

ECRI

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
Commission européenne contre le racisme et l'intolérance

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European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

ECRI general policy recommendation N°4:

National surveys on the experience
and perception of discrimination
and racism from the point of view
of potential victims

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The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance:

Recalling the Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe at their Summit held in Vienna on 8-9 October 1993;

Recalling that the Plan of Action on combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance set out as part of this Declaration invited the Committee of Ministers to establish the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance with a mandate, inter alia, to formulate general policy recommendations to member States;

Recalling also the Final Declaration and Action Plan adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe at their second Summit held in Strasbourg on 10-11 October 1997;

Stressing that this Final Declaration confirms that the goal of the member States of the Council of Europe is to build a freer, more tolerant and just European society and that it calls for the intensification of the fight against racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance;

Recalling that in its General Policy Recommendation N° 1, ECRI called on States to collect, in accordance with European laws, regulations and recommendation on data-protection and protection of privacy, where and when appropriate, data which will assist in assessing and evaluating the situation and experiences of groups which are particularly vulnerable to racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance;

Stressing that statistical data on racist and discriminatory acts and on the situation of minority groups in all fields of life are vital for the identification of problems and the formulation of policies;

Convinced that such statistical data should be supplemented by data on attitudes, opinions and perceptions;

Considering in this respect that, in addition to surveys among the general population, targeted surveys which ascertain the experiences and perceptions of potential victims as regards the racism and discrimination they face represent an innovative and valuable source of information;

Considering that the results of such surveys may be used in a variety of ways to highlight problems and improve the situation;

Considering moreover that the acknowledgement of the validity of the experiences and perceptions of potential victims conveys an important message both to the population as a whole and to the vulnerable groups themselves;

Welcoming the fact that such surveys have already been organised in a number of member States;

Noting that the organisation of such surveys throughout Europe would provide a more detailed picture of the situation as regards racism and discrimination both on a national level and on a European level:

recommends to the governments of member States to take steps to ensure that national surveys on the experience and perception of racism and discrimination from the point of view of potential victims are organised, drawing inspiration from the guidelines set out in the Appendix to this recommendation.

Appendix to ECRI's general policy recommendation N° 4

Guidelines for the organisation of surveys on the experience and perception of racism and discrimination from the point of view of potential victims

I. General aims of such surveys

1. The aim of the type of survey outlined in this recommendation is to gain a picture of the problems of racism and intolerance from the point of view of actual and potential victims. This innovative approach involves conducting a survey among members of various groups vulnerable to acts of racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, and intolerance, with questions aiming to elicit information about their experiences of racism and discrimination and how they perceive various aspects of the society in which they live in this respect. The data collected thus concerns the perceptions and experiences of members of vulnerable groups. Such data can supplement and enrich more quantitative data concerning racist incidents and levels of discrimination in various fields and data concerning opinions and attitudes of the majority population towards minority groups and issues of racism and intolerance.

II. Practical organisation of surveys

2. The design and implementation of such surveys might be entrusted to researchers or institutes with experience in the field of racism and intolerance, with the field work being carried out by survey research bodies.
3. The minority groups chosen as "categories" in the survey will depend according to national circumstances, and may include for example immigrant groups, national minorities and/or other vulnerable groups.
4. When choosing which groups to include as "categories", factors to be taken into consideration may include the size of the target population and information already available as to the degrees of discrimination faced by each group (for example, employment statistics, information about complaints of discrimination filed).
5. The inclusion of "control" or "contrast" groups may be appropriate to provide a base-line comparison: for example, a minority group which does not generally seem to face great problems of discrimination and racism might be included in the survey.

6. Good population statistics including information about variables such as place of birth, ethnic origin, religious confession, mother tongue, citizenship etc facilitate the organisation of such surveys. If this sort of census data is not available, alternative means of identifying and reaching the pertinent respondents will have to be found.
7. It should be borne in mind that some groups which might be particularly at risk as regards racism and discrimination - for example, illegal immigrants - may be very hard to reach with such surveys.

III. Survey design

8. In addition to questions concerning the socio-economic background and other factual details, questions in the survey may fall into the following broad categories:
 - questions pertaining to concrete situations, such as contacts with various authorities (e.g. police, health care, social welfare, educational institutions) as well as with other institutions (e.g. banks, housing agencies) and establishments (e.g. employers, restaurants, places of entertainment, shops): questions may ask how many times over a specific period of time (e.g. last year or last five years) respondents have been victims of unfair treatment due to their membership of a minority group and what sort of unfair treatment they have experienced.
 - questions pertaining to perceived opportunities to participate on an equal basis in society, awareness of specific measures put in place to improve the situation of minority groups, and extent to which such opportunities have been realised (areas covered to include for example possibilities for success in education and vocational training, employment opportunities)
 - questions pertaining to perceptions and attitudes: themes covered may include, as appropriate: amount of trust in institutions, attitudes towards immigration or minority policies, assessments of the country as a racist or xenophobic country, problems connected with religion, attitudes towards other groups, difficulties making contacts with the majority population, identification with the host country and country of origin, plans to stay or to return, where one feels most "at home", etc. The inclusion of such themes makes it possible to unveil interesting relationships between the degree of experienced discrimination and various attitudes and perceptions.

9. It should be noted that such questions mainly generate data on *subjective experiences* of discrimination. However, it is in any case extremely difficult to study acts of discrimination objectively and "in vivo" as they take place in the various walks of life. Reports on subjectively experienced discrimination are valuable as an indicator, particularly when they are assessed against the background of other kinds of information, such as unemployment statistics, police records, complaints filed etc.

IV. Follow-up to surveys

10. Over a period of time, follow-up surveys may be conducted, to explore changing patterns of discrimination and racism over time or to include different groups.
11. The results of the survey may be used in a variety of ways, for example: to highlight areas where action is especially necessary; for the evaluation and elaboration of policies which take into account the experiences and concerns of the groups concerned; to increase public awareness and understanding of the problems of discrimination as seen from the viewpoint of victims; to increase awareness among those working in particular areas of how their institutions and practices are perceived by minority groups (e.g. police, employers, service providers etc).