Preventing and combating racism and intolerance in and through sports

Factsheet



European Commission
against Racism and Intolerance

ECRI

Commission européenne
contre le racisme et l'intolérance

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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**Secretariat of the
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 intolerance in relation to a wide range of sport-related issues, including but not limited to addressing racist and other forms of hate speech and hate crime during or around sports events, as reflected in ECRI's country reports adopted and made public during its third, fourth, fifth and sixth monitoring cycles.

Introduction

ECRI has regularly stressed the need to strongly condemn and counteract all manifestations of racism and intolerance in the field of sport. It has also recognised the positive role that sports organisations and clubs, as well as owners of sports facilities and sports leaders, may play in ensuring respect for diversity and that sports activities may have in bringing people together in the spirit of solidarity and friendship, thus building better conditions for equal treatment and inclusion of persons belonging to groups of concern to ECRI.[1]

ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 12 on combating racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport[2] includes a wide range of recommendations addressed to the governments of Council of Europe member states and clustered around three main areas: ensuring equal opportunities in access to sport for all, combating racism and racial discrimination in sport, and building a coalition against racism in sport. In addition, some general policy recommendations that have been adopted subsequently also feature recommendations pertaining to preventing and combating racism and intolerance, particularly in the form of hate speech, in sport.[3] Moreover, in its country monitoring reports, ECRI has identified a number of promising or good practices related to action taken by member states to tackle racism and intolerance in sport.[4] It has also highlighted some initiatives linked to using sports activities as a tool for building more inclusive societies.[5]

The present factsheet outlines key recommendations made by ECRI on preventing and combating racism and intolerance in and through sport, mostly in its country reports adopted within the framework of its third, fourth, fifth and sixth monitoring cycles during the period ranging from 2006 to 2026. The present factsheet is meant to be a tool supplementing ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 12 and other 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 to address racism and intolerance in the field of sport.

1 The identification of groups of concern to ECRI will depend on national circumstances and may include, for example, Roma and Travellers, Black persons and people of African descent, non-nationals (in particular refugees, other persons benefitting from international protection and migrants), nationals with a migration background, Jews, Muslims, and LGBTI persons.

2 See **General Policy Recommendation No. 12**.

3 See, most notably, ECRI's **General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech**.

4 See, for instance, ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Monaco, § 31; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Denmark, § 56; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Croatia, § 36; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Portugal, § 51; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on the Netherlands, § 63.

5 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Croatia, § 62. In this connection, see also **Annual Report on ECRI's activities covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2023**, § 9 and Council of Europe's **Conference on the Inclusion of Child Migrants and Refugees in and through Sport** (29 November 2023, Schaan, Liechtenstein).

Furthermore, ECRI's recommendations should not be taken in isolation from the relevant standards, recommendations and decisions adopted by other Council of Europe bodies, such as the Committee of Ministers[6] and the Parliamentary Assembly[7] of the Council of Europe, as well as the European Court of Human Rights.[8] Special mention should be made in this respect of the work carried out within the framework of the Council of Europe Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS).[9]

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, as well as the groups of concern to ECRI involved.

6 See, inter alia, **Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)5 of the Committee of Ministers on the Revised European Sports Charter**.
7 See for instance, **Resolution 2276 (2019)** of the Parliamentary Assembly entitled "Stop hate speech and acts of hatred in sport" and **Resolution 2131 (2016)** entitled "Sport for all: a bridge to equality, integration and social inclusion".
8 See, for instance, the Factsheet drawn up by the Press Unit of the European Court of Human Rights entitled **Sport and the European Convention** and the overview of Key Themes **"Sports and the Convention"**, prepared by the Court's Registry.
9 See, for instance, the **EPAS** factsheets on **Human rights in and through sport**, **Sport for all** and **Inclusion of migrants and refugees in and through sport**.

Development of adequate legislative and policy frameworks

1. The authorities should draw on the principles set out in ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 12 on combating racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport when designing and adopting any relevant legislation aimed at addressing racism and intolerance in sport.[10]

2. When developing policies on preventing and combating racism and intolerance, including hate speech, in sport, the relevant authorities should consult and involve groups of concern to ECRI, in particular people of African descent.[11]

Coordination, partnerships and research

3. The authorities should implement comprehensive and coordinated action to prevent and combat racist and LGBTI-phobic hate speech in sport.[12]

4. Action against racism and intolerance in the field of sport, including the monitoring of incidents, should be developed in partnership with relevant actors.[13]

5. The need to actively counter all manifestations of racism and LGBTI-phobia should be impressed on all relevant actors in the world of football and other sports.[14]

6. The authorities should support dialogue between relevant sports clubs and civil society actors with a view to preventing racist and LGBTI-phobic chants and behaviour in football stadiums.[15]

7. Where appropriate, a study on racism and intolerance, as well as related direct and indirect discrimination, in sport should be carried out with a view to identifying any necessary action in this area.[16]

Awareness-raising and education

8. The authorities should make significant efforts to raise awareness about the dangers of racism and intolerance in sport.[17] Sports leagues and clubs should also be encouraged to take action in this direction.[18]

9. The authorities should ensure that the legislation relevant to combating racist and other forms of hate speech and hate crime during sports events is known and respected.[19]

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10 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Monaco, § 45.
11 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Spain, § 48.
12 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on the Netherlands, § 65.
13 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on France, §§ 84-85.
14 ECRI third-cycle **report** on Spain, § 53.
15 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on the Netherlands, § 54.
16 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Austria, § 69.
17 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Poland, § 112; ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Ukraine, § 65.
18 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Poland, § 89. See also ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Spain, § 48.
19 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on the Netherlands, § 54.

10. The authorities should organise or finance awareness-raising campaigns against racism and intolerance in sports at all levels.[20]

11. The authorities should implement educational programmes aimed at preventing racist and LGBTI-phobic hate speech among sports fans.[21]

Accountability

ZERO-TOLERANCE MESSAGING

12. The authorities should promote active condemnation of and responses to racist and LGBTI-phobic hate speech by leaders in the area of sport.[22]

13. The authorities should adopt a firm and unambiguous response to all manifestations of racism and intolerance in sports events.[23]

SELF-REGULATION

14. The authorities should encourage sports federations, clubs and fans' associations to develop codes of conduct or other self-regulatory measures against racism and intolerance. Such codes of conduct should address, in particular, any racist and LGBTI-phobic misconduct by fans.[24]

15. Sports leagues and clubs should be encouraged to develop disciplinary measures to address racist and LGBTI-phobic behaviour.[25]

EFFECTIVE INVESTIGATION AND SANCTIONS

16. The authorities should ensure that racist and LGBTI-phobic incidents in sport are effectively investigated and, where necessary, prosecuted.[26] In this connection, the authorities should take steps to ensure that the tools that prosecutors have at their disposal are effectively applied in cases of racism at sports events.[27]

17. The authorities should take steps to ensure that i) the organisers of football matches (and other sports events) have regulations containing clear provisions stating that racist and intolerant behaviour may give rise to administrative stadium bans, and that ii) these provisions are effectively enforced.[28]

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20 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on the Netherlands, § 236; ECRI sixth cycle **report** on Spain, § 48.
21 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on the Netherlands, § 65.
22 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Montenegro, § 35.
23 ECRI third-cycle **report** on Spain, § 53.
24 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Poland, § 112; ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Spain, § 109; ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Ukraine, § 65; ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Romania, § 98; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Poland, § 89.
25 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Spain, § 48.
26 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Serbia, § 57; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on the Netherlands, § 54; ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Spain, § 48; ECRI sixth cycle **report** on the Netherlands, § 65.
27 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Poland, § 89.
28 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Poland, § 89.

18. In compliance with relevant laws and standards, the authorities should take action to disband extremist groups engaging in racist and LGBTI-phobic activity at sports events and ban racist and LGBTI-phobic sports fan clubs.[29] They should, for example, establish cooperation with sports associations, clubs and civil society in order to collect any necessary evidence.[30]

19. Accountability mechanisms established to tackle racist and LGBTI-phobic behaviour in sports should cover professional competitions in all sports.[31]

Sport as a tool for building inclusive societies

20. The authorities should develop measures aiming to support immigrants in the field of sport. In doing so, they should pay particular attention to developing programmes to help citizens be more receptive to diversity in society.[32]

21. Where appropriate, the state-level authorities should provide additional funding to local authorities, to set up or expand institutions, such as sports clubs, that can facilitate encounters, shared interests and the overcoming of any religious or ethnic boundaries, especially among young people.[33]

Membership and participation in sport organisations and activities

22. The authorities should take legal or other appropriate measures to prevent the exclusion of non-citizens from sports association membership.[34]

23. The rules applicable to amateur sports teams should not impose conditions based on citizenship for the composition of such teams.[35]

29 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Poland, § 89; ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Serbia, § 57.
30 ECRI fifth-cycle **report** on Poland, § 89.
31 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Spain, § 107.
32 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Germany, § 149.
33 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Bosnia and Herzegovina, § 66.
34 ECRI sixth-cycle **report** on Cyprus, § 79.
35 ECRI fourth-cycle **report** on Austria, § 70.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is a unique human rights body that monitors Council of Europe member states' action against racism, intolerance and discrimination on grounds of "race", colour, language, religion, citizenship, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

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.

ECRI is composed of 46 members appointed on the basis of their independence, impartiality, moral authority and expertise in dealing with issues of racism, intolerance and related discrimination. 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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