

Equinet

THE WAR ON UKRAINE AND ITS IMPACT ON EQUALITY IN EUROPE: THREE MONTHS ON 24.05.2022

In the face of war, upholding the principle of equality is as challenging as it is essential.

The aggression of the Russian Federation initiated against Ukraine and its people is not only violating human rights and international law on the territory of Ukraine, but it also has effects across borders. **In the three months since the start of the Russian military offensive in Ukraine, national equality bodies have gathered considerable knowledge and experience regarding the impacts of the war on equality in Europe.** Equality as a core European value motivates a shared concern for human dignity, and national equality bodies across Europe continue to uphold these principles by monitoring and responding to instances of discrimination triggered by the war. Different groups may face disproportionate risks in a situation of crisis or conflict, and some of them are more vulnerable to discrimination, including, for example, women, Roma, people of African or Asian descent, LGBTIQ+ people or people with disabilities. In the past months, **equality bodies across Europe have observed diverse discrimination challenges raised by the war in Ukraine.**

Across Europe, **Equinet members are observing differing treatment of refugees based on, for instance, their skin colour, ethnicity, (perceived) nationality or religious belief.** Many national equality bodies report instances of **discrimination against Roma refugees** in particular, leading to longer waiting times and reduced access to registration centres, transport from the borders, or appropriate housing. Roma have faced problems in obtaining civil registration and identity documents in Ukraine for many years, which is now also leading to obstacles as refugees.

Women and children are at particular risk regarding human trafficking and in some countries, are facing a lack of access to healthcare and reproductive health services, such as abortions. **Trans people** whose documents do not align with their gender identity and gender expression are facing issues as refugees in some countries.

Large groups or families fleeing from Ukraine sometimes cannot find **accommodation** that will allow them to stay together. When they find **employment**, some Ukrainian refugees are offered lower pay compared to nationals in similar positions. People with disabilities fleeing the war are facing **challenges crossing borders and reaching reception centres as some of these are not accessible**. Discrimination and **hate speech against people with Ukrainian or Russian ethnic origin** has been reported to equality bodies across Europe. In some instances, young Ukrainian men fleeing Ukraine have been particularly targeted, being blamed for not staying to fight. Some refugees are at risk of intersectional discrimination, on the basis of more than one characteristic.

Discrimination in any form cannot be tolerated – not in times of peace and not during war. **Equinet members express their full support and solidarity for the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, which holds the national equality body mandate**. As champions for the value of equality and defenders of the right to non-discrimination, national equality bodies are investigating discrimination complaints, providing recommendations and advice to employers and governments, monitoring media messages, and issuing public statements on the equality impacts of the war. However, **ensuring that solidarity and human dignity is extended to all persons regardless of their background is the responsibility of all**. **Therefore, it is essential that governments, employers, the media, and all other relevant actors act to prevent and stop discrimination and to ensure equal treatment to all people affected now and, in the future, including at times of crisis, conflict and war**. This is what compassion and respect for human dignity requires, this is in our shared constitutional traditions and values, and this is what EU law dictates.

The European Network of Equality Bodies and its members are well placed to lead and catalyse this work to ensure that everyone is treated with fairness regardless of who they are, including their ethnicity, gender, religious belief, age, sexual orientation or disability. This is the only way we can rebuild societies, where all people and social groups can flourish.