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10 PRINCIPLES for INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES and STRONGER DEMOCRACIES

This document presents 10 fundamental principles for building societies where diversity is recognised and valued as a strength and an opportunity for social, cultural, economic and democratic progress.

It aims to demonstrate, in a clear and accessible manner, how diversity and inclusion can strengthen democracies for all, making them more responsive and resilient – capable of adapting to change, addressing challenges and safeguarding democratic values, human rights and the rule of law.

Inspired by the Council of Europe's intercultural inclusion approach, the "10 Principles" provide a framework for action by public authorities at all levels of governance, civil society, local communities, academia, the private sector and individuals. They seek to mobilise a wide range of actors committed to promoting these Principles and translating them into concrete public policies and actions across different sectors and contexts. Their universal scope and accessible language are intended to make them relevant and comprehensible to a broad audience.

They are based on the understanding that diversity, when recognised and managed proactively, becomes a valuable resource for the development and well-being of society as a whole. They acknowledge that people have different starting points and may face multiple barriers to inclusion and participation that can combine and reinforce each other. Addressing structural and specific barriers and inequalities, including gender inequalities, is essential for building inclusive, just societies and stronger democracies.

For the Council of Europe, intercultural inclusion is an active strategy that, by promoting equality, recognising diversity, encouraging interaction, and fostering participation, enables everyone to feel an essential part of society and to have a meaningful influence over public decisions.

Intercultural inclusion is key to democracy because it strengthens trust, social cohesion, and democratic legitimacy, turning diversity into a driving force for dialogue, collaboration, and shared prosperity for the benefit of all.

The 10 Principles contribute to the New Democratic Pact for Europe promoted by the Council of Europe, offering a framework of principles for a Europe where democracy is built every day, with everyone and for everyone.

1. We live together, free and equal

Equality and dignity are the starting points for a democratic society. They enable everyone to live freely, reach their full potential, and contribute to a thriving society.



This initiative is a contribution towards the
New Democratic Pact for Europe



Inclusion means understanding that each of us is unique and taking active steps to ensure that everyone can enjoy the same rights and accesses the same opportunities regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances. It also means recognising that people have different starting points and may face different barriers. Achieving equality requires taking these differences into account and, when necessary, adopting appropriate measures to address persistent disadvantages and ensure that no one is left behind.

Equality strengthens society by fostering fairness, and a shared sense of belonging. When people feel valued and treated with dignity, they participate, contribute and co-operate more, and support the institutions that serve them. This makes communities more cohesive and better equipped to face challenges together.

2. We embrace diversity as a strength and an opportunity

We recognise diversity as an intrinsic feature of our societies. By understanding, respecting, and actively embracing it, we create environments where everyone is valued, belongs, can thrive and contribute, making society more prosperous, and creative.

A society where diversity is managed inclusively, and which focuses on what unites us, functions better: it becomes more pluralistic and just. It also strengthens the bond between institutions and citizens. When institutions and public spaces reflect the diversity of society through their representatives, their workforce, their policies and public presence, they gain legitimacy and are perceived as being closer to the people they serve.

In this way, we build a vibrant and open democracy, in which everyone feels represented and part of a common project, for the benefit of all.

3. We act against all forms of discrimination and hatred, in all spheres of life

We affirm that discrimination and hatred have no place in our societies. They cause real harm to people, undermine dignity, and weaken the trust that everyone needs to live freely and confidently.

We actively identify and address discriminatory treatment wherever it occurs, whether based on sex, gender, “race”¹, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity and

¹ Since all human beings belong to the same species, the Council of Europe rejects theories based on the existence of different “races”. However, this document uses the term “race” in order to ensure that those persons who are generally and erroneously perceived as “belonging to another race” are not excluded from its application.





expression, sex characteristics, age, state of health, disability, marital status, migrant or refugee status, or any other characteristic.

This means removing the obstacles that prevent people from participating, challenging prejudice and hate, and responding to all forms of discrimination, including when different barriers combine and reinforce each other, or when discriminatory practices are rooted in the way institutions, organisations and social systems operate.

By preventing, confronting and combatting discrimination and hatred, and by ensuring effective assistance and safe reporting channels, we reduce exclusion and polarisation, and help building societies where everyone feels secure, thereby reinforcing the foundations of a resilient and inclusive democracy.

4. We build connections and foster positive interaction, to promote a sense of belonging

We believe that people thrive when they can meet, connect, and recognise each other as valued members of the same community, with shared rights and responsibilities. Meaningful interaction helps us understand our shared humanity, appreciate the richness of our diverse experiences, and build the relationships through which a sense of belonging can grow over time.

We create spaces and opportunities for people to engage in open and respectful dialogue and, learn from each other in everyday life. These encounters strengthen relationships and reduce prejudice, allowing people from different backgrounds to see each other as equals and as part of a shared, pluralistic “we.”

By fostering these connections, we reduce bias, polarisation, and social divisions, reinforcing the bonds that make living together possible. This strengthens trust and solidarity, contributing to more stable and secure democratic societies.

5. We uphold everyone’s right to participate

We support active involvement in community and public life. Everyone has the right and ability to contribute their voice to the decisions that shape their lives and the well-being of the community.

Meaningful participation is not limited to voting. It means taking part in social, cultural, economic, and political structures that organise daily life: neighbourhood groups, associations, schools, workplaces, cultural, religious and sports initiatives, consultative mechanisms and other decision-making spaces. It requires creating easily accessible opportunities, empowering individuals to engage, be heard, and influence collective choices. It also requires public institutions to protect and support the organisational structures, spaces and initiatives that make these contributions possible.





By supporting participation in all its forms, we help people feel part of their community and of a common project. At the same time, we strengthen the connection between people and their institutions, improve the responsiveness of public action, and ensure that community needs and aspirations are clearly expressed. This builds trust, enhances democratic legitimacy, and leads to greater well-being and fairer outcomes for society as a whole.

An engaged and committed society is less vulnerable to internal or external threats, as citizens play an active role in defending democratic values and preventing setbacks or abuses of power.

6. We make inclusion part of everyday life and every area of public action

We believe that inclusion should shape the way we live, work, and relate to one another.

We make inclusion part of every aspect of life: at work, in neighbourhoods, in schools, in health and social services, in cultural and leisure activities, and in the spaces where people meet and make decisions. This means that institutions, civil society and individuals act together so that all practices, services, and decisions reflect the needs and realities of everyone. When efforts connect in this way, actions become more coherent and resources are better used.

By mainstreaming equality and inclusion in all aspects of public action and daily life, we reduce inequalities and strengthen trust between people and their institutions. This improves the quality and impact of public decisions, contributing to a more cohesive and effective democracy.

7. We build an inclusive society with everyone, for everyone's benefit

We believe that inclusion is a shared endeavour that involves and benefits all of us. Everyone has a role to play, and everyone benefits from it.

Inclusion grows when people recognise their shared stake in the wellbeing of the whole community. Inclusive initiatives, spaces, and practices are open to everyone because they strengthen the well-being of the whole community, not only those who may face disadvantages.

By understanding inclusion as a common good, we reduce unnecessary rivalries and competition, ease tensions, and create conditions for appreciating diversity rather than fearing it. When resources and opportunities are shared, their positive effects multiply, fostering collaboration and shared growth. This lowers feelings of injustice and marginalisation, and helps building fairer, more supportive and dynamic communities capable of sustaining a vibrant and resilient democracy.





8. We build the skills to live together in diversity

We believe that intercultural competence is essential for living together in diverse societies. It enables everyone to understand and value differences, communicate respectfully, and recognise the dignity and perspectives of others.

From an early age, through education, awareness-raising and everyday experiences, we develop the values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding needed to navigate diversity constructively, such as empathy, cooperation, self-awareness, and the ability to challenge unfounded assumptions.

By strengthening intercultural competences, we participate confidently in democratic life, reduce prejudice, prevent discrimination, and foster societies which are more open to dialogue, and better equipped to resolve conflicts peacefully.

9. We strive to safeguard a respectful, safe, pluralistic and trustworthy digital environment

Today, much of our daily lives take place in the digital environment. In it, we interact with others, inform ourselves, share ideas, and participate in public affairs.

We believe that the digital space should be governed by the same values that underpin our democratic societies. It should be a pluralistic, respectful and safe environment, where freedom of expression goes hand in hand with responsibility and respect for the dignity and rights of all people.

Disinformation and online hate speech harm individuals and groups, generate fear and mistrust, and weaken living together. When messages that divide and dehumanise circulate, or when falsehoods are spread, dialogue deteriorates and democracy suffers.

In response to this, we promote critical thinking, media and digital literacy, and access to reliable information. We also encourage public institutions, digital platforms, the media, social organisations and citizens to take responsibility and action for preventing information manipulation, increasing transparency and standing against content that incites hatred or violates rights.

By caring for the digital space, we strengthen trust, living together and informed participation, ensuring that technology serves an inclusive, plural and cohesive society.





10. We measure, assess, share and learn to improve

We believe that inclusive democracies grow stronger when decisions are guided by evidence, reflection, and a willingness to learn.

Measuring what we do and understanding its impact helps us act with clarity, honesty, and purpose. By using reliable data, tracking progress, assessing results, and sharing knowledge openly, we can build on what works, address shortcomings and continuously improve our efforts. Evidence also helps identify inequalities, assess whether policies and actions have different effects on different groups, and ensure that improvements benefit everyone.

Learning also means listening to those affected and considering different experiences and perspectives, so that actions can be adapted to changing needs and circumstances. By combining knowledge, reflection, and dialogue, we can make better decisions and ensure that our efforts remain relevant and effective.

By valuing honest assessment and openness to learning, we strengthen people's trust in how decisions are made and in the institutions that serve them. This helps ensure that actions remain relevant and fair, and respond to what communities need, supporting more legitimate, adaptable, and resilient democracies.

