



# **Equality Indicators – what are they and why are they so important?**

**Trevor Phillips, European Fundamental Rights Agency, 12 May 2011**

Thank you so much for your kind introduction.

This is the second time I've been to Vienna to meet with the FRA on the issue of measurement and indicators. I last came over in March and it's good to be back again so soon. I want to thank Ilze and Morten for the invitation, for their leadership and I'd also like to thank your colleague Jo Goodey for her visit to London last week, to address a seminar we organised on a similar topic with the British Council. I had the privilege of hearing her speak; and besides letting us know about the FRA's own work, I was grateful for the way that she challenged us on our work. The more concrete and robust our debate, the better our results will be in the end.

I want to make three points today.

- First of all, I will talk about the business case for equality indicators. Why do we think data and analysis matter and why are they beginning to matter more? This discussion is not just one for geeks and researchers; this is where the political action is going to be over the next 5 to 10 years.
- Secondly, I want to say a few words about the UK experience with indicators and our own work as an NHRI and an equality regulator.

- Lastly I want to say a few words about challenges for the future.

Before any of that, I would like to say that we are great supporters of the work of the FRA. Many of your outputs are also an indication that our organisations are moving in the same direction in the way we think about these things which is reassuring for us - we aren't alone!

I'll also mention here the work of the OHCHR, about which Craig has just spoken. Your development of a set of indicators to assess compliance with human rights instruments has been exceedingly valuable to us: we will be making good use of them in our Human Rights Review methodology and I look forward to further discussions of them as things progress.

I should start by saying a word about why all this matters, not just for experts but for everyone.

### **The Business Case**

This issue to start with is to ask how can indicators contribute to improving the fundamental / human rights situation?

On the face of it, it's hard to argue with the assertion that good authoritative comparable data is valuable for organisations like ours; it helps us make the case for particular things. Without evidence no one will ever be convinced of the need for change. And that evidence has to be based on incontestable data. But why make a fuss about the detail? Isn't there just right and wrong? Why do we need sets of indicators and measurement frameworks and so on? Is this level of sophistication worth the commitment of resource and energy?

After all, what Ilze said earlier is right: life is not a laboratory. Sometimes the single case is all that matters. We don't need percentages to tell us that refusing to serve someone in a restaurant because of their gender

or race or sexual orientation is wrong - and we only need one example to know that we need to act.

But she is also right to say that there is more to equality and human rights than the single case. What we have learnt in the UK over the past two decades is that disadvantage is more subtle, more multifaceted than just individual discrimination; we need tools that can deal with that more complex challenge.

Morten's metaphor of driving in a forest at night is a good one; a wise person will take a map. But let me stretch the metaphor a bit. Actually, if we are driving at night on a familiar, well-lit road through the trees, we might risk the trip without our map. But the real world isn't like that; it isn't obvious, drawn in black and white. In our world of equality and human rights, most of the policy terrain is still uncharted; but we do know it's difficult and deceptive, full of hidden obstacles, and dangerous ravines. Second, what's worse, every time we stand back and look at the landscape its contours have changed. That's why we need the sophisticated, detailed map - and why we need to keep it constantly updated - perhaps one day we'll even have an equality measurement app for our iPods.

Third, if you don't know where you're starting from it's hard to know what's changed and what needs to be changed further – and this is what evidence gives us, a starting point, or a benchmark for action. That was the purpose of our Review “How Fair is Britain”? – but more on that in a moment.

I want to emphasise though that from the EHRC's point of view, what we do domestically isn't enough. To do our job well, we need to work with others; comparison and benchmarking are essential. So we need every

EU country to put gathering data at the heart of its work on equality. We can legislate all we like, both in Brussels and domestically, to reduce what we think are the causes of inequality but we can't know that what we're doing has the right effect or any effect at all, unless we have the information we need. In fact we can't be sure that we're legislating for the right remedies or for the important outcomes unless we know the real situation.

So this isn't just administrative or academic: today, we are marking a path towards a new theory of change. It could be called a scientific or forensic approach - one that puts an emphasis on evidence; on progress, rather than process; and on change for the better, rather than good intentions. We aren't yet there. We are at the start of the road as Aurel said, of creating, in Craig's beautifully elegant phrase "the science of human dignity". Let me offer you an example of the way that this approach can make a profound and real-world difference.

### **The Situation in the UK**

The big equality story at the moment in the UK is probably the question of women on boards: that is to say, diversity in the leadership of public companies.

A report has been published by Lord Davis, who was appointed by the new government to examine this. There is absolutely no doubt, if you look at his report, that the single most important and convincing thing about it, is the comparison he has made between the UK, Norway, and Australia. Australia particularly has made dramatic strides over the last two years, by the simple expedient of an agreement with their stock exchange. Two years ago the proportion of women recruited to Boards was 8.9 per cent - last year it was 27 per cent. Now the figures in themselves are startling, but the point I want to make here is that the

impact on our domestic debate came because of one piece of information, which was an international comparator.

You can't know any of this by accident, or by talking to somebody in the supermarket. You have to measure it.

If all we were concerned about were individual discrimination, then it would be right that measurement isn't that significant strategically. But as I suggested earlier, we know that discrimination isn't just one on one. We know that much arises from habit, from inertia, and from cultural practice. We know that some patterns of discrimination are so subtly woven into society's way of doing things that no individual act is of itself illegal or challengeable under law; but that taken together those small acts of neglect or thoughtlessness can add up to a pattern of disadvantage for women, disabled people, LGBT people or ethnic minorities.

It is this fact (this calculus) that perhaps marks out the traditional, basic anti-discrimination proposition from the more modern and sophisticated pro-equality approach. It is why aggregate evidence is so vital, and why we at the EHRC have started to invest heavily in this kind of work.

So, now, let me describe some of the steps we have taken along this path.

Last year we launched a review which is called "How Fair is Britain?".

It's our most ambitious piece of work since we came into existence 3 years ago. Frankly, if your work was simply measured by the number of kilograms, we would be way out in front of everyone else. At 750 pages, this is pretty monumental, if we had all the data that we should have, it would have probably been about 2000 pages. My colleague here who was really responsible – Anna Henry – can probably tell you more about the statistics. Since we launched it, the executive summary – has been

downloaded 73,000 times. The whole thing has been download 25,000 times, which I reckon would make us a best seller.

We think it's important because it's the first time in our society that we've tried to do it. It is probably, and I may be over claiming, it is probably the most complete attempt at this anywhere in the world so far. It is based on 40 of the 80 or so indicators developed by the Equality Measurement Framework, which we published in 2009 – to which many of the people in this room contributed, so thank you all. This year we will publish a similar volume, which this time will focus on human rights. In 2012 we will publish a further volume which assesses what we call “good relations” – that is to say the dimensions of relations between groups of individuals – and all of these reports we will use to assess progress against our mandate.

I want to say a few words about the main themes emerging from the Review.

As we worked, we discovered some things that didn't surprise us at all, and we discovered quite a lot of things that did surprise us, and I want to dwell on those for a moment, particularly looking at one of the areas with which I'm particularly familiar, and which is a big part of what FRA does, and that is the areas of **race and ethnicity**.

Now there is some **good news** here, which is, for example; older workers in the UK are weathering the recession better than others; the life expectancy gap between men and women is closing; surprisingly black women are more likely to be in full time employment than any other group of women – whether this is good news or not I'm absolutely sure, we think that this might be because they're actually doing two jobs; Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage women in the UK are more likely to be employed as professionals than Bangladeshi and Pakistani men.

There are also **inequalities that are persisting**: girls are outperforming boys at virtually every level, but they're not reaping the rewards of their academic success in the labour market. We don't know if this is due to straight forward discrimination, or whether it is – and I think this is more likely – job segregation: boys into construction and things that involve numbers and steering; girls doing things that involve looking after people and are paid by the public sector – but we don't know though.

By the way, data gathering about minority groups isn't just about minority groups and doesn't just benefit minorities. In the UK, ethnic monitoring in education has over the past decade revealed the steady emergence of poor white boys a key problem demographic. This a fact that has attracted a great deal of attention, and interestingly, support for our analytic process from commentators who can normally be relied on to dismiss any defence of minority rights. So there are political dividends here in making the work we do better understood as a contribution to the whole society's well-being.

Returning to our analysis, when we looked at adults of working age – disabled people are half as likely to have a degree as non-disable people, and that's not just about including learning disabled people, this is all kinds of disabled people.

In the area of employment the gender gap goes on, the ethnic employment gap continues, and even for ethnic groups who are thought to be doing well, there is a pay penalty of the offence of working whilst not white: Chinese men earn 11 per cent less than their similarly qualified white counterparts; Indian 13 per cent.

Lastly I want to say a few words about **emerging inequalities** and this is a consequence principally of the most significant demographic trend of our time, and that is the ageing society. Today there are 175,000 children in Britain who care for relatives older than themselves; there

225,000 sick or disabled people who spend many hours a week looking after an ailing spouse or sibling. In the next decade we expect the proportion of the number of people in the UK who are over 85 to have doubled, and that means that there is a need for care, which is a dramatically increase from where we were before – we estimate that the need for care of all kinds is going to rise by 87 per cent over the first half of this century, and most of it will be provided by relatives. Today, 1 in 8 people in England provide unpaid care to adults, and we're estimating that the need for informal care is projected to rise by 90 per cent by 2041. You only need to think about this for 15 seconds to think about (a) social consequences; and the cost consequences if we are going to throw the responsibility for this back on to individuals, and of course that feeds in to major questions about pensions.

We think that this taken together tells us some things about opportunity in the United Kingdom. It has led us to identify 5 key gateways: health and wellbeing; education and inclusion; work and wealth; safety and security; and autonomy and choice, and their significance in terms of impact on opportunity. This we believe should have an important influence on the way that the UK plans for recovery - to make this an inclusive recovery that employs all the people's talents rather than spends wastefully on welfare for the excluded.

### **Human Rights Indicators**

We now intend to expand these to include indicators into the human rights sphere, and here I wholly endorse the OHCHR approach set out by Craig this morning.

In fact our equality measurement framework used human rights principles as a starting point, using the ideas of Amartya Sen and essential 'capabilities' that everyone needs to live and to thrive.

The natural extension of this is to look at our human rights obligations, and the HRMF does just this, capturing more of the obligations of the state in terms of the structures of human rights legislation. Anna will go into this in her presentation but the important thing to note for now is that this approach enables us to look at our treaty obligations, and the experiences of people in the UK from both an equality, and a human rights perspective.

### **Challenges for the Future**

But let me lastly say a few words about what is still to be done, and where I hope we can work together.

I think that there are a number of things which between us we could start to think about.

The underlying principle is that it would be helpful if everybody had data, and if that data were comparable.

Let me suggest a few further questions:

- How do we focus our work to meet the challenge of the economic downturn? – And how do we understand the impact it has on different groups better? Maybe we should consider a regular survey of the effects of recession and recovery on different social groups?
- Secondly, how can we understand from indicators where we need to put more effort into research, where do we need more additional evidence?
- Thirdly, what are the common summary indicators that will enable pan-European comparison and rankings, which will tell us how well we've moved, but also tell us where our diversity is significant? Obviously, we don't want to apply the same rules to everybody in Europe.

- Fourthly, how can we learn from each other to better capture the experiences of invisible or marginalised groups in Europe?

That's enough from me. I agree with Aurel, that in taking the lead here, the FRA is opening a new chapter on the use of data, by bringing innovation, judgement analysis and insight to our work. We absolutely support that work and want to play a part in moving us to the next stage in the fight for equality and human rights.

Thank you very much for taking the time to listen to me.

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