

# RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BLACK PERSONS / PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

## Factsheet



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# **RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BLACK PERSONS / PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT**

Factsheet

**Secretariat of ECRI  
European Commission  
against Racism and Intolerance**

**Council of Europe**

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*The present factsheet has been prepared by the Secretariat of ECRI. It presents ECRI's key recommendations on preventing and combating racism and discrimination against Black persons / people of African descent, as reflected in ECRI's country reports adopted and made public over the last 30 years.*

# Introduction

**E**CRI has all too often observed that Black persons and people of African descent continue to face racism and discrimination across Europe. Anti-Black racism<sup>1</sup> and discrimination can take several forms, such as hate speech, hate-motivated violence, direct and indirect discrimination in various areas of life (including education), negative stereotyping in the media, inequality in representation, notably in public services, and racial profiling by law enforcement officials. ECRI has also recognised its link to the legacy and negative impact of colonialism and slavery, which have led to deep-rooted racism against Black persons and people of African descent in many European countries.<sup>2</sup>

This factsheet outlines key recommendations made by ECRI on this topic in its country monitoring reports that were made public between March 1994 and March 2024. They complement other relevant recommendations aiming at addressing various other forms of racism and intolerance as well. ECRI remains alert to emerging or persisting issues of a structural or institutional nature that may impact Black persons and people of African descent in particular, as illustrated by its 2020 statement and related observations on racism in policing.<sup>3</sup>

By using an intersectional approach in its country monitoring work, ECRI has also observed specific vulnerabilities experienced in some countries, for example, by Black persons and people of African descent with a migrant background, Black Muslims<sup>4</sup>, as well as by Black women and women of African descent. ECRI acknowledges that the specific national context can have a bearing on the prevalence and nature of anti-Black racism and discrimination. However, recent research shows the persisting manifestation of racism and discrimination against Black persons and people of African descent in many different European countries.<sup>5</sup>

The present factsheet is meant to be a tool supplementing relevant texts of a general nature adopted by ECRI. It should also be seen as work in progress and not considered as exhaustive. New issues may emerge in the coming years, notably from new technology and other developments, which will require new responses. Furthermore, ECRI's recommendations should not be taken in isolation from the work of other Council of Europe and international bodies, including the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, the Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as, at United Nations level, CERD and the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent. It should also be borne in mind that the precise nature of ECRI's recommendations and the legal contexts and policy areas in which these recommendations have been made may vary significantly, depending on circumstances in the countries in question.

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- 1 The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has also recognised anti-Black racism, or Afrophobia, as a specific form of racism, and has called on Council of Europe member States to take determined action to eradicate it. See PACE Resolution **2389 (2021)** entitled “Combating Afrophobia, or anti-Black racism, in Europe”, adopted on 24 June 2021. See also the **General Recommendation No. 34 (2011)** on racial discrimination against people of African descent of the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).
  - 2 ECRI **Statement** on racism in policing, including racial profiling, and systemic racism, adopted by ECRI at its 82<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting (30 June – 2 July 2020). See also ECRI **Annual Report 2020**, §§ 22-26.
  - 3 ECRI **Statement** on racism in policing, including racial profiling, and systemic racism, adopted by ECRI at its 82<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting (30 June – 2 July 2020).
  - 4 ECRI **General Policy Recommendation No. 5** (revised) on preventing and combating anti-Muslim racism and discrimination, Part II, § 12.
  - 5 See, for instance, the **report** by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), “Being Black in the EU – Experiences of people of African descent”, published in October 2023.

## Improving data collection and conducting surveys

1. Public institutions should endeavour to fill any gap in official data collection when it comes to discrimination and social exclusion of Black persons and people of African descent.<sup>6</sup>
2. The authorities should monitor the situation of Black communities and people of African descent and, where necessary, commission an independent study into their experiences of racism and discrimination so as to identify fields where action is most urgently needed and to adopt tangible measures to counter anti-Black racism and discrimination.<sup>7</sup>

## Raising awareness and strengthening history teaching

3. The authorities should conduct awareness-raising campaigns targeting the general population and public officials about racism and discrimination encountered by Black persons and people of African descent, and the need to counter these phenomena.<sup>8</sup> The authorities should involve civil society actors, in particular non-governmental organisations representing the interests of Black persons and people of African descent, in the design and implementation of such campaigns.<sup>9</sup>
4. The authorities should make use of relevant initiatives, such as the International Decade for People of African Descent, to roll-out anti-hate campaigns.<sup>10</sup>
5. The authorities should increase awareness about the historical dimensions of racism and inequalities, especially colonialism and slavery, whose legacies have affected the whole of Europe.<sup>11</sup> Where relevant, they should initiate a debate on the question of reparations, beyond strictly financial matters, in respect of slave trade and colonialism, in consultation with civil society, and should consider drawing up policies in this regard.<sup>12</sup>
6. Where relevant, the authorities should strengthen history teaching that encompasses any role played by their country in the development and abolition of slavery, and any forms of racial discrimination and hate-motivated violence in connection with the colonial period. In this context, teaching and school textbooks should also cover the history and contribution of Black persons and people of African descent to society.<sup>13</sup>

## Supporting the media in developing bias-free reporting

7. The authorities should initiate, without encroaching on media independence, a process in which the media and their representative organisations develop guidance to tackle routines and reflexes that have stigmatising effects on groups of concern, ECRI including Black persons and people of African descent, and to ensure balanced reporting on issues relating to such groups.<sup>14</sup>

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6 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Denmark, §§ 88-89.

7 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Denmark, § 89; ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Switzerland, § 140; ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Germany, § 110.

8 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Switzerland, § 141.

9 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Austria, § 91.

10 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on the Czech Republic, § 44; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Finland, § 80.

11 ECRI **Statement** on racism in policing, including racial profiling, and systemic racism, adopted by ECRI at its 82<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting (30 June – 2 July 2020).

12 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on France, § 67.

13 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Portugal, § 37.

14 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on the Netherlands, § 44.



## Improving equality in representation

8. The authorities should intensify the recruitment of Black teachers and teachers of African descent in educational establishments in order for teaching staff to reflect better the communities they serve, and the authorities should make efforts to retain them in the teaching profession.<sup>15</sup>
9. The authorities should promote the recruitment, career development, and retention of Black persons and people of African descent and other minority ethnic staff in law enforcement agencies and other sectors of the criminal justice system.<sup>16</sup>

## Addressing discrimination and inequalities in various areas of life

10. The authorities should take strong measures, in close co-operation with relevant communities, to address any discrimination against Black persons and people of African descent in the areas of housing and employment.<sup>17</sup>
11. The authorities should pay special attention to the inequalities affecting Black children and adults / children and adults of African descent who are in need of support in the area of education.<sup>18</sup>
12. The authorities should address inequalities in health status and access to health services experienced by members of Black communities / people of African descent and other minority ethnic groups, including in relation to any disproportionate representation among users of mental health services. In this connection, the authorities should consider actions to raise awareness of racism and the need for more cultural awareness and sensitivity amongst staff working in health institutions.<sup>19</sup>
13. The authorities should address discrimination against Black persons and people of African descent when accessing public places, including bars and restaurants, as well as discrimination taking place in the entertainment industry. To this end, the relevant authorities should make full use, as appropriate, of the criminal and civil law anti-discrimination provisions.<sup>20</sup>

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15 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on the United Kingdom, § 80.

16 ECRI second-cycle **report** on Ireland, § 59; ECRI fourth-cycle **report**, § 121, and fifth-cycle **report** on the United Kingdom, § 130.

17 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Finland, § 80.

18 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Portugal, § 78.

19 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on the United Kingdom, § 106.

20 ECRI second-cycle **report** on Malta, § 22; ECRI third-cycle **report** on Sweden, § 75.

## Addressing racism against Black persons / people of African descent in sports<sup>21</sup>

14. The authorities should take a set of measures to tackle racism against Black persons and people of African descent in football and other sports, including by encouraging the development, by national football and other sports associations, of appropriate codes of conduct that would address, inter alia, the issue of racism among fans.<sup>22</sup>
15. The authorities should prescribe and make use of appropriate administrative, civil, or criminal provisions to tackle racism at sports events, including - where appropriate - the disbanding of extremist groups engaging in racist activities, such as those targeting Black athletes and athletes of African descent.<sup>23</sup>

## Tackling hate crime under-reporting

16. The authorities should develop frameworks for dialogue and co-operation between law enforcement agencies and members of Black communities and people of African descent as well as other minority groups<sup>24</sup> and encourage them to come forward and report hate incidents / cases of hate crime against Black persons and people of African descent in order to tackle any underreporting.<sup>25</sup>

## Addressing abusive practices of law enforcement officials<sup>26</sup>

17. The authorities should address any forms of abuse on the part of law enforcement officials against Black persons and people of African descent as well as persons belonging to other ethnic minority groups, including by enhancing police accountability.<sup>27</sup>
18. As concerns communication with the media and participation in public debates relating to policing, law enforcement and other public officials should avoid generalisations and the stigmatisation of Black persons and people of African descent, as well as other communities.<sup>28</sup>
19. Law enforcement agencies should ensure that Black persons and people of African descent are not subject to stop-and-searches or constraint measures without reasonable suspicion, including through awareness-raising activities and training for law enforcement officials as well as, where appropriate, the application of sanctions.<sup>29</sup>

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21 For more information on the issue of racism in the field of sport, see ECRI **General Policy Recommendation No. 12** on combating racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport.

22 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Poland, § 112; ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Belgium, § 103; ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on France, § 85.

23 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Poland, § 89.

24 **ECRI Statement** on racist police abuse, including racial profiling, and systemic racism, adopted by ECRI at its 82nd plenary meeting (30 June – 2 July 2020); ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Austria, §§ 59-60; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Switzerland, § 61.

25 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Portugal, § 48.

26 For more information on the issue of racism in policing, see ECRI **General Policy Recommendation No. 11** on combating racism and racial discrimination in policing; ECRI Secretariat **Factsheet** on preventing and combating racism and intolerance within law enforcement agencies.

27 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Portugal, §§ 64-65; ECRI third-cycle **report** on Austria, §§ 62 and 86.

28 ECRI third-cycle **report** on Austria, § 62.

29 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Switzerland, §§ 71-72.

20. The authorities should ensure that the operation of databases used by law enforcement officials do not pose any risks of direct or indirect racial discrimination or of strengthening a tendency for racial profiling by law enforcement officials, for example where a database has a disproportionate representation of Black persons and people of African descent, and other persons belonging to ethnic minority groups.<sup>30</sup>
21. The authorities should take action to monitor and, where relevant, improve the situation of Black and other ethnic minority groups in the criminal justice system in practice.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on the United Kingdom, §§ 207-208.

<sup>31</sup> ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on the United Kingdom, § 120.

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.