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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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European Commission
against Racism and Intolerance

ECRI
Commission européenne
contre le racisme et l'intolérance

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ECRI webinar on inclusive education in times of Covid-19

with a special focus on migrant and Roma children

co-organised by ECRI and the Greek Chairmanship of the
Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

30 June, 14.30 (CET)

Concept Note

Background

In March 2020 almost all European countries, as an urgent measure to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus, abandoned education of school children in class and replaced it with distance learning. This meant that children had to study from home, with support at least implicitly expected from their parents. In May and June many schools around Europe started teaching in classrooms again, but mostly on a limited scale, often in smaller groups with alternating student attendance, while putting in place measures to ensure physical distancing between pupils. Despite the partial re-opening of some schools, many children had to continue fully or partially studying from home. Very few countries kept their primary and secondary schools open throughout whilst some others decided that schools remain closed until the end of the school year.

While home schooling due to school closures or other special schooling arrangements involving home schooling has been a challenge for parents even in the best of circumstances, some parents have for reasons of availability or limited linguistic or other skills not been in a position to support their children's learning effectively, which has undoubtedly had adverse effects as regards educational continuity. Disadvantaged students have struggled to adapt to distance learning, including for reasons of insufficient or complete lack of access to online learning platforms or even to more basic technical means for communicating with their teachers. Pending conclusive evidence, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on schooling arrangements is likely to have long term consequences, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalised pupils such as children of migrant or Roma background, magnifying already-existing disparities within the education systems. As many school systems are now offering online learning modalities, it is therefore imperative to tackle the so-called digital divide in moving forward.

In this context, reference should be made to ECRI's [General Policy Recommendation N°10](#) on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education. The principles contained in this instrument must be used as a compass in the design and deployment of measures with a view to address the problems arising from the ongoing pandemic in the education sector. More than ever, it has become crucial to ensure compulsory, free and quality education for all, as anchored in [key legal instruments at the UN level](#), including in [goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030](#), and at [Council of Europe level](#), such as in the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (CM/Rec(2010)7).

Studies should be undertaken, in conjunction with civil society organisations, on the situation of children from minority groups in the school system, by compiling statistics on their attendance and completion rates; drop-out rates; results achieved and progress made; as well as to gather information required to identify problems facing pupils from minority groups in the school environment in order to introduce policies to solve these problems.

Undertaking research, based on data collection, on the impact of the period of home schooling imposed by the closure of schools during the Covid-19 pandemic will allow the future preparation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive educational policies aimed at supporting pupils, including in particular those who may be disadvantaged because of origin, ethnicity or status, in the later stages of the Covid-19 pandemic and during any future temporary closures of schools, caused by health concerns or any other reasons. Moreover, preparing school children of all backgrounds for the doubtlessly forthcoming digitalisation of school education can only be beneficial and of help in closing the digital divide in the future.

Teachers working at all levels also need to be better prepared for any educational disruption in the future and increased digitalisation of education, especially those with migrant or Roma children in

their classes. They must be offered appropriate training so as to educate and respond the needs of pupils from different background.¹

Objectives

The webinar aims to bring together a number of key international and national stakeholders working against racism and discrimination on grounds of ethnic/national background or migrant status, including experts on matters relating to education, to discuss ways and means of countering what in practice may amount to exacerbated forms of discrimination faced by certain groups of pupils, in particular migrant and/or Roma children, during times of exceptional schooling arrangements as a result of government responses to the Covid-19 pandemic or other similar situations.

The discussions will allow the participants to seek remedies to any instances of increased structural discrimination faced by the disadvantaged pupils as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, facilitated by case studies on difficulties faced by teachers in ensuring inclusive education for such pupils during the pandemic, together with examples of good practices to mitigate any negative effects of school closures on such disadvantaged children.

More concretely, the discussions will contribute to identify key principles of action in the area of inclusive education in times of Covid-19 and will support ECRI in its country monitoring work on this topic. Further, the conclusions of the webinar will help Council of Europe member states to develop appropriate education policies and related contingency plans for times of health or other crises.

Participants

Apart from the members of ECRI and National Liaison Officers, permanent representatives of member states to the Council of Europe, members of relevant Council of Europe bodies and representatives of national equality bodies will be invited to participate, as will representatives of relevant international organisations, NGOs and teacher trade-unions.

Speakers, structure and practical arrangements of the webinar.

The webinar will be chaired and moderated by ECRI.

Apart from an address by the Greek Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Miltiadis Varvitsiotis,, speakers will also include representatives of relevant Council of Europe bodies, UNESCO and civil society.

First-hand experiences will be shared by two primary school teachers with a high share of children with a migrant background or Roma in their classes.

The webinar is scheduled to last 90 minutes with 60 minutes reserved for speakers' interventions, followed by 30 minutes reserved for questions and discussions. Participants will be invited to pose questions through the chat function of the Blue Jeans Events online platform which will be used for the webinar and presented to the speakers by the chair of the webinar.

The webinar will be held without interpretation. Interventions will be made in English.

Beyond the platform used by the invited participants, it is foreseen that the webinar will be livestreamed on YouTube and/or Facebook.

¹ See, in this connection, section III (1) of ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 10.