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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This *perspective* aims to:

- Explore the specific nature of the contribution that can be made by equality bodies to protecting and fulfilling economic and social rights.
- Establish the contribution being made by equality bodies to the enjoyment of economic and social rights without discrimination.
- Identify how this contribution might be further reinforced.

Equality bodies make a particular, additional, and unique contribution to the protection and fulfilment of economic and social rights. This is due to their specific mandate and to the particular traditions that have evolved over time in the field of seeking to prevent discrimination, accommodate diversity, and achieve full equality in practice.

Equality bodies:

- Provide a non-discrimination foundation to economic and social rights.
- Contribute a diversity perspective to economic and social rights.
- Draw in partners in pursuing economic and social rights.
- Infuse economic and social rights with an ambition for equality.

The legal work of equality bodies under equal treatment legislation provides a non-discrimination foundation to economic and social rights. This includes supporting and representing claimants or hearing and mediating cases, particularly in relation to employment, equal pay, labour market programmes, and in relation to public services or publicly funded services in education, housing and health fields. This contribution can be amplified where equal treatment legislation goes beyond non-discrimination to impose positive duties on employers. Equality bodies that implement equal treatment legislation that includes a ground of socio-economic status can be better placed to make this contribution.

Equality bodies contribute a diversity perspective to economic and social rights by making visible the economic and social situation of different groups in society. These initiatives include general data gathering and analysis initiatives and specific pieces of research. Some equality bodies are involved in monitoring international human rights instruments and this allows them to bring a focus on taking diversity into account in their implementation. Equality bodies' work of commenting on legislation and making policy recommendations in policy areas concerned provides another route to bring this diversity perspective to bear.

Equality bodies draw in partners to the work on economic and social rights through the formal partnership arrangements with key stakeholders they have developed in their work on issues relevant to these rights. This has included

working directly with individual employers and service providers to implement good equality, diversity and non-discrimination practice. It has included supporting practice by duty bearers to comply with outcomes and recommendations from casework and inquiries. Equality bodies have also worked to enhance the capacity of stakeholders to devise and implement good equality, diversity and non-discrimination practice through guidance and training.

Action by equality bodies on mainstreaming equality in public policy, especially economic policy and social policy, can infuse economic and social rights with an ambition to achieve equality. European equal treatment legislation allows Member States to maintain or adopt measures that permit action by employers and service providers to achieve full equality in practice. The promotion and deployment of positive action by equality bodies has an important contribution to make to infusing these rights with an ambition for equality.

Equality bodies could make explicit their specific contribution to the protection of economic and social rights. Particular actions could be identified and goals could be set in this regard. Equality bodies could develop and deepen their economic expertise and their capacity for economic analysis to enhance their contribution in this field.

Equinet could build a debate on the specific contribution to be made by equality bodies to the protection of economic and social rights and on the differentiation between equality and human rights. This could be developed through the *cooperation platform on advancing social and economic rights and socio-economic equality*, in partnership with the Council of Europe, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, and the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions. Equinet could develop exchanges, training, and peer learning on equality bodies contributing to the protection and fulfilment of economic and social rights.

The authorities at European and Member State level could ensure a broad mandate for equality bodies to ensure they can make their contribution to the protection and fulfilment of economic and social rights. In particular, the mandate of equality bodies could be expanded to include the ground of socio-economic status and the powers of equality bodies could be expanded to include mandatory consultation with equality bodies on new legislation. Steps could be taken to ensure that equality bodies are allocated sufficient resources and powers to fulfil their roles and potential and to ensure a parity between work on equality and work on human rights in bodies that are established to pursue both of these mandates in order to maximise their contribution to the protection and fulfilment of economic and social rights.