

## BACKGROUND PAPER

# Equality Data Initiative

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### The Project

Reliable data is needed to ensure equality and actively fight discrimination. Data does this by measuring inequalities and allowing the development of positive solutions to inequality such as targeted social policies. Data also allows us monitor whether these measures work.

The Equality Data Initiative (EDI), initiated by the Open Society Foundations, and implemented in collaboration with the [Migration Policy Group](#) and the [European Network Against Racism](#), aims to develop research on, and increase awareness of, the need for data regarding specific minority groups in the European Union (EU). Its ultimate goal is to enhance the measurability of (in)equality for groups at risk of discrimination. Equality data refers to all types of disaggregated data used to assess the comparative situation of specific groups at risk of discrimination. Such data can be collected through different techniques, i.e. in the framework of public statistics (census, administrative files), ad hoc surveys, internal monitoring by enterprises or public administrations, judicial system data, and data from complaints received by equality bodies.

### Why Now?

Inequality – social, economic, political – persists in Europe. The only way to effectively monitor the impact of the EU's anti-discrimination directives (Racial Equality Directive and Employment Equality Directive) and national policies is through equality data and statistics. Data collection is a key feature of policy evaluation and policy formulation.

### *Country research focus*

The project focuses on Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Romania and Sweden in the field of public education and on France in the field of public employment.

## - Background Research and First Equality Data Symposium

The Migration Policy Group examined the legal and policy background on equality data in the seven countries that are part of the project. It further looked at the best options and methods for equality data collection related to race, ethnicity and disability for the purpose of monitoring equality in the field of public education and employment. The research provided an overview of the possible windows for advocacy and litigation at national level as well as concrete policy recommendations to advance equality data in the selected member-states.

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"The general principle in the selected countries is the prohibition of processing sensitive data, although there are both exemptions to this prohibition and situations which are excluded from its scope. Thus, the opportunity for such data collection exists in a range of specific situations."

Equality Data Initiative, comparative report, 2013

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In October 2013, the European Network Against Racism and the Open Society Foundations held the first Equality Data Symposium Brussels. It gathered academics, statisticians, researchers, NGO representatives and national and EU officials who shared their perspectives and work on the collection of equality data.

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"It is necessary to keep the purpose of data gathering in mind. Particular sets of data are not useful for everything; discerning their appropriateness to certain situations is key. In the past, the mantra was that data did not exist; nowadays, the mantra is to operationalize the data into strategy."

Andrey Ivanov (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights), Closing Speech, Symposium on Equality Data Collection, October 24, 2013

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## - National Consultations and Equality Data Initiative Report

EU member-states have primarily expressed concerns about the collection of ethnic and disability data. The EU and international human rights institutions have limited powers to enforce data collection obligations at the national level. It was thus crucial to operate at the national level to revive the debate on the collection of equality data and foster a change of attitudes among authorities and the public. In the framework of the Equality Data Initiative project, we conducted meetings with relevant stakeholder in the seven member-states selected for the project between March and August 2014. Representatives from ethnic and racial minorities and people with disabilities participated in group discussions.

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"The field of gender discrimination shows that data can really change things. We have to find a clever way to collect these data and ensure that it's only used for anti-discrimination purposes. "

Participant at national stakeholders meeting in Germany

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The final report *Ethnic Origin and Disability Data Collection in Europe: Measuring Inequality-Combating Discrimination* published in November 2014 analyzes the diversity of approaches and practices of equality data collection in the European Union. It brings together desk research and the conclusions of the national consultations and puts forward recommendations for action at both the national and EU levels in order to achieve effective change in the field of equality data.

The Second Equality Data Symposium in Brussels presented the report to representatives of EU member-states, public and private companies, academics, EU institutions, demographers, equality bodies, foundations and non-governmental organizations.

Some of the report's main conclusions are:

- The European Commission is well placed to leverage national debates and curtail the various unlawful practices presently in use by different member states.
- Equality data should be collected on the basis of "binding core principles" which needs to be adopted at the EU level.
- The purposes of data collection have to be specifically defined.
- The development of disability and ethnic origin categories requires first consultation with all the communities.
- Disability categories need to be demedicalized and special educational needs categories should be more widely used in education.
- Advocacy and legal challenges are needed to steer national debates away from taboos, question unlawful, harmful or simply unsuitable data collection practices, and call for the inclusion of disability and ethnic minority communities in the process.

*Relevant EU Directives and international legal texts – data collection:*

[Racial Equality Directive \(2000/43/EC\)](#);

[Employment Equality Directive \(2000/78\)](#);

[Data Protection Directive \(1995/46\)](#);

[Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol \(CRPD\)](#);

[European Convention on Human Rights](#);

[Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#);

[European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) (reports);

[International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination \(ICERD\)](#).

*EU Surveys on discrimination:*

[Special Eurobarometer 263 on Discrimination in the European Union](#) (European Commission, 2006);

[Eurobarometer 2012 on perceptions of discrimination in the EU](#) (European Commission, 2012);

[EU-MIDIS: European Union minorities and discrimination survey](#) (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009);

[Roma at glance](#) (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2012).