CommHR(2026)73

ECRI Annual Seminar with Equality Bodies
"The role of Equality Bodies in addressing hateful and discriminatory narratives in political and other public discourse"

Video message by Michael O'Flaherty,
Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

Strasbourg, 15 October 2026

Hello,

Thank you very much for inviting me to attend this conference and again I apologise that I am unable to be with you in person. This week I am in Warsaw attending a number of events. But friends, I think that the topic of this conference is so tight, timely and so necessary.

The hate that you will be engaging with, discussing, considering over these days is one I experience every day in my work. I see it in the hate directed against Jews. I am deeply worried about the rising levels of anti-Semitism in our societies.

I see the worrying level of hatred against Muslims, anti-Muslim hatred, and again, this is a growing problem that is as of yet under-acknowledged in at least some of our societies.

I see the marginalisation, the erection of every form of hate against members of the Roma and Traveller communities, a persistent hatred, but one we must tackle. I see the persecution levels of hate directed against members of the LGBTIQ communities, again in far too many, in many member states of the Council of Europe.

I see the impact of the hate. I see the extent to which it triggers fear, it triggers exclusion, the extent to which people are subject to every form of discrimination, subject to violence. I see the massive under-reporting of the phenomenon, not least because people do not have confidence in the authorities to take seriously their complaints and their concerns.

I see the great difficulty you have as equality bodies in engaging with the range of the hates that you have to confront in a context of sometimes at least a lack of political support and the lack, certainly, of the necessary resources to do your job properly.

For your conference today I encourage you to consider a number of actions.

The first is a point I would have made often in my previous role as Director of the Fundamental Rights Agency, but is no less important in my current capacity and that is we need to invest in the data.

We will not fix it if we do not measure it, and yet we do a poor job in many places of gathering data around the lived experience of being the victim of hate, including racialised hate, in so many different settings and contexts, and of course once we have the data we need to use it, we need to let it be the bedrock for solid policy and legal responses.

A second consideration that you might wish to have before you today, is the extent to which we, all of us but including equality bodies need to challenge our authorities, our governments to do a better job. They have to stamp out the expressions of hate when they come from political figures. They have to prosecute hate when it crosses the criminal line. They have to, as I said earlier, resource all of the necessary efforts and initiatives.

Still another duty that we all have and I know that it is before you, it is on your agenda, is the extent to which we all have to invest in building up societies that do not just tolerate difference but actively promote it as an essential element of what makes our societies thriving and fulfilling places.

And lastly, ultimately and most important of all, whatever we do we must do it not for but with the impacted communities. We will do so much better a job and indeed will be far more respectful of human rights when we work out every step of our analysis of the situation and the action we need to take in response to that situation, side by side, with the impacted community. I wish you every best wish for your considerations.

Thank you.