

## Strengthening the role of equality bodies across the EU: Council adopts two directives

Today the Council formally adopted two directives to strengthen the role of equality bodies across the EU.

Equality bodies were established to promote equal treatment, combat discrimination and offer assistance to victims. The new rules adopted today will improve the effectiveness of these bodies and guarantee their independence. The directives establish common EU-wide minimum requirements for equality bodies in a number of key areas, including:

- **enhanced competences** for equality bodies to combat discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation in the area of employment, and discrimination based on sex in the area of social security
- a legal requirement for equality bodies to be **independent** from external influence
- a legal requirement to provide equality bodies with sufficient human, technical and financial **resources**
- a requirement for public institutions to **consult equality bodies** on matters related to discrimination, and for equality bodies to be empowered to carry out activities to **prevent discrimination and promote equal treatment**, for example, by promoting positive action and equality mainstreaming
- increased powers to conduct **inquiries and engage in dispute resolution** in discrimination cases, in line with national law and practice

### Next steps

The directives will now be signed and will enter into force following publication in the EU's Official Journal. Member states will have two years to adapt their national legislation to the provisions of the directives.

### Background

Equality bodies are public institutions that protect and provide assistance to victims of discrimination. The EU's equality legislation stipulates that all member states must establish national equality bodies to deal with cases of discrimination on the grounds of sex, and racial or ethnic origin.

Under the existing legislation on equality bodies, member states have a wide margin of discretion, leading to significant differences across the EU as regards the competences, independence, resources, accessibility and effectiveness of such bodies.

On 7 December 2022 the Commission published two proposals to strengthen equality bodies:

- a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities between women and men in matters of employment and occupation, with Article 157 TFEU as the legal basis (ordinary legislative procedure)
- a proposal for a Council directive on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment between persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, equal treatment in the field of employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, equal treatment between women and men in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services, with Article 19(1) TFEU as the legal basis (consent procedure)
- [Social rights in the EU \(background information\)](#)