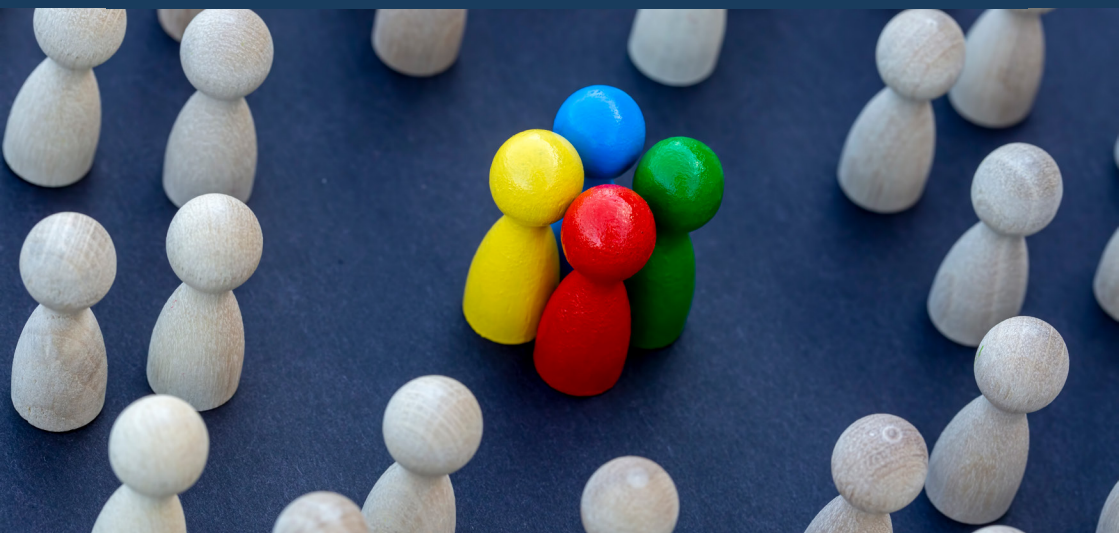


ECRI annual seminar with Equality Bodies

Exposing Racism, Intolerance, and Inequalities

concept note



Commemorating 30 Years of ECRI

17-18 October 2024, Strasbourg



European Commission
against Racism and Intolerance
ECRI
Commission européenne
contre le racisme et l'intolérance



Introduction

The exceptional 2024 session of the annual seminar of the **European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)** with equality bodies, which is organised in close consultation with the **European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET)** and the **United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)**, will provide an opportunity to take stock of 30 years of monitoring work and will focus on two specific critical issues: i) racism and intolerance in health care, and ii) structural discrimination and institutional racism.

ECRI: 30 years of monitoring work

The year 2024 marks ECRI's 30th year of existence. Since its first plenary meeting in 1994 in Strasbourg (France), **ECRI has been carefully monitoring racism, intolerance and related discrimination in all Council of Europe member states.** Over the past three decades, ECRI's work has helped to shape national laws, policies and other measures aimed at ensuring effective equality and countering various forms of racism, including antigypsyism, xenophobia, racism against Black persons/people of African descent, antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism, as well as different forms of intolerance, including LGBTI-phobia.

ECRI has provided Council of Europe member states with guidance to prevent and combat these phenomena effectively by issuing general policy and country-specific recommendations. It has also consistently prompted action to set up or strengthen equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level and supported the adoption of binding standards in this respect at the level of the European Union.

Racism and Intolerance in health care

It emerged from ECRI's findings during the sixth monitoring cycle, which started in 2019, that **certain groups in vulnerable situations, such as Roma and Travellers, refugees and migrants, nationals with a migration background, Black persons/people of African descent and LGBTI persons, have been particularly exposed to racism, intolerance and related discrimination in the health sector.** In various country reports, ECRI has emphasised the need for preventive action and accountability measures in this area.¹ ECRI also drew on the work of other Council of Europe bodies, such as the European Committee of Social Rights, and key international partners, including CERD.

In a special session, the annual seminar will address barriers faced by communities of concern to ECRI, CERD and equality bodies in accessing quality health care. ECRI's work on inequalities in health care, as highlighted in its country monitoring reports, will be discussed together with experts and representatives of relevant bodies.

Structural discrimination and institutional racism

In its **General Policy Recommendation (GPR) No. 2 (revised)** on equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level, ECRI considers structural discrimination as referring to *“rules, norms, routines, patterns of attitudes and behaviour in institutions and other societal structures that, consciously or unconsciously, present obstacles to groups or individuals in accessing the same rights and opportunities as others and that contribute to less favourable outcomes for them than for the majority of the population”*.²

Questions about structural inequalities have often been raised in times of crises, such as health, humanitarian and economic crises, or as a result of individual cases of racist abuse considered to be indicative of more general, deep-rooted forms of racism. It also emerged that crises have not only exposed but also deepened underlying structural inequalities in various policy areas, such as education, employment and health care, as was the case during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.³

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1. See Factsheet on tackling racism and intolerance in the area of health care, published by the Secretariat of ECRI, in May 2024.
 2. See paragraph 20 of the Explanatory Memorandum to GPR No. 2 (revised).
 3. For more details, see ECRI's statements and recent annual reports, in particular for the years 2020 to 2023.

When it comes to “institutional racism”, ECRI has referred to it in cases of perceived general failure to address racial prejudice within police or other public institutions. The 1999 Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, which looked into the authorities’ response to the racist murder of a young Black man, Stephen Lawrence, described institutional racism as *“the collective failure of a [public] organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people”*.⁴

Institutional racism has often taken the form of widespread racist abuse by law enforcement or other public officials, including racial profiling, or the general failure of the relevant authorities to investigate racist abuse. It has also emerged that resorting to artificial intelligence systems by police or other public institutions to address crime or fraud may entail increasing risks of generating, perpetuating or developing some forms of institutional racism.

The European Court of Human Rights⁵, ECRI, CERD and equality bodies have played a crucial role in recognising, preventing and combating patterns of racism and racial discrimination across Europe and beyond. By collaborating with civil society actors, parliamentary structures and government bodies, equality bodies serve as crucial catalysts for promoting equality and tackling entrenched forms of discrimination and racism.⁶

In a session dedicated to this topic, the annual seminar will explore policies and practices within institutions that disproportionately disadvantage certain groups of concern to ECRI, CERD and equality bodies.

Speakers invited to share their insights and experiences in the introduction and the three substantive sessions of the annual seminar will include, in addition to ECRI members and representatives of equality bodies, representatives of international partners, academics and civil society actors, as well as victims of discrimination or racist abuse.

4. See paragraph 6 of ECRI's second report on the United Kingdom.

5. See, in this connection, the judgment of 16 April 2019 in the case of *Lingurar v. Romania*, in which the Court used the term “institutionalised racism” in the context of police action targeting Roma communities.

6. EQUINET, *Standards for Equality Bodies* (2024).

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is a unique human rights monitoring body which specialises in questions relating to the fight against racism, discrimination (on grounds of “race”, ethnic/national origin, colour, citizenship, religion, language, sexual orientation and gender identity), xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance in Europe.

ECRI was set up by the first Summit of Heads of State and Government of the member states of the Council of Europe in 1993 and became operational in 1994. As ECRI marks 30 years of combating racism and intolerance, current trends show that these are still persistent problems in European societies that require renewed efforts to be overcome.

ECRI is composed of 46 members appointed on the basis of their independence, impartiality, moral authority and expertise in dealing with issues of racism, discrimination, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance. Each Council of Europe member state appoints one person to serve as a member of ECRI.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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