Open letter: European and national equality civil society networks and organisations react to the portfolio of the Commissioner-designate for Preparedness, Crisis Management and Equality

article, non-discrimination, asylum, hate crime

In light of the recent unveiling of the new European Commission, European and national equality civil society networks and organisations wish to express their shock and dismay over the downgrading of the Equality portfolio compared to the previous mandate.

When the President of the European Commission delayed announcing the new College due to the lack of female Commissioners, we were hopeful that this signalled a commitment to strengthen the Equality portfolio and advancing the EU's vision for a "Union of Equality." Instead, we are disappointed that this delay appears to have been more a performative gesture regarding an expected "gender quota" than a genuine commitment to substance.

The shift from Equality being a stand-alone portfolio to now being combined with Crisis Management and Preparedness under the same Commissioner poses a significant risk that the latter will be prioritised to the detriment of the former. Given crises' urgent and often overwhelming nature, we fear that equality issues will be sidelined in favour of crisis management. This new configuration **risks undermining the consistent and diligent implementation of the Equality agenda**, as crises like pandemics, wars, and economic or environmental disasters will likely dominate the Commissioner's time and focus. Recent years have shown that crises can easily overwhelm even the most dedicated officials.

Despite the ambitious goal of building a Union of Equality, **the mission letter fails to grant the Commissioner-designate a broad mandate to lead the fight against structural and intersectional discrimination or to advance anti-discrimination legislation**. Worrisome is also the complete omission of age discrimination, a ground for action under EU treaties, marking a step backwards from the previous Commissioner's mandate. The letter also fails to underpin these objectives with the necessary Commission services as it only refers to the Equality Taskforce.

We are also concerned by the lack of long-term consideration of gender equality based on collective values, knowledge and behaviours acquired through education and life-long learning. We regret the absence of long-term investment in education and future generations, which is essential to allowing the EU to « shift from reaction to proactive readiness » in the field.

Gabriela Hraba?ová, the Director of the European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network, stated that *"With equality tacked onto crisis management, efforts to address antigypsyism, racism, and intersectional discrimination against Europe's racialised minorities will likely be overshadowed or significantly diminished."*

Sabine Saliba, Secretary General of Eurochild, stated, *''Considering global conflicts, the increasing effects of climate change, and the importance of non-discrimination policies, we believe these issues warrant more focused attention. The integration of the two portfolios may risk sidelining essential efforts to uphold the rights of all children,*

including those facing unique vulnerabilities due to their circumstances, such as children with disabilities, Roma children and children with a migrant background.''

Farah Abdi, Policy Officer at TGEU, stated, "*The Mission Letters show a worrying disconnect between equality and key areas like democracy and justice, sidelining protections for LGBTI people, especially trans refugees, who face heightened risks to their fundamental rights. Without committing to a strong legislative push, the renewed LGBTIQ Equality Strategy risks further marginalisation at a critical time."*

Maciej Kucharczyk, Secretary General of AGE Platform Europe, *commented on behalf of their network of more than 100 organisations, directly representing millions of older persons in Europe. "At a time when inequalities are increasing in our societies across all population and age groups, the EU must step up – not scale down – its efforts to achieve a 'Union of Equality'. It is completely inappropriate to lump together such an important issue for the EU's internal and external affairs under the broad Preparedness and Crisis Management portfolio. We are particularly concerned by the lack of any reference to the fight against age discrimination in the new equality portfolio, which is a clear downgrade from the mandate of the past Commissioner. There can be no true 'Union of Equality' unless the Commission takes action on age discrimination alongside other grounds".*

Together, ERGO Network and other equality-focused networks and civil society organisations **call on the European Commission's leadership to ensure that equality remains a central priority in the EU's work. We urge President Ursula von der Leyen to reaffirm the EU's commitment to the Union of Equality and equip the Commissioner with the resources and capacity needed to fulfil this role effectively.**

Given the inexplicable absence of DG JUST and DG EMPL from the Mission Letter—departments that oversee the EU Anti-Racism Coordinator and the units responsible for the Union of Equality—**we seek clarification from the Commission on how the Equality portfolio will be implemented structurally and practically**. A genuine commitment to equality should also include **recruiting people of diverse backgrounds** within the Commissioner's cabinet.

Sincerely yours,

The signatory organisations below

- **European Networks:**
  European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network, Brussels
- Eurochild
- European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)
- European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)
- European Network Against Racism (ENAR)
- European Anti-Poverty Network
- Equinox – Initiative for Racial Justice
- AGE Platform Europe
- European Disability Forum
- Social Platform
- European Roma Rights Center
- European Civic Forum
- TGEU (Trans Europe and Central Asia)
- Eurodiaconia
- Feminist Collective of Romani Gender Experts
- Quality Education in Europe for Sustainable Social Transformation (QUEST)
- Dynamo International
- ternYpe – International Roma Youth Network
- Hope and Homes for Children

- International Step by Step Association-ISSA
- OII Organisation Intersex International Europe e.V.
- Romnja Feminist Library
- Diaspora Vote

National organisations:

- Romano Centro, Austria
- Minority Initiative, Austria
- Waterford Integration Services, Ireland
- Changemakers Lab, Greece
- Greek Forum of Migrants, Greece
- Equal Opportunities Initiative Association, Bulgaria
- Roma Forum, Serbia
- Amalipe, Bulgaria
- Integro Association, Bulgaria
- Roma Women Platform ROMNI, Moldova
- Estonian Human Rights Centre, Estonia
- Phiren Amenca, Hungary
- Romni APS, Italy
- Central Council of German Sinti and Roma (Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma), Germany
- Melde- und Informationsstelle Antiziganismus (MIA), Germany
- Amaro Drom, Germany
- Zero Discrimination Association, Turkey
- Advancing Together, Kosovo
- Trajosko Drom, Sweden
- Roma Community Centre, Lithuania
- La voix des rroms, France
- Regional Roma Educational Youth Association-RROMA, North Macedonia
- Nevo Parudimos, Romania
- Roma Advocacy and Research Centre, Slovakia
- RomanoNet, Czechia
- Roma Women Fund “Chirikli”, Ukraine
- Jaw Dikh Foundation, Poland
- Roma Active Albania, Albania
- Presencia Gitana, Spain
- FAGIC – Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Cataluña, Spain
- E-Romnja, Romania
- Migrant Tales, Finland
- Helsinki Deaconess Institute Foundation sr, Finland
- The Finnish Roma Association, Finland