

STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AGAINST RACISM AND INTOLERANCE (ECRI) ON RACIST POLICE ABUSE, INCLUDING RACIAL PROFILING, AND SYSTEMIC RACISM

Adopted by ECRI at its 82nd plenary meeting (30 June – 2 July 2020)

The tragic death of George Floyd upon apprehension by the police in late May 2020 in Minneapolis (Minnesota, United States) has triggered a wave of protests against racism across the world and ignited discussions on the excessive use of force by law enforcement officials against persons belonging to minority groups, the persistent practices of racial profiling and more generally systemic racism, all of which are to be found in Europe. ECRI calls upon Council of Europe member states to take determined action in this area.

ECRI expresses its sympathy with the families of all victims of racist police violence and its solidarity with those protesting peacefully against racism. ECRI has always stressed the positive obligation on the police in combating racism and racial discrimination as well as in protecting and promoting human rights. Trust in the police by all segments of society enhances safety for all. However, for too long, instances of racist police abuse have tarnished the profession and jeopardised the work of all those police officers who comply with police ethics and the law and combat racist hate crime.

During its country visits, ECRI has heard many accounts of racist police abuse, including racial profiling and acts of violence, towards minority groups or migrants. As clearly stated in [ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 11](#) on combating racism and racial discrimination in policing, racial profiling constitutes a specific form of racial discrimination and must be expressly prohibited by law. It generates a feeling of humiliation and injustice among those groups that are subjected to it, results in their stigmatisation, negative stereotyping and alienation, and hinders good community relations. Furthermore, as concluded by the European Court of Human Rights, the perception by police officers of persons belonging to a particular community as “criminals” and the ensuing practice of racial profiling can result in “institutionalised racism”¹.

ECRI therefore urges Council of Europe member states to take steps in this area, in particular to develop: i) recruitment procedures which ensure that the composition of the police reflects the diversity of the population; ii) human rights training, at regular intervals, for all police officers; iii) frameworks for dialogue and co-operation between the police and members of minority groups; iv) effective reporting procedures within the police, including through the adoption of protective measures for ‘whistle blowers’; v) strong support for victims and witnesses of police misconduct; and vi) fully independent bodies to investigate incidents of alleged police abuse. It is essential to create a police culture where racist abuse is regarded as having no place within law enforcement agencies and racism is actively prevented and combatted under all circumstances. In addition, when communicating with the media and the public at large the police should always be careful to do so in a way that does not perpetuate hostility or prejudice towards minority groups.

Peaceful anti-racism protests and the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on many minority groups² have increased public awareness of both the origins and the consequences of “systemic racism and inequalities” that have permeated the daily life of minority groups, affecting their access to education, employment, health and housing. While overt racism is relatively easy to recognise, unconscious racial bias is widespread but hidden, often resulting in “racism without racists”.

¹ [Lingurar v Romania](#) (no. 48474/14), 16 April 2019.

² See also the [statement](#) on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and related government responses on groups of concern to ECRI issued by the Bureau of ECRI following its meeting of 19 May 2020.

ECRI calls on all decision-makers in Council of Europe member states to use the windows of opportunity that have opened through the ongoing mobilisation against racism to deliver clear messages of zero tolerance to and take effective action against racism and discrimination, where these come to light in policing and other areas, and to push forward with the implementation of ECRI's recommendations as well as to increase awareness about the historical dimensions of racism and inequalities, especially colonialism and slavery, whose legacies have affected the whole of Europe.