

Preventing and combating racism and intolerance in and through education

Factsheet



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**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 aims to present ECRI's key recommendations on preventing and combating racism and intolerance in and through education¹, as reflected in particular in ECRI's country reports adopted and made public in the context of the fifth and sixth monitoring cycles during the period ranging from February 2014 to February 2024.

1 For the purpose of this factsheet, the focus is intentionally kept on “**formal education**” as per article 2.c. of the **Council of Europe's Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education**, i.e. “*the structured education and training system that runs from pre-primary and primary through secondary school and on to university. It takes place, as a rule, at general or vocational educational institutions and leads to certification.*”

INTRODUCTION

Education is an important tool for tackling racism and intolerance, while being at the same time an area in which both phenomena may exist, proliferate, and lead to discrimination, with harmful consequences for children and the society as a whole. ECRI has always strongly highlighted that human rights education based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination, as well as tolerance and respect for diversity, can play a key role in combating racism and intolerance.

ECRI's **General Policy Recommendation No. 10 on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through education** includes a wide range of recommendations addressed to the governments of member states and clustered around four main areas:

- ▶ ensure compulsory, free and quality education for all;
- ▶ combat racism and racial discrimination at school;
- ▶ train the entire teaching staff to work in intercultural environments;
- ▶ ensure that the necessary resources are allocated to the implementation of relevant policies, which should be regularly evaluated.

Following the adoption of General Policy Recommendation No. 10, ECRI paid special attention to education policies and efforts within the framework of its country monitoring work, particularly looking at inclusive education².

In addition, in recent general policy recommendations, education issues feature prominently. By way of illustration, in its revised **General Policy Recommendation No. 9 on preventing and combating Antisemitism** (published in September 2021), ECRI strongly emphasised the role of education in addressing antisemitism, and in promoting learning about the Holocaust and the developments leading up to it. In its revised **General Policy Recommendation No. 5 on preventing and combating anti-Muslim racism and discrimination** (published in March 2022), ECRI underlined the need for governments to proactively address anti-Muslim racism and discrimination through education, ensuring that education systems build pupils and students' resistance to anti-Muslim hatred and prejudice, and to respond effectively to instances of anti-Muslim racism and discrimination in educational settings. **General Policy Recommendation No. 17 on preventing and combating intolerance and discrimination against LGBTI persons** (published in September 2023) includes a dedicated section on the need for action in the area of inclusive education and preventing cultures of bullying, harassment, discrimination and violence.

The present factsheet is meant to be a tool supplementing General Policy Recommendation No. 10 and other relevant general policy recommendations 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, at the Council of Europe level, the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly, the European Court of Human Rights, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Committee of Social Rights and the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, as well as, at United Nations level, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

It should also be borne in mind that the precise nature and legal contexts and policy areas in which ECRI's recommendations have been made may vary significantly, depending on the circumstances observed in the countries in question.

² In the context of its sixth monitoring cycle, ECRI's focus on inclusive education relates to human rights education at different school levels, the promotion of equality, diversity, and inclusion issues in the curriculum and in teacher training, and the development of mechanisms aimed at monitoring and dealing with racist and LGBTI-phobic incidents/bullying, including online.

Developing human rights education and promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in schools

1. The authorities should ensure that schools include human rights education, in particular issues pertaining to equality and non-discrimination, in their curricula.³
2. The authorities should include mandatory initial and ongoing teacher training on human rights, including on equality, diversity, and inclusion issues.⁴ Such training should be developed in close cooperation with the local school authorities to ensure that it is rolled out evenly across the country and to possibly identify and replicate good practices.⁵
3. The authorities should reinvigorate the role of education as a tool to better live together in intercultural societies and understand societal issues linked to questions such as racial and LGBTI-phobic stereotypes and prejudices, religions and beliefs, and immigration matters⁶, as well as to increase awareness about the historical dimensions of racism and inequalities, including colonialism and slavery.⁷
4. The authorities should carefully consider the development and/or revision of textbooks as part of their efforts to develop human rights education, for example by introducing a special focus on the right to equality and the prohibition of discrimination⁸, removing references or material encouraging stereotyping, prejudice, and intolerance against specific groups of concern to ECRI.⁹
5. The authorities should promote awareness-raising activities on LGBTI equality in the school environment.¹⁰ They should also consult LGBTI communities and representatives when taking action for LGBTI equality in the field of education.¹¹

3 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on the Slovak Republic, §14; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Belgium, §19; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Germany, §18; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Luxembourg, §48.

4 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Poland, §12; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Armenia, §14; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Azerbaijan, §14; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on France, §15; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Denmark, §14; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Estonia, §14; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Austria, §16; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Bulgaria, §101; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Albania, §47.

5 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Czech Republic, §8.

6 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on France, §44.

7 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Portugal, §37; **Statement** on racism in policing, including racial profiling, and systemic racism, adopted by ECRI at its 82nd plenary meeting (30 June – 2 July 2020).

8 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Croatia, §44.

9 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on France, §79; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Türkiye, §88 (*before 2022, the official name of Türkiye in English was Turkey*).

10 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Poland, §16; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Cyprus, §17.

11 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Greece, §143; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Lithuania, §106.

Addressing any segregation in schools and paying special attention to pupils with a minority or migration background¹²

6. The authorities should take steps to prohibit school segregation and eliminate any such practice, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, with a view to achieving inclusive education and meeting the best interests of the child. Special attention should be given to children with a minority or migration background¹³ by, for example, drawing-up and evaluating specific school policies¹⁴, creating inclusive learning environments¹⁵ and setting up robust monitoring mechanisms.¹⁶
7. The authorities should take action in the education system to ensure that pupils with an ethnic minority or migration background can gain full proficiency in the state language(s).¹⁷ When entering primary school, all children with a minority or migration background should have sufficient mastery of the language of instruction to complete their schooling successfully, as well as receive any necessary specialised support during their schooling.¹⁸
8. The authorities should address any language-related challenge that may lead to educational disadvantage, including at preschool or primary school level¹⁹, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.²⁰
9. The authorities should organise broad consultations of practitioners, in particular teachers and other education professionals working with pupils and students with a minority or migration background, parents' associations, and organisations representatives of the relevant communities, in order to effectively implement policies of relevance to education.²¹

12 As regards actions aimed at addressing the situation of specific groups of children in school, reference is made to the ECRI Secretariat **factsheet** on preventing and combating antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma and Travellers, the **factsheet** on the integration and inclusion of migrants and the **factsheet** on preventing and combating racism and discrimination against Black persons/people of African descent.

13 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on North Macedonia, §57; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Albania, §47; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Denmark, §82.

14 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Hungary, §81.

15 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Bosnia and Herzegovina, §59.

16 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Romania, §75.

17 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on the Republic of Moldova, §90; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Georgia, §62.

18 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Luxembourg, §87 and ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Türkiye, §86.

19 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Lichtenstein, §46.

20 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Lithuania, §82.

21 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Estonia, §78.

Countering racist and LGBTI-phobic bullying in schools²²

10. The authorities should set up effective policies and mechanisms to prevent, monitor and respond to bullying (including online) in schools²³, as well as a system to monitor and deal with racist and anti-LGBTI incidents in schools.²⁴
11. The authorities should move on from general anti-bullying activities to developing and implementing group-specific modules against bullying of children deemed vulnerable on the grounds of their national or ethnic origin, skin colour, citizenship, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics, amongst other things.²⁵
12. The relevant authorities should convey a firm message of zero tolerance of LGBTI-phobic attitudes and behaviours to all education professionals interacting with pupils and parents.²⁶
13. To promote mutual understanding and respect in schools, the authorities should provide all pupils and students with the information, protection, and support necessary to enable them to live in accordance with their sexual orientation and gender identity.²⁷

Ensuring a non-discriminatory approach to the wearing of religious symbols or clothing

14. The authorities should take measures to ensure that decisions taken by schools regarding the wearing of religious symbols or clothing at school and in higher education establishments are not discriminatory.²⁸

22 On this topic, reference is also made to the relevant section of the **factsheet** on LGBTI issues.

23 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Hungary, §13; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Georgia, §11.

24 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Luxembourg, §15; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Armenia, §15; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Azerbaijan, §17; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Cyprus, §12; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Bulgaria, §9; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Switzerland, §13; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Greece, §13; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Iceland, §92; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Montenegro, §97; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Ukraine, §125; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on the United Kingdom, §149.

25 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Iceland, §19; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Estonia, §17; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Albania, §11.

26 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Poland, §16; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Cyprus, §17.

27 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on the Netherlands, §97; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Portugal, §107; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Spain, §104; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Luxembourg, §90; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Italy, §118; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Austria, §91; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Switzerland, §82; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Belgium, §163.

28 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Austria, §18; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Belgium, §21; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on France, §70.

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.