Participa City - Preventing racism and discrimination of ethnic and cultural minorities in Europe and fostering participation through a European game

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Transnational Context Analysis

Transnational Analysis Report

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Executive Summary

Participa City is an Erasmus+ cooperation partnership bringing together organisations from Bulgaria, France, Germany, Portugal and Sweden to address racism and discrimination against ethnic and cultural minorities and to strengthen their participation in society. The project pursues five interconnected aims: to prevent racism and discrimination, to develop practical prevention strategies, to sensitise decision-makers and other gatekeepers, to expand opportunities for minority participation, and to foster a diversity-friendly climate in Europe.

This transnational report presents the main outcomes of WP2: the transnational context analysis. WP2 serves as the evidence base for the project's later outputs, namely the European simulation game (WP3) and a two-step competence-oriented training course (WP4). The purpose of WP2 is to:

- identify the ethnic and cultural groups most affected by racism and discrimination in each partner country.
- analyse the "gatekeeper" fields where exclusion occurs most strongly.
- collect, document and analyse "critical incidents," authentic cases of discrimination that will inform action recommendations and serve as the basis for training materials.

A shared methodology was applied in all five countries, combining three instruments: an online survey, semi-structured interviews, and a critical incident collection. Each partner collected at least thirty survey responses, ten expert or stakeholder interviews, and ten documented critical incidents. In total, 178 survey responses were gathered across countries: Germany (56), France (30), Portugal (31), Sweden (30) and Bulgaria (31). The survey reached practitioners in education, social services, healthcare, administration and NGOs, while 52 interviews captured insights from gatekeepers, decision-makers and community representatives. In total, 60 critical incidents documented provide concrete illustrations of discrimination in practice.

Across all five countries, there is strong convergence on both the groups most affected and the fields requiring action.

- *The most affected groups:* Roma communities, people of African descent, Muslims (particularly women with headscarves), and migrants/refugees are consistently identified as the most vulnerable. In Sweden, the Sámi also feature as an indigenous group facing structural discrimination. Intersectional disadvantages - combining ethnicity with gender, disability or sexual orientation - are reported in all contexts.
- *Fields for action:* Five areas are prioritised across all partner countries: education, labour market, housing, public services/administration, and policing/justice. Four countries also highlight *healthcare*, and four stress *public space and media/digital environments* as key sites of exclusion. Education emerges as the most universal lever for change, while housing and employment barriers are described as particularly entrenched.

While the patterns are broadly similar, national differences exist. France places particular emphasis on policing and administrative discrimination, Bulgaria highlights antigypsyism as a systemic challenge, Germany draws attention to discrimination in housing and digital spaces, Portugal points to everyday discrimination in customer-facing services, and Sweden stresses intersectionality and the position of the Sámi.

1. Introduction

Participa City is an Erasmus+ cooperation partnership that brings together organisations from Bulgaria, France, Germany, Portugal and Sweden to prevent racism and discrimination against ethnic and cultural minorities and to strengthen their participation in society. The project pursues five interconnected aims: prevention of racism and discrimination, development of concrete prevention strategies, sensitization to decision-makers and other gatekeepers to avoid discriminatory structures, strengthening the participation of minorities, and fostering a diversity-friendly climate in Europe.

This transnational report is one of the main results of WP2, the Transnational Context Analysis. WP2 was designed to map and compare national contexts with a view to identifying the groups most affected by racism and discrimination, the "gatekeeper" fields that shape participation (for example, education, housing, employment and public administration), and the competence gaps that need to be closed among adult education providers and gatekeepers (within this context gatekeepers are defined as people who are decisive for the participation of ethnic and cultural minorities as the have decision-making power about the access to important resources for these groups). It also collects and analyses "critical incidents" - episodes in which those involved felt discrimination based on ethnic or cultural origin occurred in order to inform actionable recommendations and build a learning database. These results are consolidated in a transnational analysis accompanied by an infographic, available on the project's website thereby providing a needs-driven foundation for the design of the European game in WP3 and the two-step training course in WP4.

WP2 proceeded through a common methodology agreed by the partnership. First, shared instruments were developed - an interview guideline, a survey design and a critical incident template to ensure comparability across countries. Each partner country was assigned a minimum target of ten interviews, thirty completed survey responses and a collection of ten critical incidents. The online survey was conducted in early 2025 and distributed through partner networks to practitioners, educators, and professionals across relevant sectors. In total, 178 responses were collected from five countries: 56 from Germany, 30 from France, 31 from Portugal, 30 from Sweden and 31 from Bulgaria. These figures demonstrate that the initial set of indicators were not

only achieved but also exceeded, resulting in enriched and comprehensive data for subsequent analysis. These quantitative insights were complemented by interviews with educators, municipal officers, civil society actors and minority representatives, which together produced a catalogue of real-life incidents.

The present transnational report is therefore both an evidence base and a bridge to practice. It is structured in five equally developed country chapters (Bulgaria, France, Germany, Portugal and Sweden), followed by a comparative analysis that draws out similarities and differences in target groups and fields for action, and an infographic that visualizes the main patterns for wider audiences.

2. National reports

After completing data collection, each partner country produced a national report. These reports translate raw survey responses, interview testimony and critical incidents into structured national analyses. The national reports focus on two analytical dimensions. First, they identify the ethnic and cultural groups that are most affected by racism and discrimination in each country, illustrating how exclusion is experienced in practice. Second, they map the fields of life where preventive action is most urgently needed, such as education, employment, housing, public services, healthcare and justice. By treating these dimensions systematically, the transnational report can compare contexts, highlight similarities across Europe and acknowledge country-specific differences that must be addressed in prevention strategies. In addition to the narrative reports, the partnership generated a catalogue of critical incidents - concrete situations where individuals experienced or observed discrimination based on their ethnic or cultural background. This critical incident database, which will comprise twenty-five cases with accompanying action recommendations, has a dual purpose. It offers authentic examples that can be used in awareness-raising and training, and it serves as a practical resource for the design of the Participa City simulation game.

With the national reports established as the foundation, the following chapters turn to the specific contexts of each partner country. Each chapter presents, in equal depth, the groups most affected by racism and discrimination, the priority fields where preventive action is needed, and insights from surveys, interviews and documented critical incidents.

2.1 Bulgaria

The Bulgarian national context demonstrates how entrenched discrimination continues to shape the lives of ethnic and cultural minorities, most notably the *Roma population*, but also other groups such as *Turkish and Muslim minorities, migrants and refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and people at the intersections of ethnicity with gender, disability or sexual orientation*. The findings from the national survey and interviews paint a consistent picture of structural disadvantage and highlight how racism in Bulgaria is reproduced across multiple fields of life: education, employment, housing, healthcare, public services and interactions with police and justice authorities.

Survey data confirm the centrality of *education* as a site of both harm and potential transformation. More than four out of five Bulgarian respondents rated the need for preventive action against racism in schools as "high," and a similar proportion saw urgent needs in the labour market, public space, and the justice system. The survey also asked which groups were perceived to be most discriminated against, and *Roma were overwhelmingly identified, followed by migrants and refugees*. The lived experience behind these statistics was further illuminated in the qualitative interviews carried out with municipal officials, Roma educators and NGO leaders. These accounts highlighted that Roma children continue to be concentrated in segregated schools, often in inferior facilities with fewer resources, and that teachers sometimes carry low expectations of Roma pupils, which compounds disadvantage. The interviews also revealed how parents are excluded from decision-making in school life, either because of stigma or because they lack the necessary information and access.

Employment is another area where Roma and other minorities face structural barriers. Interviewees stressed that many employers still hold discriminatory attitudes and prefer not to hire Roma, while others confine them to the most precarious, low-paid jobs. Roma young people are often trapped in informal or seasonal work, with little opportunity to develop professional careers. The survey results confirmed this pattern, with a majority of respondents citing the labour market as a priority field for anti-racism prevention. This is not only about individual prejudice but also about systemic failings such as lack of targeted employment programmes, weak enforcement of equality legislation, and insufficient recognition of the skills that many Roma and migrant workers bring.

Housing and healthcare present further layers of exclusion. Many Roma families live in settlements that lack legal recognition, leaving them without official addresses. This in turn bars them from registering with local authorities, voting, accessing social protection or healthcare. Interviews with teachers and NGO practitioners describe how families without documents are sometimes refused hospital admission or asked to pay fees illegally. These incidents not only undermine trust in institutions but also reinforce cycles of poverty and marginalisation.

The justice and policing system is also a recurring site of discrimination. Survey respondents emphasised the need for stronger anti-racism measures in law enforcement, while interviewees noted frequent cases of racial profiling and selective application of the law. Roma, in particular, are perceived as being over-policed yet under-protected, facing harsher treatment when accused and less protection when they are victims. Migrants and refugees also experience distrust in their dealings with the justice system, with many reluctant to report hate crimes or discrimination because they fear inaction or even retaliation.

Beyond these institutional fields, the Bulgarian national context highlights the role of public discourse and media. Several interviewees underlined how negative media portrayals of Roma and migrants reinforce social prejudice, depicting them as dependent or criminal, and how political actors exploit antigypsyism and xenophobia to mobilise support. The survey findings echo this concern, with respondents rating the media and public space as areas where prevention is urgently needed.

Based on the national report, good examples are also presented. Civil society organisations are ofthen recognised as leaders in advancing Roma education, legal support and community empowerment. Teachers of Roma origin described how their dual role as professionals and community members enables them to act as bridges, challenging stereotypes from within and creating more inclusive school environments. These examples suggest that change is possible when public institutions and civil society work together and when minorities are empowered to lead.

Overall, the Bulgarian context highlights the depth of *structural racism in education, labour markets, housing and policing, and the persistence of antigypsyism as a defining feature of national life*. The survey and interview findings converge on the

need for systemic responses: inclusive education policies that end segregation and raise expectations for Roma pupils; targeted employment measures and stronger equality enforcement in hiring; removal of administrative barriers that exclude families from healthcare and social services; and investment in police and judicial training to counter profiling and ensure equal treatment.

The national report stresses that prevention is not only about teaching tolerance but about changing how institutions operate. This means recognising that discrimination is not an isolated act but a system of practices that reproduce inequality, and that dismantling it requires political will, accountability and resources. It also means valuing the lived experience and expertise of Roma and other minorities as indispensable for designing effective solutions.

2.2 France

The French national report and survey data reveal a complex and multi-layered picture of how racism and discrimination are experienced and reproduced across key institutions. While France presents itself as a Republic built on universalism and equal citizenship, the testimonies collected show that ethnic and cultural minorities frequently encounter exclusion in daily life, *with North African, sub-Saharan African, Roma, and Muslim communities bearing the brunt of discrimination*. Migrants and refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors, are also heavily affected, facing both systemic and interpersonal barriers that limit access to rights and opportunities. Survey results underscore the central role that professionals in the social sector play in observing and addressing discrimination. Nearly half of all respondents reported working in social services, with others based in education, healthcare, and community organisations. A strong consensus emerged around the importance of education as a preventive tool: more than three-quarters of respondents rated anti-racism education as "very important," reflecting a recognition that schools and adult learning spaces are pivotal both as sites of discrimination and as arenas where inclusive practices can be fostered. Respondents also drew attention to discrimination in the labour market and in housing, pointing to structural barriers that reinforce cycles of inequality.

The national interviews shed further light on how discrimination unfolds in practice. Practitioners working in integration services for migrants reported that *young people of*

foreign origin often face differential treatment from administrative offices and prefectures. Unaccompanied minors, for example, are subject to repeated questioning and suspicion when seeking protection, often being denied documentation or placed in precarious conditions. Roma families continue to face forced evictions and precarious housing arrangements, which disrupt children's schooling and perpetuate marginalisation. Individuals of North African or sub-Saharan background are frequently stopped for identity checks in public spaces or public transport, with many perceiving these encounters as racially motivated and humiliating.

The *labour market* presents another central field where discrimination takes root. Survey participants and interviewees described cases of discriminatory hiring practices, where applicants with foreign-sounding names or visible religious markers are either not shortlisted or treated differently in interview settings. Women wearing headscarves are particularly vulnerable to exclusion, with their visibility making them frequent targets of bias. Workers of minority origin also report being confined to low-paid, insecure jobs, with limited career progression. In the cultural and media sectors, negative representations of migrants and racialised communities reinforce these barriers, contributing to widespread stereotyping.

Housing is a similarly problematic area. Survey responses and interviews confirm that people of African and North African origin face systemic discrimination in the rental market, where landlords either refuse to rent to them or impose stricter conditions. This perpetuates residential segregation, particularly in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods where poverty and unemployment are concentrated. The link between place of residence, socio-economic marginalisation, and discrimination emerged repeatedly in the testimonies.

Healthcare and public services are also affected. Respondents pointed out that ethnic and cultural minorities often feel mistrusted or inadequately supported in health settings, particularly when language barriers exist. Administrative services are described as inflexible, with minority residents sometimes denied access to entitlements due to opaque or discretionary practices by officials. These institutional dynamics create an environment where individuals feel they must constantly justify their presence and rights.

The groups identified as most affected across survey and interview material are therefore consistent: people of North African and sub-Saharan descent, Roma communities, and migrants and refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors. Muslims, both men and women, face targeted discrimination linked to religious identity, with Islamophobia cited as a growing concern in both political discourse and everyday interactions. Intersectional disadvantages were also noted, with women and young people of minority origin experiencing compounded barriers in schools, the workplace and healthcare.

The national context highlights several priority fields for action. Education is paramount, both in terms of tackling discriminatory practices within schools and in equipping educators and students with anti-racism competences. The labour market requires measures to combat hiring discrimination and promote diversity in management and leadership positions. Housing policies must address systemic exclusion and territorial segregation, ensuring equal access to stable accommodation. Public services, including healthcare and administrative bodies, need stronger frameworks for accountability, complaint handling, and cultural competence. Finally, policing and justice are crucial fields where practices of racial profiling and unequal treatment must be confronted. The French case also reveals the critical role of civil society. NGOs, community groups and migrant associations are at the forefront of both documenting discrimination and supporting those affected, yet they often lack sufficient resources and institutional backing. Empowering these actors, and ensuring their voices are integrated into national and local decision-making, is essential for long-term prevention. The national survey and interviews make clear that prevention cannot be left to occasional training sessions or symbolic gestures: it must be embedded in policies, backed by enforcement mechanisms, and sustained by political will.

Overall, the French national context underscores the paradox of a state committed to equality in principle but struggling to implement it in practice. Discrimination persists not only in interpersonal encounters but also within institutional frameworks, shaping access to education, housing, work, and justice. For Participa City, the French findings highlight the importance of designing prevention strategies that directly confront institutional discrimination, ensure accountability, and equip both gatekeepers and educators with the competences to make equality a lived reality.

2.3 Germany

The German national report and survey evidence together highlight how *racism and discrimination persist in multiple fields of life, shaping access to housing, employment, education, and public services, and undermining trust in institutions*. Despite strong legal frameworks, affected groups continue to encounter both subtle and overt forms of discrimination that reveal enduring structural inequalities.

Survey respondents came mainly from the education and social sectors, but also included representatives of administration, health, media, and law. The sample was predominantly female, reflecting the gender composition of social professions, and included both practitioners who work directly with affected communities and professionals with broader institutional perspectives. *Almost 70% of respondents rated anti-racism education as "very important," signalling a consensus that preventive strategies in Germany must start with awareness and training.*

The survey results, reinforced by interviews, consistently identify several groups as most heavily affected. These include people of *Turkish and Arab origin, people of African descent, Roma and Sinti communities, and refugees and asylum seekers. Women wearing visible religious symbols, particularly Muslim women with headscarves*, are singled out as being disproportionately targeted in both workplaces and public spaces. Intersectional disadvantage also emerges, with respondents noting that ethnic minorities who are also women, LGBTQ+, or disabled often face compounded discrimination.

Housing discrimination was the most frequently cited problem. Minority respondents and practitioners reported that landlords routinely refuse to rent to people with foreign-sounding names, visibly different appearances, or uncertain legal status. Even when individuals meet all financial criteria, they may be rejected or subjected to stricter conditions than majority applicants. The effect is a persistent concentration of migrants and minorities in poorer neighbourhoods, which further entrenches segregation and limits access to good schools, jobs, and services.

Employment discrimination is also widespread. Survey responses and interviews describe difficulties for migrants in having foreign qualifications recognised, exclusion from apprenticeships, and outright bias in recruitment processes. Cases were reported where highly qualified applicants were repeatedly rejected, while majority candidates

with similar or lower qualifications were hired. The interviews underscored that racialised employees are often confined to precarious, low-paid jobs, and that career progression is limited by both implicit and explicit barriers. This leads to a cycle of underemployment that undermines both economic security and social participation.

Education emerged as both a site of concern and a potential lever for change. Teachers and social workers described how children of migrant and minority background are disproportionately placed in lower school tracks, sometimes based on stereotypes about their abilities rather than actual performance. *Roma children* in particular are affected by negative expectations that restrict their educational opportunities. At the same time, respondents stressed

that schools are key sites for building inclusive practices and promoting intercultural understanding, provided that teachers are equipped with the right competences.

Public services and administration represent another field where discrimination occurs. Survey respondents reported a rising number of complaints against public authorities, particularly concerning unequal treatment in welfare offices, job centres, and immigration services. The justice system and the police were also highlighted as fields where discrimination is entrenched. *Interviewees described cases of racial profiling during identity checks and disproportionate targeting of minorities in law enforcement*. These practices undermine trust in authorities and discourage victims from reporting discrimination or hate crimes.

Healthcare is also a relevant domain. Some respondents reported that minority patients experience less attentive care, communication barriers, or discriminatory attitudes from staff. For refugees and asylum seekers, administrative hurdles further complicate access to services.

The German context also emphasises the role of media and digital spaces in shaping experiences of racism. Interviewees observed that discriminatory narratives in politics and media reinforce stereotypes about migrants and minorities, while online spaces often become arenas of harassment and hate speech. Older and disabled migrants, in particular, face digital exclusion that compounds social barriers.

Despite these challenges, the German national report points to positive practices and opportunities for change. *Municipal integration officers and anti-discrimination counsellors are working to embed fairer practices within local governance*. Civil society actors are leading initiatives in intercultural training and advocacy. Schools and universities increasingly experiment with intercultural curricula and anti-racism projects. These examples show that progress is possible when institutions commit resources and when practitioners are given tools to act as "upstanders" rather than bystanders.

The priority fields for action in Germany are therefore clear: education, housing, employment, public services and administration, policing and justice, and healthcare. *Competence-building for educators, administrators, and gatekeepers is seen as essential*. This includes skills for bias-aware decision-making, trauma-sensitive interaction, and fair complaint handling. Legal literacy and stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination law are also required, alongside organisational reforms that make institutions accountable for equitable outcomes.

In sum, the German national context illustrates how discrimination is deeply embedded in structures that shape everyday life. It shows that even where legal frameworks are strong, discriminatory practices persist in schools, workplaces, housing markets, and public institutions. For Participa City, the German findings highlight the urgency of developing prevention strategies that combine education and training with institutional accountability, and of equipping gatekeepers with the competences to intervene effectively.

2.4 Portugal

The Portuguese national context illustrates how racism and discrimination affect a diverse set of groups, *including Roma, Afro-descendants, Brazilians, and migrants from Asia and the Middle East.* These groups face persistent structural barriers in education, employment, housing, public services, and policing, which are compounded by public narratives that normalise exclusion.

Survey results highlight a strong consensus on the need for preventive measures: *over 90% of participants rated education against racism as "very important."* Respondents came from across sectors including education, health, social services, NGOs, and

cultural organisations, offering a cross-sectional view of discrimination in Portuguese society. Interviews with educators, social workers, lawyers, and community representatives added depth, revealing how discrimination manifests in concrete situations of exclusion.

Roma communities remain among the most marginalised. Evidence from both surveys and interviews shows that Roma children face ongoing school segregation, high dropout rates, and reduced access to higher education. Teachers sometimes hold negative stereotypes about Roma pupils, which lowers expectations and reinforces exclusion. Roma adults experience widespread bias in the labour market and are often refused services in shops, restaurants, and other public spaces.

Afro-descendants, particularly those with roots in former Portuguese colonies, are also heavily affected. They report frequent encounters with discriminatory policing, such as being stopped disproportionately for identity checks, as well as barriers in the housing and job markets. For Brazilians, xenophobia often takes the form of stereotyping, with migrants sometimes dismissed as unskilled workers even when they hold qualifications. *Migrants from Asia and the Middle East face language barriers and suspicion that affects their access to services.*

Housing and employment were especially emphasised by survey respondents as areas requiring urgent action. Landlords have been reported to impose higher rents or security deposits on minority applicants, or to refuse them altogether. On the labour market, discriminatory hiring practices remain a major obstacle, with minority candidates often overlooked. Respondents noted that prejudice extends beyond initial recruitment: minority employees report slower promotion and greater exposure to insecure contracts.

Interviews highlighted how public services, *particularly law enforcement and healthcare, are implicated in perpetuating discrimination.* Accounts of police profiling and inadequate follow-up on complaints are widespread. In healthcare, language barriers, lack of intercultural competence among professionals, and differential treatment undermine trust in the system.

At the same time, positive initiatives were noted. NGOs and grassroots organisations are actively working to empower minority groups and provide training in anti-racism.

The interviews point to a growing public conversation about racism in Portugal, with increasing numbers of discrimination complaints being filed. This suggests a rising awareness of rights and the availability of mechanisms to challenge unfair treatment.

The priority fields for action in Portugal are therefore education, employment, housing, policing and justice, and healthcare. Competence-building for teachers, HR staff, police officers, and healthcare workers is identified as essential. Respondents call for intercultural training, anti-racism curricula, better complaint mechanisms, and data collection on ethnicity to monitor discrimination.

2.5 Sweden

The Swedish national context demonstrates how *racism and discrimination operate at both structural and interpersonal levels*, despite the country's long-standing commitment to equality. Minority groups identified as most affected include *Muslims, Afro-Swedes, Roma, LGBTQ+ individuals with minority backgrounds, and the Sámi, Sweden's indigenous people. Refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants more broadly also face systemic barriers in housing, employment, healthcare, and education*.

Survey results reveal high levels of awareness and commitment among practitioners: *more than 80% rated education against racism as "very important."* Respondents were largely from education, social services, healthcare, law, and NGOs, and many reported voluntary engagement in anti-racism initiatives. This highlights the significant civil society involvement in combating discrimination.

Housing discrimination emerged as a major concern. Interviewees described how migrants and people with foreign-sounding names are frequently denied rentals, regardless of financial stability. This leads to residential segregation and limits access to services and opportunities.

In the labour market, respondents pointed to unequal treatment in recruitment and promotion. Migrant women are particularly disadvantaged, facing both gender and ethnic discrimination, which often leaves them excluded from secure employment. Refugees and asylum seekers encounter difficulties in having their qualifications recognised and are unable to get jobs they are qualified for, while Afro-Swedes and Roma face bias that restricts access to well-paying jobs.

Education is another key arena. Minority children often report bullying and exclusion in schools, while teachers sometimes fail to intervene effectively. Interviewees noted that schools do not always provide safe spaces for minority pupils, and that discriminatory practices can remain unchallenged. At the same time, education is viewed as one of the most powerful tools for prevention, provided that teachers and school leaders receive training in anti-racism and intercultural competence.

Public services, including the Migration Agency, are described as gatekeepers where discrimination occurs. Interviewees shared cases of biased decision-making, lack of cultural competence, and failures to use interpreters appropriately. Healthcare professionals also acknowledged gaps in their own capacity to provide equitable care to minority patients, particularly migrant women.

A particular theme in the Swedish findings is intersectionality. Respondents emphasised that discrimination often affects people who belong to multiple marginalised groups - such as migrant women, LGBTQ+ youth of minority background, or Sámi women - compounding barriers and increasing vulnerability. Another theme is the role of political discourse: the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric has reinforced social polarisation and contributed to hostility towards minorities.

The priority fields for action in Sweden include housing, employment, education, public services, and healthcare, with policing and justice also flagged as areas requiring more attention. Respondents stressed that preventive strategies must go beyond individual-level training and address systemic and organisational change.

3. Transnational comparison

The five national reports reveal striking similarities as well as important differences in how racism and discrimination are experienced across Bulgaria, France, Germany, Portugal, and Sweden. Together, they provide a composite picture of Europe-wide challenges while also underlining the importance of tailoring prevention strategies to specific national contexts.

Affected groups

Across the countries, Roma communities are recurrently identified as among the populations most affected by racism and discrimination. While in Bulgaria they constitute the primary group experiencing such inequalities, in the other national contexts they are described as one of several communities facing comparable forms of exclusion and marginalization. Their experiences cut across education, housing, employment, healthcare, and public space, making antigypsyism a pan-European concern. People of African descent are also systematically targeted: in Portugal and France, Afro-descendants and sub-Saharan Africans face pervasive discrimination; in Germany and Sweden, Afro-descendants report exclusion in the labour and housing markets; in Sweden, Afro-Swedes face some of the highest levels of discrimination documented nationally.

Muslim communities emerge as another common group affected across countries. In France, Germany, Portugal, and Sweden, Muslims - especially women wearing headscarves face exclusion in workplaces, schools, and public services. Migrants and refugees, particularly those from the Middle East and Africa, are repeatedly identified as experiencing systemic barriers, from suspicion in asylum procedures to exclusion from labour and housing. In Sweden, the Sámi add a unique dimension as an indigenous group experiencing structural discrimination.

Fields for action

The convergence across countries is strongest in five key fields: *education, labour market, housing, public services and administration, and policing/justice*. Education is universally seen as both a site of discrimination and a powerful field for preventive action. Labour market exclusion is highlighted everywhere, with barriers ranging from bias in recruitment to lack of recognition of foreign qualifications. Housing discrimination is similarly pervasive, leading to segregation in all partner contexts. Public services and administration, including migration offices and welfare services, are flagged in each country as critical arenas where institutional discrimination occurs. Policing and justice systems are consistently criticised for racial profiling and unequal treatment of minorities.

Healthcare is highlighted in all of the countries pointing to differential treatment of minority patients, barriers to access, and lack of cultural competence among staff.

Public space and media also emerge in multiple countries (France, Portugal, Germany, and Bulgaria), highlighting how discriminatory narratives in political discourse, media representation, and online platforms fuel everyday racism.

Similarities and differences

The overarching similarity is that racism is not confined to interpersonal prejudice but is embedded structurally in schools, workplaces, housing markets, and institutions that are decisive for accessing resources. All partners identify Roma, people of African descent, Muslims, and migrants/refugees as primary targets, showing a strong transnational pattern.

Differences arise in emphasis. In France, discrimination in policing and administrative services (prefectures, prefectural checks, identity controls) is especially prominent. In Bulgaria, antigypsyism and systemic exclusion of Roma are particularly severe, with consequences across every sector. In Germany, complaints against public authorities and digital/media harms are more prominent. In Portugal, everyday discrimination in shops, restaurants, and customer-facing services is an additional theme. In Sweden, intersectionality and the position of the Sámi bring unique perspectives, alongside emphasis on systemic change within organisations.

Implications

These findings demonstrate that while local variations exist, the commonalities are strong enough to justify a transnational approach. The identification of Roma, people of African descent, Muslims, and migrants as priority groups, and the convergence around education, labour market, housing, public services, and policing as priority fields, create a shared agenda for European-level interventions. At the same time, national differences underline the importance of tailoring prevention strategies to specific contexts, recognising the weight of antigypsyism in Bulgaria, police profiling in France, digital exclusion in Germany, everyday stereotyping in Portugal, and intersectionality in Sweden.

For Participa City, the comparative analysis reinforces the project's central strategy: to develop competence-based prevention tools that can be adapted across countries while remaining sensitive to national realities. It also underscores the need to address both structural and interpersonal discrimination, recognising that gatekeepers play a decisive role in either reproducing or dismantling exclusion.

4. Priority action fields and competence implications

The analysis of the comparative European transnational analysis of the situation in different countries makes clear that racism and discrimination manifest most forcefully in a handful of decisive fields of social life: education, employment, housing, public services and administration, policing and justice, healthcare, and in some countries, public space and media/digital communication. These are the fields where ethnic and cultural minorities most often experience barriers, and where gatekeepers hold the power to either reinforce exclusion or open up pathways for participation. What emerges equally strongly is that preventive action in these fields depends on the development of concrete competences among adult educators, frontline professionals, administrators and institutional decision-makers. This section therefore explores the implications of the findings from the transnational comparison for competence development, showing how they will feed into the design of the Participa City simulation game and the competence-oriented training course.

Education

Across all five partner countries, education stands out as both a site of reproduction of racism and a lever for prevention. Schools and other learning settings are where discriminatory practices are first experienced by children and where lasting attitudes are either cemented or challenged. The collected data underline the need for competences that go beyond general awareness-raising and instead equip educators to act in specific, high-stakes situations. Teachers require *anti-bias pedagogy* to counter stereotypes, *skills for early intervention* to address microaggressions and bullying before they escalate, and *competence in handling incidents* fairly and transparently. Working with families in multilingual and intercultural settings demands communication competences and cultural sensitivity, while tackling segregation requires institutional-level know-how in *desegregation policy design and implementation.*

Labour market

Employment is identified in every partner country as a decisive gatekeeping field. Here, competences are required both at the individual HR level and within broader institutional frameworks. Practitioners need to master *bias-aware recruitment and*

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promotion, design and apply *transparent evaluation criteria*, and build *mentoring and support structures* that allow minority employees to thrive. Competences also include developing *whistleblower-friendly complaint procedures*, so that employees who expose discrimination are protected rather than punished.

France and Portugal underscore the importance of frontline competences in HR and customer-facing roles, where discriminatory practices are often most visible. Germany and Sweden emphasise the competences of administrative and regulatory actors who shape labour-market access through recognition of qualifications and labour policies. Bulgaria stresses competences in municipal and NGO collaboration, recognising that integration into the labour market often requires cross-sector partnerships.

Housing

In all countries, discrimination in access to rental housing is a recurring theme. Prevention in this field requires competences for both *landlords and municipalities*. Municipal officers and housing providers must be trained in *equal-treatment enforcement, fair-housing procedures, and anti-discrimination monitoring mechanisms*. Competences also include mediation skills to resolve conflicts and to counter neighbourhood-level exclusion.

Examples from the national reports illustrate these needs: Swedish respondents described systemic name-based rejections; German and Portuguese respondents detailed discriminatory hurdles in the rental process; Bulgarian respondents connected Roma exclusion directly to discriminatory housing practices; and in France, precarious housing for unaccompanied minors reflected administrative biases.

Public services, policing and justice

Trust in public institutions is a cornerstone of participation, yet the collected data shows how discrimination erodes this trust. Competences are therefore urgently required *in fair case-handling, bias-aware decision-making*, and the use *of interpreters and accessible communication tools*. Civil servants and frontline administrators must also develop skills for *transparent documentation of incidents* and clear referral pathways to rights-protection bodies.

Survey and interview material shows slightly different national priorities. In Germany, the rise in complaints about public authorities shows the need for competence in transparent and accountable service delivery. In Sweden, civil servants and police require training in intersectional awareness and trauma-informed interaction. In France, prefectural staff and police officers need competences to eliminate racialised checks and discriminatory gatekeeping. In Bulgaria, police and prosecutors require capacity to properly investigate and sanction hate crimes. In Portugal, competences in complaint handling and law enforcement training are seen as central.

Healthcare

Four of the five countries bring healthcare into focus as a priority field. Competences here are centred on *cultural competence, trust-building, and equitable service delivery*. Health professionals must be able to recognise implicit bias, communicate effectively with patients from diverse backgrounds, and adapt care to the needs of minority groups.

German survey and interview evidence documents discriminatory attitudes among some medical personnel and barriers in accessing healthcare. Swedish interviews highlight gendered dimensions, such as the specific challenges faced by migrant women. Portuguese interviewees call for systematic training in cultural competence for health staff, while Bulgarian materials describe unequal treatment in emergency care. These findings point to the need for training modules in that address bias in clinical interactions, supported by WP3 scenarios where learners practice responding to subtle but consequential discriminatory situations.

Public space, media and digital

Finally, the collected data underscores the significance of public space and media. Incidents of discrimination in transport, retail, and leisure facilities highlight the need for *community mediation competences and bystander intervention skills,* equipping individuals and professionals to respond constructively in real time. In the media and digital sphere, competences are needed for *countering stereotypes, institutional communication, and reporting and referral mechanisms* for hate speech.

The German report in particular highlights the urgency of addressing online harassment and accessibility barriers for older and disabled people. France and Portugal emphasise cultural and media representations as drivers of exclusion. Bulgaria shows how antigypsyist discourse in public life feeds discrimination in practice.

The identification of priority fields and competence needs is not an end in itself but a foundation for action. The documented critical incidents will serve as realistic ideas for new scenarios, ensuring that learners practice competences in real-life contexts. Finally, the Participa City project will provide a training course that will make a contribution to the growth of these competences in adult educators, civil servants and other gatekeepers.

By connecting findings to practice in this way, the project ensures that the insights of the transnational report are translated into concrete strategies that can prevent racism and discrimination, strengthen minority participation, and contribute to a diversity-friendly climate in Europe.

5. Summary and analysis of the critical incidents collection

As part of the Participa City project, a collection of critical incidents was analysed to identify situations in which individuals perceived unequal treatment based on ethnic or cultural origin. The following summary provides an overview of the findings of the critical incident collection highlighting the geographical distribution of incidents, the main fields of life affected, the groups most impacted, and concluding with recommendations for future action.

A total of 60 incidents were collected across the five European countries. The highest number of cases was reported in Germany (19 incidents), followed by Portugal (11) France (10), Sweden (10), and Bulgaria (10). The incidents were categorized according to the societal domains in which they occurred. The two most frequently mentioned areas were *education* and the *labour market*, each accounting for 16 incidents.

Discrimination was also commonly reported in *public life* (11 incidents), including interactions in public spaces, customer service, and social activities. Additional reports concerned *housing* (5 incidents), *public transport* (5 incidents), *law enforcement* (3 incidents), *health care* (2 incidents), and isolated cases related to *politics and religion.*

These findings indicate that discrimination and unequal treatment are not confined to specific contexts but occur across multiple spheres of daily life, particularly where individuals interact with public institutions or seek access to essential resources such as education, work, and housing.

The analysis revealed that several groups were represented among those experiencing discrimination. The largest number of incidents involved people with *immigrant backgrounds* (19 cases), followed by members of the *black community* (13) and the *Roma community* (10). Other groups frequently mentioned included the *muslim community* (6), people with refugee backgrounds (3), and smaller numbers of incidents concerning Brazilian, Maghrebin, African, and Polish communities. These results reflect persistent patterns of marginalization faced by visible minorities and individuals perceived as culturally or ethnically different from the majority population.

The collected data demonstrates that unequal treatment on the basis of ethnic or cultural origin remains a widespread challenge across Europe. The incidents highlight the need for both *preventive measures and responsive actions* to promote equality and inclusion.

To address these issues, the following *acting recommendations* are proposed on *societal level:*

- Education and Awareness: schools, workplaces, and public institutions should implement anti-bias training and intercultural education to foster understanding and empathy across communities.

- Policy and Enforcement: anti-discrimination laws should be strengthened and effectively enforced. Accessible reporting mechanisms—such as online complaint platforms or local support centers—should be established to help victims of discrimination.

- Community and Dialogue: local authorities should support intercultural dialogue initiatives and mediation programs that bring together different communities to build trust and cooperation.

- Institutional Change: efforts should be made to increase diversity within public institutions, particularly in education, law enforcement, and healthcare, and to ensure ongoing monitoring and data collection on discriminatory incidents.

- Public Awareness: positive narratives about cultural diversity should be promoted through media, campaigns, and cultural events that showcase the contributions of different communities to society.

Support mechanisms for dealing with individual incidents can help individuals to defend themselves or others against racist discrimination. In this context reporting systems and critical incident databases are partly available on European or national level[1] in the partner countries.

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[1] For example: https://www.i-report.eu/en/report-a-case/ or
https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/EN/homepage/homepage-node.html

The ParticipaCity partnership developed the following acting reccomendations for individuals facing or whitnessing racist discrimination to take action:

> Recognize and name the discrimination

A fundamental step is the recognition and clear identification of a discriminatory act. Discrimination may appear in explicit or subtle forms — through verbal remarks, differential treatment, or systemic barriers. Naming the experience as discrimination allows for greater clarity, prevents self-blame, and creates the foundation for further action or dialogue. This process also contributes to the visibility of discriminatory practices that might otherwise remain unacknowledged.

> Document the discrimination

Systematic documentation is essential for ensuring that incidents are not lost or forgotten. Written notes describing the time, place, people involved, and circumstances, as well as the collection of relevant evidence such as written correspondence, photographs, or witness statements, strengthen the reliability of subsequent reporting or legal action. Documentation also facilitates institutional learning by providing concrete examples for prevention and training measures.

> Communicate proactive and assertive

Whenever circumstances allow, open and assertive communication can help clarify misunderstandings and challenge discriminatory behaviour. Assertive communication means expressing one's feelings and needs clearly and respectfully without aggression or passivity. For example, one might say, "I felt treated differently because of my background — I'd like to understand why this happened." Such communication can help clarify misunderstandings, interrupt discriminatory behavior, and open dialogue. However, safety and emotional readiness should always come first.

> Seek support

Experiencing or witnessing discrimination can be emotionally draining. It is important to reach out for support — from trusted friends, colleagues, counselors, or anti-discrimination organizations. Emotional support helps process the experience, while organizational or legal support can provide guidance on the next steps, such as filing a formal complaint or mediation. Nobody should have to handle discrimination alone.

➢ Report the incident

Reporting is a key part of accountability. Depending on the context, incidents can be reported to employers, school administrations, anti-discrimination offices, ombuds institutions, or the police. When available, official complaint mechanisms or equality bodies ensure that discrimination is documented and addressed systematically. Reporting also helps build statistical evidence for broader advocacy and policy reform.

➢ Raise awareness

Turning personal experiences into collective awareness can contribute to social change. Sharing one's story — through community meetings, social media, or collaborations with NGOs — helps others recognize similar patterns and know they are not alone. Advocacy and campaigns can amplify marginalized voices and promote inclusive narratives. Supporting local NGOs or anti-racism initiatives is an effective way to make a lasting impact.

➢ Engage in Anti-Discrimination Politics of Public Spaces

Beyond individual action, individuals can contribute to shaping inclusive public spaces. This includes advocating for data collection and research on discrimination, participating in public consultations, or engaging in open talks, workshops, and intercultural activities. Such participation helps build communities that recognize diversity as a strength and hold institutions accountable for equal treatment.

The ParticipaCity partnership will make a contribution to sensitize individuals in Europe in decisionmaking and gatekeeper positions by providing a critical incident database with acting reccomendations and providing innovative training approaches to act anti-racist that is available online into the project's website: https://participa-city.eu/

In addition the partnership will get engaged in a dialogue with policy makers and develop a policy paper to advocate for more efforts towards anti-discrimination.

6. Methodological reflections and limitations

This methodological approach was deliberately designed as a triangulated methodology, combining three complementary sources of evidence: surveys, semi-structured interviews, and critical incident documentation. This combination ensured that the data collected would cover both breadth and depth. The online surveys reached a broad set of practitioners and community members accessible through partner networks, offering a picture of perceptions and priorities across multiple sectors. The interviews added depth by capturing the voices of both institutional gatekeepers and minority advocates, allowing a closer look at the mechanisms through which discrimination is reproduced or challenged. Finally, the critical incidents provided authentic, context-specific examples of how racism and discrimination play out in everyday interactions.

These incidents not only anchor the findings in lived experience but also supply valuable material for the design of the simulation game in the next step of the project implementation.

The rationale for this triangulated approach was clearly articulated in the project application: to link the quantitative reach of survey data, the qualitative depth of interviews, and the situational richness of critical incidents. In practice, this design proved effective. Across countries, the three sources consistently converged on the same groups most affected (Roma, people of African descent, Muslims, and migrants/refugees) and the same priority fields (education, employment, housing, public services, and justice). This repeated convergence increases the reliability of the findings and mitigates the limitations of non-probability sampling.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge several limitations. First, the surveys were distributed mainly through partner networks, which means that the samples cannot be considered representative of the general population. Instead, they reflect the perspectives of practitioners, educators, civil society actors, and some community members who are already engaged or reachable by the partners. This may bias the results towards those more aware of racism and discrimination issues. Second, in sensitive domains such as discrimination, under-reporting is inevitable. Many victims choose not to share experiences due to fear of stigma, lack of trust in institutions, or trauma associated with recounting incidents. As a result, the true scale of racism is

likely under-estimated. Third, each national context is shaped by its own legal frameworks, political debates, and public discourses. Concepts and terms (for example, "migration background" in Germany, "universalism" in France, or "antigypsyism" in Bulgaria) are not always directly comparable, which limits cross-national generalisation.

Despite these limitations, the methodology ensures a high degree of internal quality and validity. The consistent use of common instruments across countries allows for meaningful comparison. The minimum thresholds for data collection ensured that each national report had sufficient material to build a robust analysis. The triangulated design reduces the risk of isolated or anecdotal findings by cross-checking patterns from different sources. Importantly, the strong overlap in results across countries reinforces confidence that the identified groups and fields of action reflect structural realities rather than random variation.

In sum, this analysis produced a multi-layered evidence base that is both sufficiently rich to inform national analyses and coherent enough to support a transnational synthesis. The methodological approach strikes a balance between feasibility and depth, ensuring that the project's practical outputs in the following steps rest on a solid and credible foundation.

7. Conclusion

The conducted transnational analysis provides a comprehensive evidence base on how racism and discrimination are experienced across five European countries. By combining survey results, in-depth interviews, and critical incident documentation, the partnership has identified the ethnic and cultural groups most affected and the societal fields where preventive action is most required according to the respondents in the sample. *Roma communities, people of African descent, Muslims, and migrants and refugees* are consistently named as facing the greatest barriers, while education, employment, housing, public services, and policing emerge as the fields where structural discrimination is most entrenched.

The findings make clear that racism is not only an individual attitude but a systemic issue rooted in institutions, policies, and everyday practices. This reinforces the project's emphasis on equipping gatekeepers - teachers, employers, administrators, healthcare professionals, and police with the competences to intervene effectively and to dismantle discriminatory structures. The catalogue of critical incidents illustrates the lived realities of discrimination and offers authentic material for use in awareness-raising and competence development.

Looking ahead, this analysis provides the essential foundation for the next stages of Participa City. The simulation game will be developed using real-life scenarios inspired by the critical incident database, enabling learners to experience and practice decision-making in situations where discrimination arises. In the next step, a training course will be implemented to build competences systematically. Together, these outputs will translate the insights of this report into practical tools for prevention, ensuring that the project's overarching aim - strengthening participation and fostering a diversity-friendly climate in Europe can be realised in concrete practice.

Participa City – Preventing racism and discrimination of ethnic and cultural minorities in Europe and fostering participation through a European game

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