and CERD recommendations (both thematic and country-specific) into their national advocacy and reporting work?*
- ▶ *What practical forms of cooperation between equality bodies, ECRI, and CERD have proved to be effective or could be strengthened further?*

- ▶ *What tools, resources, or coordination mechanisms would help equality bodies make better use of recommendations made by European and international bodies or networks in their national contexts?*

17:30 – 18:30 | From Challenges to Commitments: Plenary Reflections and Next Steps

- ▶ Moderator: **Johan FRIESTEDT**, Executive Secretary of ECRI

This session will bring together the key reflections and conclusions from the parallel lab's discussions. The Rapporteurs from each lab will present highlights of the debates, emerging trends, and concrete proposals for possible action. The session will serve as a space for open dialogue among all participants, allowing for cross-cutting reflections, identification of common challenges, and discussion about potential coordinated action. It will also explore how the insights generated can be followed up at national, European and international level, including through enhanced cooperation with ECRI, CERD, and peer bodies and institutions.

Cooperation projects in the field of anti-discrimination in Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership region

- ▶ **Angela LONGO**, Head of Anti-discrimination Cooperation Unit, Council of Europe

Enhancing multi-stakeholder responses to hate speech and hate crime' a Mission Driven Initiative funded through the EEA-Norway grants

- ▶ **Thorsten AFFLERBACH**, Head of the Inclusion and Anti-discrimination programmes Division, Council of Europe

18:30 | End of the first working day

ADVANCING EQUALITY IN AN ERA OF DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

Friday | 24 October 2025

Morning Session: Enhancing Impact and Collaboration

09:00 - 09:30 | Arrival of participants

09:30 - 10:30 | Panel Discussion: Protecting and Empowering Equality Bodies in Times of Democratic Backsliding: Legal Standards, Cooperation and Strategic Action

- ▶ Moderator: **Maria Daniella MAROUDA**, ECRI member in respect of Greece

This panel will explore how to reinforce their institutional position and effectiveness, with a focus on the evolving European and international legal landscape.

Speakers will reflect on the significance of ECRI's revised General Policy Recommendation (GPR) No. 2 on equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at the national level, the new EU Directive 2024/1499 of 7 May 2024 on minimum standards for equality bodies in areas relevant to ECRI and CERD, as well as the role of the forthcoming EU Anti-Racism Strategy for 2026–2030. The discussion will examine how these frameworks can contribute to safeguarding and strengthening the independence and effectiveness of equality bodies. Additional themes include cross-border cooperation, engagement with civil society, and the strategic use of recommendations issued by European and international bodies to advance national equality agendas.

Speakers:

- ▶ **Michał BALCERZAK**, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
- ▶ **Tuula HAATAINEN**, (Finland, SOC), PACE Rapporteur on Enhancing co-operation between parliaments and equality bodies (online)
- ▶ **Patrick CHARLIER**, Chair of the European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET)
- ▶ **Tena ŠIMONVIĆ EINWALTER**, First Vice-Chair of ECRI
- ▶ **Michaela MOUA**, EU Commission's Coordinator on combating racism

Guiding Questions for the Panel Discussion:

How can legal and policy frameworks like ECRI's GPR No. 2, CERD recommendations, and new EU legislation help equality bodies remain independent and impactful in the face of democratic backsliding?

What role can cross-border cooperation and peer learning among equality bodies play in safeguarding their institutional position and amplifying their work?

How can equality bodies better engage with civil society to build resilience, legitimacy, and broader societal impact in increasingly hostile environments?

In what ways can recommendations made by European and international bodies - both thematic and country-specific recommendations - be more effectively used to drive change at the national, regional or local level?

10:00 – 10:30 | Q&A

10:30 - 11:00 | Coffee Break & Networking

11:00 - 12:30 | Panel discussion: Algorithmic Bias and Racial Profiling: Safeguarding Equality in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

- ▶ Moderator **Tamás KADAR**, EQUINET Co-Director - Operations, Policy & Legal

Speakers:

- ▶ **Milla VIDINA**, Policy Officer - (EQUINET) AI Act: Technical standards and Art. 77 authorities (*online*)
- ▶ **Tiina VALONEN**, Chief Specialist, Head of Unit - Office of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (Finland) (*online*)
- ▶ **Wies DINSBACH**, programme manager Non-discrimination, and **Samantha van HEERWAARDEN-SMIDT**, legal policy advisor - Netherlands Institute for Human Rights
- ▶ **Oyidiya OJI**, Advocacy and Policy Advisor: Digital Right - European Network Against Racism (ENAR) (*online*)

In 2018, ECRI already commissioned an independent study on discrimination, artificial intelligence and algorithmic decision-making, which was prepared by Frederik Zuiderveen Borgesius. It was referenced when the 2024 Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Democracy and the Rule of Law (CoE Framework Convention on AI) was drawn up, when a Council of Europe study was prepared by Ivana Bartoletti and Raphaële Xenidis on the impact of artificial intelligence systems, their potential for promoting equality, including gender equality, and the risks they may cause in relation to non-discrimination (2023) and it foregrounds the draft Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on artificial intelligence and equality currently under development. At both European Union and Council of Europe levels, legal frameworks have been adopted or are in the process of being adopted. They aim at addressing risks to equality. Equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level are increasingly recognised as part of the institutional ecosystem dealing with AI and involved in monitoring action against unlawful algorithmic systems. While various legislations have the potential to enhance equality protection, their effectiveness might be undermined by existing gaps, particularly in relation to AI used by law enforcement agencies. Equality bodies therefore have a particularly important role to play in those areas to compensate any oversight deficiencies and ensure that persons and groups of persons at heightened risk of discrimination, particularly on the grounds of "race", national or ethnic background, and religion are offered meaningful protections.

Guiding Questions for the Panel Discussion:

- ▶ *Equality bodies may be given special powers under the EU AI Act (Art. 77- access to information) and the CoE Framework Convention on AI (Art. 27 – information and coordination rights). What are the opportunities and challenges that equality bodies may face in assuming these?*

- ▶ *What are the main areas of work with law enforcement agencies, including border control authorities?*
- ▶ *Are you aware of the deployment of algorithmic systems by law enforcement agencies, including at borders? Does your equality body plan to get involved in these specific contexts?*

12:00 – 12:30 | Q&A

12:30 | Closing Remarks & Next Steps

Speakers

- ▶ **Michael WHINE**, Chair of ECRI's Working Group on relations with Civil Society and Equality Bodies
- ▶ Short evaluation
- ▶ **Bertil COTTIER**, ECRI's Chair
- ▶ ECRI Secretariat

13:00 | END OF THE ANNUAL SEMINAR

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is a unique human rights monitoring body which specialises in questions relating to the fight against racism, intolerance and related discrimination on grounds of "race", colour, language, religion, citizenship, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics.

ECRI was set up by the first Summit of Heads of State and Government of the member states of the Council of Europe in 1993 and became operational in 1994.

ECRI is composed of 46 members appointed on the basis of their independence, impartiality, moral authority and expertise in dealing with issues of racism and intolerance. Each Council of Europe member state appoints one person to serve as a member of ECRI.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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