



European Year of Equal Opportunities for All 2007
What Role for the UK Voluntary Sector?
UKREN Briefing Paper

Introduction

On 17 May 2006 the European Parliament and the Council designated 2007 to be the *European Year of Equal Opportunities for All*.¹

The *European Year of Equal Opportunities for All* takes on the mantle of earlier initiatives such as the 2003 European Year of People with Disabilities, and marks the tenth anniversary of the 1997 European Year against Racism. It is a response by the European Commission to the call for enhanced public awareness initiatives that arose from its consultation on the *Green Paper on equality and non-discrimination in an enlarged EU*, and acknowledges that EU anti-discrimination legislation is not yet sufficiently known, understood and applied.

Why a European Year of Equal Opportunities for All?

Legislation alone is not enough to tackle the deep-rooted and multifaceted patterns of inequality which many people face today. A proactive strategy is required, one that is as sophisticated as the problems faced, and which sets out to change public attitudes by promoting tolerance and diversity, while increasing people's awareness of their rights and stimulating debates to focus on the principal barriers to a more inclusive and just society.

The special designation of Year 2007 is part of the overall *Framework Strategy on Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities for All*, which outlines the core activities planned by the Commission. In addition, the momentum created by Year 2007 should feed smoothly into the new *European Year of Intercultural Dialogue* proposed by the Commission for 2008.

What is the Year about?

Activities during 2007 will seek to raise awareness of the EU's existing – and substantial – equality and anti-discrimination legislation on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation and gender, as well as stimulating debate and exchanges of good practice.

¹ Decision no. 771/2006/EC

Four core objectives have been set for the Year:

Rights – to raise awareness of the right to equality and non-discrimination, and the problem of multiple discrimination. The European Year aims to make groups that are at risk of discrimination more aware of their rights and of existing European legislation in the field of anti-discrimination.

Representation – to stimulate a debate on ways to increase the participation of under-represented groups in society, in particular groups that are victims of discrimination, and to encourage a better balance between men and women in the process of that participation. The European Year will encourage discussion and reflection on the need to promote greater participation in society, and spirited action designed to combat discrimination.

Recognition – to celebrate and accommodate diversity and equality. The European Year will highlight the positive contribution that people, irrespective of their sex, racial and ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, can make to society as a whole, in particular by accentuating the benefits of diversity.

Respect – to promote a more cohesive society. The European Year will raise awareness of the importance of eliminating stereotypes, prejudice and violence, promoting good relations between all in society, in particular among young people, and promoting and disseminating the values that underlie the fight against discrimination.²

How will the Year 2007 be implemented?

The Commission has designed a two-pronged strategy for the Year, with activities taking place at both European and national levels.

Activities during the Year should include:

- *Meetings and events* connected with the objectives of the European Year, including a European launch event and individual national celebrations;
- *Information and educational campaigns and measures to disseminate and promote* the principles and values celebrated by the Year, and a Community-wide information campaign including the organisation of competitions;
- *Cooperation* with corporate, broadcasting and media organisations;
- *Community or nationwide surveys and studies* including an impact assessment and evaluation of the Year.

The Year's budget of €15 million covers preparatory activities in 2006 as well as the various events taking place during 2007 itself.

What happens at national level will be supported up to 50% from EU funds, and the allocation of funds will be based on the voting rights of the individual Member State in the EU Council. Funding will respond to a single grant application, to be submitted by each Member State, which describes the national strategy for the Year, the activities proposed that require funding, and the organisations that are to be responsible for the implementing each national plan.

² See Article 2, Decision No 771/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2006 establishing the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007) available from:
<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32006D0771:EN:HTML>

How does the Year 2007 relate to other European initiatives?

Legislative Framework

The fight against discrimination at Community level was accelerated by the introduction of Article 13 of the EC Treaty by means of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997. It represented a historic step forward, and in 2000, on the basis of that empowerment, the European Community adopted a package of two Directives (commonly referred to as the Race Directive and the Employment Framework Directive) and a Community Action Programme,³ complemented by a more recent Directive in 2004 on the prohibition of gender discrimination in goods and services,⁴ thereby demonstrating the Community's commitment to a society free from discrimination.

2007 will be a significant year for the European anti-discrimination law framework. The extra time allowed for some Member States to transpose the age and disability provisions of the Employment Directive into their own national legislation will have expired. This means that uniform protection will have been achieved (at least in theory!) throughout the EU. The next requirement for Member States is that, by 31 December 2007, they should transpose the provisions of the Gender Equality Directive 2004/113/EC into their national legal systems.

Framework Strategy for Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities for All

The main political idea behind the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All 2007 is embodied in and derived from the renewed emphasis of the Lisbon strategic objectives. In its 2005 Communication the Commission called for a 'society, which can integrate both the ageing and the young, particularly for the development of our workforce, where current dynamics cast a shadow over both long-term growth and social cohesion.'⁵ Eliminating discrimination so as to open up job and training opportunities to large groups of the EU population has been identified as important for a competitive and dynamic economy and society.

Further impetus derives from the recognition that while the EU has been a driving force in implementing the principle of equal treatment and in adopting effective anti-discrimination legislation, there are still a number of structural barriers faced by migrants, ethnic minorities, the disabled, older and younger workers and other vulnerable groups that have to be effectively tackled, and profound societal changes need to be introduced. This was emphasised in the Commission's Communication *Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities for All – a Framework Strategy*.⁶

The Framework Strategy aims both to reinforce individual legal protection against discrimination and to develop a positive approach to the promotion of equal opportunities. It maps out future priorities, key activities and planned outcomes for the Commission without designating an overall time-frame for implementation. Its seven defined areas of activity are: (1) ensuring legal protection; (2) assessing the need for new legal protections; (3) mainstreaming; (4) learning from good practice; (5) awareness-raising and cooperation; (6) special initiative on ethnic minorities; and (7) international cooperation.⁷

³ **Council Directive 2000/43/EC** implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin and **Council Directive 2000/78/EC** establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation
⁴ **Council Directive 2004/113/EC** implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services

⁵ COM (2005) 24 final, 2.2.2005, p.4

⁶ Available from http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/ev07/com07_en.pdf

⁷ For further details see the ENAR Fact Sheet on the Framework Strategy, No. 23 at <http://www.enar-eu.org/en/factsheets/index.shtml>

The decision to establish 2007 as the 'European Year of Equal Opportunities for All' was one of the key initiatives announced in the Framework Strategy

PROGRESS

The Framework Strategy is complemented by annual work plans under the Community Action Programme to Combat Discrimination, which will be replaced in 2007 by PROGRESS, a new Community Programme for Employment and Social Security.

The aim of the PROGRESS programme is to provide financial support for the implementation of the European Union's objectives in the field of employment and social affairs for the period 2007–2013 and offers the possibility for co-funding the operating costs of European-level networks. The analysis and mutual learning activities, awareness-raising and dissemination campaigns and assistance for the main players will be funded from a budget of €628.8.

Final adoption of the PROGRESS programme is scheduled for October 2006; however, an open Framework Call for Proposals addressed to organisations active in combating discrimination has already been published.⁸

Roundtables organised by ENAR National Coordinations in Member States

As the Year 2007 is a European initiative which will impact directly on the work of national Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), it should aim to provide as much added value as possible to the work of those concerned with the fight against racism. The European Network Against Racism (ENAR), a network of European NGOs working to combat racism in all the EU Member States and itself an outcome of the 1997 European Year Against Racism, has been facilitating this through its National Coordinations⁹ by organising Round Tables on the Year 2007 throughout the EU between June and October 2006.

These roundtables aim to:

- inform anti-racist NGOs and, more broadly, NGOs working on the six discrimination grounds about the Year and its objectives;
- collect NGOs' thoughts and expectations of how the challenges of Year 2007 can be met in each national context;
- provide an opportunity for networking across the discrimination grounds and develop joint proposals on possible awareness-raising projects covering those different discrimination grounds,
- assist in formulating ideas and reflections on how to contribute in a meaningful manner to European Year 2007.

Outcomes from the roundtables will be discussed within the network. A report will be drafted in order to influence preparatory work and implementation at EU level and to provide a contribution to national activities.

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/tenders/tenders_en.cfm?id=965

⁹ In the case of the UK, the UK Race & Europe Network (UKREN) acts as the national coordination for ENAR

How does the Year 2007 relate to national activities?

2006 and 2007 are important milestones for UK equality legislation. The Government has a manifesto commitment to introduce a Single Equality Bill during this Parliament. The Discrimination Law Review and the Equalities Review, announced in February 2005, are working in tandem and are designed to lead to publication of the Single Equality Bill. The Discrimination Law Review's objective is to develop a simpler and fairer legal framework and address inconsistencies in the current anti-discrimination legislation.

Consultations have been held for both Reviews during 2006 with the participation of key stakeholders and interest groups. Publication of the Discrimination Law Review consultation document will be timed in response to the publication of the Equalities Review final report, and is expected in February 2007.

On 1 October 2006, the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 came into force to protect workers from age discrimination. Under the new law it will be illegal for employers to discriminate against employees, trainees or job seekers because of their age. Employers must ensure that all workers, regardless of age, have the same rights in terms of training and promotion.

How is the Year 2007 to be implemented in the UK?

The Commission intends to devolve much of the activity during the Year to National Implementing Bodies (NIB). NIBs will be responsible for defining the national strategy and also for selecting the individual activities to be proposed for Community funding in accordance with 'operational guidelines' developed by the Commission. In other words the Commission will make national bodies largely responsible for the implementation of the Year; however, they must do so in accordance with common guidelines, in particular with the requirement that all the grounds of discrimination have to be addressed and dealt with fairly.

All Member States are required to submit their national strategy and priorities for the Year 2007 to the European Commission by 15 December 2006. The UK has yet to designate a National Implementing Body. Currently, the work around the Year 2007 in the UK is undertaken by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is likely to be involved too.

UKREN Roundtable

The National Implementing Body is required to consult on a regular basis and cooperate closely with civil society and with organisations representing the interest of those who are potentially exposed to discrimination. Although the Body has not been appointed yet, the roundtable offers an exclusive opportunity for relevant stakeholders to discuss issues around the Year and to identify possible joint projects and proposals across different strands of equality. It follows the model of other roundtable discussions organised in Member States by ENAR's National Coordinations.¹⁰

The roundtable is designed around the four core objectives of the Year. Each objective will be looked at and discussed through three main questions:

- What are the expectations in terms of issues that need to be dealt with at national level?
- What are the challenges facing the UK in preparation of the Year?
- What are the common themes for 2007 that require action across the strands, and that could develop into joint initiatives to be implemented in the Year?

¹⁰ Information on roundtables held in other Member States can be found on the ENAR website <http://www.enar.eu.org/en/national/roundtables.shtml>

Useful Documents and Links

European Commission's website on the European Year 2007

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equality2007/index_en.htm

Commission Communication on Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities for all – A Framework Strategy, COM(2005) 224 final

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/public/pubst_en.htm

Communication to the Spring European Council Working Together For Growth And Jobs – A New Start For The Lisbon Strategy, COM (2005) 24 final, 2.2.2005

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0024en01.pdf

Decision No 771/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2006 establishing the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007) — towards a just society

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_146/l_14620060531en00010007.pdf

GREEN PAPER - Equality and Non-Discrimination in an Enlarged European Union (June 2004)

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/policy/aneval/green_en.htm

Proposal for a Decision Establishing a Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS

http://europa.eu.int/eurlex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2004/com2004_0488en01.pdf

Common position of the Council on the adoption of a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/docs/com2006_440_en.pdf

European anti-discrimination law review (April 2006)

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fundamental_rights/public/pubst_en.htm

ENAR's webpage on the Round Tables

<http://www.enar-eu.org/en/national/roundtables.shtml>

ENAR Fact Sheet No. 23 on the Commission's communication on non-discrimination and equal opportunities – A Framework Strategy

<http://www.enar-eu.org/en/factsheets/index.shtml>

Introductory film on anti-discrimination policies in 11 languages

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/movie/film_en.htm