

ECRI's Round Table in Portugal

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BRIEFING PAPER

ECRI's Round Table in Portugal is part of a series of national round tables in the member States of the Council of Europe, which are organized in the framework of ECRI's new Programme of Action on Relations with Civil Society.

The reasoning behind this new Programme of Action is that racism and intolerance can only be successfully countered if civil society is actively engaged in this fight: tackling racism and intolerance requires not only action on the part of governments (to whom ECRI's recommendations are addressed), but also the full involvement of civil society. ECRI attaches great importance to ensuring that its anti-racism message filters down to the whole of civil society, and also to involving the various sectors of society in an intercultural dialogue based on mutual respect.

The main themes of this Round Table are: (1) ECRI's report on Portugal; (2) challenges ahead for Portugal in the field of asylum and immigration; (3) Portugal's anti-discrimination legislation; and (3) the situation of Roma/Gypsies in Portugal.

In its recently published [Report on Portugal](#), ECRI observes that problems persist with the application of anti-racism and discrimination laws, which in practice falls short of the protection provided for by the legislation in force. Immigrants and Roma/Gypsies often find themselves in very precarious situations because of administrative failings, which hinder or delay their attempts to secure recognition of their rights, and are therefore confronted with acts of discrimination in their day-to-day lives. The lack of precise and sufficient data on these acts makes it difficult to assess the impact of measures taken to combat racism and intolerance.

At the same time ECRI acknowledges that over recent years, Portugal has taken a number of steps to combat racism and intolerance. This includes the adoption of Law No. 134/99 prohibiting racial discrimination and the launch of a wide range of activities aimed at promoting the integration of immigrants and Roma/Gypsies in education and work.

All those issues will be discussed with representatives of the responsible governmental agencies and the victims of discrimination in the light of Portugal's existing anti-discrimination legislation and the newly adopted National Plan for Immigration, which

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foresees among other things the creation of an Observatory for Immigration and the establishment of a National Network of Support Centres for Immigrants. A special emphasis will be also put on practical initiatives for immigrants and Roma/Gypsies on the local level, such as launched by the Municipal Council for Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities of Lisbon and the Portuguese Intercultural Secretariat. An open debate among all relevant actors will help to identify together effective ways of better implementing those extremely important initiatives and will also give impulses for further reform.

Finally, this Round Table also acknowledges the important role that the media play in the fight against racism and intolerance. The mass media have a unique position in society: the way in which they create and disseminate common cultural references may have an important influence on people's attitudes. Media representations of the different groups in society, the way they portray relationships between these groups and the way in which they report incidents, may, in some cases, fuel stereotypes, prejudices and racist discourse -often unintentionally- rather than combating these phenomena. Media reporting needs to be especially sensitive when it comes to ethnic, cultural and religious relations in society, but unfortunately there sometimes still seems to be a lack of awareness of these issues. Initiatives like the launch of the Journalism Prize "Immigration and Ethnic Minorities - Journalism for Tolerance" by the High Commissioner for Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities are therefore strongly to be encouraged.