



Breakout session: The effects of racism in education

Background Paper

RACISM IN EDUCATION

Racial or ethnic origin is significant in education in various different ways. Perspectives on racial or ethnic diversity in a given Member State may play a significant role in policymaking, designing of curricula and education materials, and on teacher training. Racial or ethnic origin can lead to unequal treatment, while, more broadly, embedded racial inequities produce unequal opportunities for access to quality education.¹

Structural racism may critically affect educational policies and practices, while persistent stereotypes work against racialised children and young people at different levels, affecting their opportunities for educational attainment. The consequences of failing to ensure educational achievement are far-reaching. The adverse effects can be far reaching and impact future employment prospects, putting them at greater risk of poverty and limiting participation in civic life. According to a [European Commission report](#), the loss of in-person schooling as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic in vulnerable communities is expected to lead to lower retention and completion rates among these communities.

Despite measures taken to date, further work is needed to better understand how disparities are produced, and the consequences of embedded racial inequities. It is important to understand how these can be eliminated to ensure that all children and young people have the same opportunities to access quality education and educational achievement.

¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Gergely, D., Farkas, L., *Racial discrimination in education and EU equality law*, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2838/28257>

TRENDS IN EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

According to data from the European Agency for Fundamental Rights, almost one in eight (12%) respondents to the [European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey](#) experienced discrimination in the past five years in an educational setting or when in contact with staff from their children’s schools based on their ethnic or immigrant background, with 6% experiencing this type of discrimination in the 12 months before the survey. Slightly higher than the average is the share of Roma respondents (14%) when asked about their experiences of discrimination in the last 5 years.

For the same time period, 9% of people with a sub-Saharan African background reported having felt discriminated against, while the rate is 13% for those with a North African background. Regarding religion and religious beliefs, the share of Muslims having felt discriminated against is 13% in the last 5 years and 6% in the 12 months before the survey. For Jews, the rate is 8% when asked about their experiences of discrimination in the last 12 months according to a [survey](#) on the topic. Most strikingly, 28% of respondents to the 2019 [Roma and Travellers Survey](#) said they had experienced discrimination in education in the past five years².

Table 1: Discrimination experiences in education (or when in contact with school personnel) based on ethnic or immigrant background (including skin colour, ethnic origin or immigrant background, and religion or religious belief) in the 12 months and five years before the survey, different FRA surveys (%)

Survey	Group	In education (or when in contact with school personnel)	
		In the past 5 years	In the past 12 months
EU MIDIS II (2016)	Main results (all groups, EU-28) ^a	12	6
	Muslims (in 15 countries)	13	6
	Roma (in 12 countries)	14	7
	Sub-Saharan Africa (in 12 countries)	9	4
	North Africa (5 countries)	13	7
Second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU (2018) ^b	Jews (in 12 countries)	n.a. ^c	8
Roma and Travellers survey (2019) ^d	Roma and Travellers (in 6 countries)	28	12

Notes: ^a The rates for EU-MIDIS II -Main results are based on data for all groups surveyed: Roma/ Russian minority/ immigrants and descendants of immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa/ Turkey/ North Africa/ Asia and South Asia/ recent immigrants.

^b The rates on discrimination experiences for the second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU are based on the ground 'because of being Jewish'.

^cn.a. = not available for this period.

^d The rates on discrimination experiences for the Roma and Travellers survey are based on the ground 'because of being Roma/Traveller'.

Source: FRA, EU-MIDIS II 2016, Second Antisemitism Survey 2018, Roma and Travellers Survey 2019.

MEASURES TO TACKLE RACISM IN EDUCATION

² New data concerning Roma will become available in autumn 2022, as collected through the EU FRA [Roma Survey 2020](#), in eight Member States (Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Spain) and two accession countries (North Macedonia and Serbia). Survey questions cover the socio-economic situation of Roma and their experiences of discrimination, harassment and violence – including any racially-motivated incidents.

The '[Racial Equality Directive](#)', clearly states that to ensure the development of democratic societies which allow the participation of all persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, specific action in the field of discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin in the area of education should be undertaken.

Further to the legal measures in place³ and to reinforce relevant efforts, the European Commission combats all forms of racism in education through policy and funding programmes. While the main responsibility for the content and organisation of education and training systems lies with the Member States, strengthening inclusive education is one of the priorities for EU level cooperation. For example, inclusion and fairness in education is among the priority dimensions of the [European Education Area](#) and the imperative for inclusion and fairness equally applies to digital learning and education, under the updated [Digital Education Action Plan \(2021-2027\)](#). The new comprehensive [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) also includes actions to tackle racism and discrimination. Finally, schools have an instrumental role in helping to reduce racial stereotyping and prejudice among children.

Another initiative is the [Erasmus+](#) which finances projects contributing to the integration of people with a minority racial or ethnic background. Likewise, the [European Solidarity Corps](#) promotes solidarity activities geared towards fighting racism and discrimination. [The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme](#) also provides financial support to actions of the Member States' authorities, civil society organisations, international organisations and other stakeholders aiming to address all forms of racism, xenophobia and intolerance, including in access to education.

[ECRI General Policy Recommendation N°10 on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education](#) proposes specific measures to Member States to ensure compulsory, free and quality education for all; to combat racism and racial discrimination at school; and to train members of the teaching profession to work in a multicultural environment. In annual reports and public statements, ECRI has also underlined the need to fully acknowledge past and present racism, in the teaching of history. It has encouraged governments to look further into the historical dimensions of racism and inequalities, especially colonialism and slavery, whose legacies have permeated the whole of Europe.⁴

Education curricula should be revised to provide a contextualised approach to European history and contribute to eradicating stereotypes that lead to discrimination. What is not taught in schools because it is omitted in the curriculum is considered the 'null curriculum', referring to what students do not have the opportunity to learn. Decolonisation of knowledge, and therefore of history, can be regarded as the basis for understanding contemporary realities.

The aim of the breakout session is to discuss how disparities are perpetuated in education, to better understand the consequences of these embedded racial inequities, and how they can be eliminated to ensure that all children and young people access the same opportunities through their education.

Guiding questions:

³ [EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025](#), see pages 5-6 and 9-12.

⁴ See ECRI's 2021 [annual report](#)

- How are racial and ethnic disparities and inequities produced and perpetuated in educational settings, and what are their consequences?
- How can these disparities be eliminated to ensure that all children and young people have the same opportunities for educational achievement?
- How we better engage with civil society organisations working with racialised children and young people in education in the consultative processes to support Member States and other key stakeholders in tackling racism to bring their knowledge and expertise from the ground?