

Breaking the silence on racial discrimination in childhood

**Eurochild's contribution to
the 2026-2030 EU anti-racism
strategy**



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

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The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination defines racial discrimination as: *"Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."*¹

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) highlights that racism thrives "where there is ignorance, unfounded fears of racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic or other forms of difference, the exploitation of prejudices, or the teaching or dissemination of distorted values."² Racism, whether conscious or unconscious, manifests in both subtle and overt forms, perpetuating systemic inequities that disproportionately affect racialised communities. For children across Europe, these injustices translate into persistent violations of their rights.³

Conversations around racial and ethnic discrimination are too often absent from discussions on children's rights. This silence points to a systemic failure to recognise the lived experiences of children with a migrant background and ethnic minority origin and the structural racism embedded in our societies.

At Eurochild, we call for the next anti-racism strategy to explicitly address how racial and ethnic discrimination, xenophobia, and discrimination based on migration or residence status, religious affiliation or linguistic background, as well as intersectional discrimination, affect children. The strategy must include a specific focus on how racial discrimination impacts children's rights, supported by concrete indicators to monitor progress and accountability. A glossary of working definitions is provided at the end of this contribution.

Evidence of racial disparities in childhood

Reliable, disaggregated equality data is fundamental to evidence-based policymaking. Yet, across the EU, efforts to collect data on migration background and minority ethnic origin remain fragmented, inconsistent, or non-existent. The scarcity of reliable data on children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin limits our ability to understand the extent of racial discrimination and develop appropriate responses.⁴ Despite the

¹ United Nations. (1965). *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Article 1.*

² Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2001). *General Comment No. 1: The aims of education (CRC/GC/2001/1).*

³ Eurochild. (2024, November 21). *Racism violates children's rights.*

⁴ European Network Against Racism. (2019, March 16). *Equality data collection: What is it all about?*

aforementioned challenges in collecting data, evidence demonstrates that children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin are particularly vulnerable to experiencing human rights violations and discrimination in the following key areas, which shape their lives from their early years:

1. Child poverty and social exclusion

A child's background remains a strong predictor of their life opportunities. In 2020, children with a parent who was born outside of the EU were up to twice as likely to be poor as those whose parents were born in the EU.⁵ In 2023, in **France**, 43.7% of children with parents born outside the EU were affected by poverty or social exclusion, compared to 24.9% for the overall AROPE rate.⁶ In **Germany**, data from 2023 shows that among children under the age of three, the participation rate in early childhood care and education is 43% when both parents were born in the country, compared to just 22% when at least one parent was born abroad.⁷

These figures reflect deeper systemic barriers that many children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin face.⁸ Discrimination in the labour market restricts access to stable, well-paid employment. Language and administrative obstacles often make it more challenging for families to access support services. Further, as highlighted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin are more likely not to benefit from social security, due to many barriers, including language, bureaucracy, and lack of awareness about their rights.⁹ The Dutch childcare benefits scandal, in which automated data-matching algorithms flagged over 26,000 families, disproportionately those with a migration background, for alleged fraud, illustrates how reliance on AI and opaque bureaucratic decision-making can institutionalise discrimination.^{10 11}

2. Education

Education disparities across Europe are stark and persistent. In **Bulgaria** and **Romania**, early school leaving is particularly high among Roma children.¹² More than half of Roma children

⁵ Eurostat. (2021, October 28). [1 in 4 children in the EU at risk of poverty or social exclusion](#).

⁶ Eurochild. (2025). [France – 2024 biennial report on the implementation of the Child Guarantee](#).

⁷ Germany's Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2024) [First progress report bmfsfj.de on the implementation of the National Action Plan "New opportunities for children in Germany"](#)

⁸ Eurochild. (2025). [Eurochild Flagship Sub-report on Child Poverty and Social Exclusion](#).

⁹ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2017). [General comment No. 22 \(2017\) on the rights of all children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return](#). United Nations. CRC/C/GC/22.

¹⁰ Amnesty International. (2021, October). [Xenophobic machines: Discrimination through unregulated use of algorithms in the Dutch childcare benefits scandal](#). London: Amnesty International Ltd.

¹¹ Eurochild. (June 2025). [Eradicating child poverty in Europe](#).

¹² Eurochild. (2025). [Flagship sub-report on Roma Children across Europe](#). Eurochild

(52%) in Europe attend schools or classes where nearly all their peers are Roma.¹³ In **Finland**, foreign-born students underperform at a rate of 57.2%, with a 35.2 percentage point gap compared to their native-born peers. In **France**, foreign-born students are twice as likely to underachieve as those without a migrant background. In **Sweden**, the performance gap between foreign-born and native-born students stands at 19 percentage points.¹⁴ In **Germany**, data from 2023 shows that among children under the age of three, the participation rate in childcare is 43% when both parents were born in Germany, compared to just 22% when at least one parent was born abroad. For children aged three to under six, participation is nearly universal among those with no migration background, but drops to 78% when at least one parent was born abroad. First-generation immigrant children are significantly less likely to attend higher secondary school compared to their peers without a migration background.¹⁵ Wide disparities in educational outcomes are often rooted in systemic discrimination outside and within school systems, leading to a combination of institutional and social barriers.^{16 17}

Students from marginalised communities often report higher rates of bullying, racial discrimination, and social exclusion in schools. These factors contribute to a learning environment that reinforces inequality rather than addressing it.¹⁸ In Europe, there is a need for inclusive environments that actively promote human rights education, equipping children and young people with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to respect diversity, challenge discrimination, and contribute to a more just and equitable society. A qualitative study of Syrian-born refugee children in Rotterdam found that children as young as ten described being excluded from playground games, mocked for their language mistakes, and told things like *“Do you go back to your country? Don’t forget your country. Don’t forget it, that’s better, the Netherlands is not your country”*.¹⁹

A good practice funded by the European Union, the Including Children Affected by Migration (ICAM) Programme aimed to enhance the inclusion, well-being, and educational outcomes of 10.5 million children affected by migration. Implemented in schools across Italy, Spain, Romania, and the United Kingdom, ICAM was built on a successfully trialled model to create safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. The programme equipped school staff with the tools and training necessary to support children’s social and emotional

¹³ UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. (2024). [Breaking barriers: An analytical report on Roma children and women in Kosovo \(UNSCR 1244\), Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia \[Summary report\]. UNICEF.](#)

¹⁴ European Commission. Secretariat-General (2024, June 19). [2024 European Semester: Spring package](#)

¹⁵ Germany’s Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2024) [First progress report bmfsfj.de on the implementation of the National Action Plan “New opportunities for children in Germany”](#)

¹⁶ UNICEF. (2022, November). [Rights denied: The impact of discrimination on children.](#) United Nations Children’s Fund.

¹⁷ Eurochild. (2025). [Flagship Sub-Report on Inclusive Education for all Children.](#)

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ van der Ent, B., Dagevos, J., & Stam, T. (2020). [Syrian-born children with a refugee background in Rotterdam: A child-centred approach to explore their social contacts and the experienced social climate in the Netherlands.](#) *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 15(Suppl. 2), Article 1721985.

development, strengthen peer relationships, and foster a sense of belonging, thereby contributing to more inclusive education systems across Europe.²⁰ Other good practices can be found in the biennial reports on the European Child Guarantee, including the introduction of a definition of segregation in education and guidelines for desegregation in Slovakia.²¹

3. Healthcare

Across Europe, children with a migrant background often struggle to access healthcare due to legal, linguistic, or financial barriers. Moreover, these children are often excluded from broader public health initiatives, leaving them particularly vulnerable in times of crisis. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many migrant children were unable to access vital services, such as health information, vaccinations, or remote education. This exclusion deepens the divide, creating further inequities and long-term consequences for their health and well-being. In Europe, only five countries – **France, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Italy** – ensure that all migrant children, regardless of their legal status, have equal access to healthcare as citizens do.²² Migrant children are less likely to be insured and use public health services significantly less than natives, except for emergency care.²³

Children with a migrant background and those belonging to ethnic minorities are also more likely to have direct experience of environmental challenges — such as climate change, extreme weather events, food and water insecurity, air, water and soil pollution, biodiversity loss, and deforestation — all of which have major impacts on their health. In particular, they are disproportionately exposed to toxins and pollutants, increasing the risk of respiratory issues, heat-related illnesses, and impairment of cognitive development.^{24 25}

The negative impact of racism is also visible in mental health outcomes. Refugee and migrant children experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, and trauma, with racism acting as a significant contributing factor.²⁶ Children from migrant backgrounds have often faced situations that are very different from those in the host countries. As a result, the

²⁰ Eurochild. (2021, September 6). [ICAM – Improving the inclusion in school of Children Affected by Migration](#).

²¹ Eurochild. (2024, June 10). [Biennial reports on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee](#).

²² Stevens, A. J., Boukari, Y., English, S., Kadir, A., Kumar, B. N., & Devakumar, D. (2024). [Addressing migration and health inequity in Europe: Discriminatory, racist, and xenophobic policies and practices against child refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants in European health systems](#). Yorkshire and Humber

²³ Galanis, P., Koureas, S., Siskou, O., Konstantakopoulou, O., Angelopoulos, G., & Kaitelidou, D. (2022). Healthcare services access, use and barriers among migrants in Europe: A systematic review. *International Journal of Caring Sciences*, 15(1), 28–47.

²⁴ Eurochild (2025). [Flagship sub-report on children’s right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment](#).

²⁵ Council of Europe. (2025, May 26). [Environmental challenges and national minorities](#).

²⁶ Barros, S., Santos, J. C., Candido, B. P., Batista, L. E., & Gonçalves, M. M. (2022). Mental health assistance for Black children and adolescents and racism. *Interface - Comunicação, Saúde, Educação*, 26, e220153.

mental health care systems in host countries are frequently ill-equipped²⁷ to respond to these specific needs, particularly when mental health crises are linked to war trauma.²⁸

4. Housing

In General Comment 21, the CRC Committee refers to the compounding forms of discrimination faced by children in street situations, including based on race, ethnicity, indigenous status, immigration status, particularly as minority groups are overrepresented amongst those in street situations (para. 26).²⁹

According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), people of African descent in Europe face widespread racial discrimination in housing. One in four respondents reported being denied rental housing by private landlords due to their ethnic origin. Discrimination is over four times more likely in the private rental market (23%) compared to public housing authorities (5%), with the highest incidences reported in **Germany** (62%), **Austria** (49%), **Belgium** (44%), and **Italy** (43%). Additionally, 14% of respondents could not afford to keep their homes warm, which is double the EU average.³⁰

Roma communities are also affected by stark housing inequalities. Nearly half (45%) live in overcrowded dwellings, compared to a 17% EU average. Over half (52%) experience housing deprivation, including living in damp or dark residences lacking proper sanitation. In **Romania** and **Slovakia**, 40% and 28% of Roma, respectively, lack access to tap water within their homes. Furthermore, 24% reported facing discrimination when seeking housing within the past five years. Roma children are particularly vulnerable, often growing up in informal settlements or segregated areas without access to basic services like clean water, electricity, or adequate sanitation. The absence of legal tenure also exposes families to forced evictions and homelessness.^{31 32}

Children in migrant and refugee families across EU Member States face similarly dire housing conditions. Those residing in camps, reception centres, or asylum accommodations frequently endure prolonged stays in overcrowded, unsanitary, and temporary shelters. These living environments pose serious health risks and contribute to psychological distress, educational disruption, and social exclusion. Unaccompanied minors in countries such as **France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Greece** are particularly at

²⁷ Eurochild. (2025). [Flagship sub-report on Children's Mental Health](#).

²⁸ Eurochild. (2025, March 24). [Malta launches national consultation manual on children and armed conflict](#). Eurochild.

²⁹ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2017). *General comment No. 21: Children in street situations (CRC/C/GC/21)*. United Nations.

³⁰ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2023). [Being Black in the EU: Experiences of people of African descent](#).

³¹ [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. \(2023\). Roma in 10 European countries: Main results – Roma survey 2021. Publications Office of the European Union.](#)

³² Eurochild. (June 2025). [Housing challenges faced by children in Europe](#).

risk, often facing homelessness or inadequate shelter due to delays in the asylum process and insufficient reception capacity.^{33 34 35}

Structural inequalities create these inequalities, exposing children to health and safety risks. Structural racism in housing policy—including exclusionary zoning laws, underinvestment in marginalised communities, and limited legal recourse—perpetuates residential segregation and deepens inequality.

5. Birth registration and statelessness

While the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that every child shall be registered, obliging states to implement these rights "in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless", an estimated 500,000 people in Europe are stateless. Thousands more are at risk of statelessness due to gaps in nationality laws, weak civil registration systems, and racial discrimination.³⁶

Statelessness deprives children of fundamental rights such as legal identity, access to education, healthcare, social protection, and, in many cases, protection from exploitation and abuse.³⁷ Birth registration is a critical safeguard against statelessness, as it provides formal recognition of a child's birth, including key details such as name, date and place of birth, and parentage. Where birth registration is inaccessible, delayed, or discriminatory, children are at increased risk of becoming stateless.³⁸

As highlighted by CRC General Comment 8,³⁹ stateless children often belong to minority communities or migrant families and that the lack of a birth certificate frequently results from discrimination against certain ethnic or religious groups. In Europe, among the most affected are Roma communities, who face systemic barriers in accessing birth registration services. Roma children are often born in informal settings or in families lacking identification documents, which complicates timely registration and jeopardises their right to identity and nationality rights.⁴⁰

³³ Culora, A., & Janta, B. (2020). Understanding the housing conditions experienced by children in the EU. European Commission.

³⁴ FEANTSA. (2025). Unaccompanied minors in the EU.

³⁵ FEANTSA. (2025). Unaccompanied minors in the EU.

³⁶ European Network on Statelessness. (n.d.). Everything you need to know about statelessness.

³⁷ UNHCR. (2023). Global trends in statelessness. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

³⁸ UNHCR. (2023a). Statelessness in Europe. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

³⁹ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2006). *General comment No. 8: The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (CRC/C/GC/8)*. United Nations.

⁴⁰ European Network on Statelessness. (2022). Roma Belong: Statelessness, discrimination and marginalisation of Roma in Europe.

6. Child protection

While the overrepresentation of children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin is documented in the United States⁴¹ and the United Kingdom,⁴² comparable data across European Union countries remains scarce. Nevertheless, similar patterns of disproportionality and systemic bias are present across several EU member states. There is growing evidence of their overrepresentation of children in alternative care, particularly among Roma children.⁴³ In several Member States, children with a migrant or ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be deemed “unfit” due to poverty-related factors, leading to disproportionate rates of family separation. Research from **Sweden** shows that children from ethnic minority groups were assessed at greater risk of harm than other children in similar circumstances, with unconscious bias among caseworkers identified as a driver of these disparities.^{44 45}

7. Violence against children

Children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin often face violence linked to racial discrimination, including hate speech, bullying, and discriminatory practices. Nearly one in four respondents to a survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights to people with African Descent reported that someone had made offensive or threatening remarks to their child in person due to the child’s ethnic or immigrant background. Among parents of African descent, 8% reported that their child had experienced physical abuse, such as hitting, hair-pulling, or kicking. The highest rates were in **Ireland** and **Finland**, where as many as 23% and 20% of parents, respectively, reported that their children had such experiences.⁴⁶ In **Slovakia**, there is evidence of police officers beating and threatening to shoot Romani children for not respecting quarantine measures.⁴⁷

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⁴¹ Bartholet, E., Wulczyn, F., Barth, R. P., & Lederman, C. (2011). *Race and child welfare*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago; Redd, J., Suggs, H., Gibbons, R. D., Muhammad, L., McDonald, J., & Bell, C. C. (2005). A plan to strengthen systems and reduce the number of African-American children in child welfare. *Illinois Child Welfare*, 2(1–2), 1–9

⁴² Edwards, T., Hussain, A., Sato, C., King, J., Saini, M., & King, B. (2020). *Exploring racial disproportionalities and disparities for Black families involved with the child welfare system: A scoping review protocol*. *Social Science Protocols*, 3, 1–10.

⁴³ Byrne, K. (2021, December 1). [Romani children in state care and other abuses of the fundamental right to a safe, happy and healthy childhood](#). European Roma Rights Centre.

⁴⁴ Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare. (2022). *Social Services’ Child and Family Interventions: Disparities in Case Handling*.

⁴⁵ [Eurochild \(2025\) Flagship sub-report on child protection systems in Europe](#)

⁴⁶ [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. \(2023\). Being Black in the EU: Experiences of people of African descent.](#)

⁴⁷ [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(2024\) Addressing racism in policing](#). Publications Office of the European Union.

⁴⁸ Eurochild. (2025, June 2). [Violence against children in Europe](#) Eurochild.

8. The justice system

People from ethnic and migrant backgrounds are often met with punitive responses rather than social support for similar offences, compared to those without such backgrounds.⁴⁹ In **Italy**, while children with a migrant background represented less than 8% of the total children in 2018, they accounted for 36% of those in youth detention centres. Notably, few migrant children benefited from the measures introduced to reduce prison admissions at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁰

Studies in the **Netherlands** find Moroccan and Turkish youths significantly overrepresented in pre-trial detention and sentenced cohorts compared to native Dutch peers, even when controlling for offence type. Although youths with a non-Western immigrant background make up only about 12 % of the general 18–24 population, they account for some 35 % of young people in detention facilities in the Netherlands.⁵¹ Youth with a migration background in the **Netherlands** are significantly less likely to be released from pre-trial detention compared to their native Dutch peers. A Dutch quantitative study found that both youth with a migration background and those with intellectual disabilities are less likely to receive positive release recommendations from the Child Protection Service, influencing judges' decisions. These youth are also disproportionately held in remand detention for similar offences.⁵²

9. Racial profiling and policing

While stop and searches without a reasonable justification and based on ethnicity violate human rights,⁵³ these practices are documented across Europe. For children, particularly those from racialised, migrant, Roma, or Muslim communities, such practices translate into routine humiliation, fear, and exclusion from public spaces. Racial profiling in policing not only violates their fundamental rights but can also shape their perception of justice and safety in society. The use of biased technologies, such as facial recognition, further exacerbates risks, particularly for children already subject to discrimination. Safeguards are essential to protect their rights and dignity.⁵⁴

In **France**,⁵⁵ there is evidence that police disproportionately target individuals based on their skin colour or perceived ethnic origin, particularly young people assumed to be Black or Arab, including children. Similar findings have been reported in **Greece** and other EU

⁴⁹ European Network Against Racism. (2016). *Racism and discrimination in the context of migration in Europe: ENAR Shadow Report 2015–2016*. Brussels: ENAR.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Veen, V. C. (2011). *Risk profiles of youth in pre-trial detention: A comparative study of Moroccan and Dutch male adolescents in the Netherlands* (Doctoral dissertation, Utrecht University). Utrecht University.

⁵² Mastropasqua, I., Totaro, M. S., & Barberis, G. (2019). *Minori stranieri e giustizia minorile in Italia*. Gangemi Editore.

⁵³ European Court of Human Rights. (2008). *N. v. the United Kingdom (Application no. 26565/05)*.

⁵⁴ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. (2025). *Annual report on ECRI's activities covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2024*. Council of Europe.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch. (2020, June 18). *"They talk to us like we're dogs": Abusive police stops in France*.

countries by the European Fundamental Rights Agency.⁵⁶ Between March 2023 and March 2024, in the **UK**, there were approximately 103,100 stop-and-searches involving children. Among those with recorded ethnicity, Black children made up 19 % of searches, and were the only group over-represented. Over three-quarters (76%) of stop-and-searches of children resulted in 'No further action'.⁵⁷ Black children are 6.5 times more likely than white children to be strip-searched by police in the UK.⁵⁸

10. Migration policies

The plight of migrant children exposes the racial and discriminatory dimensions of Europe's immigration systems. At least 3,500 children have died in the central Mediterranean in the past 10 years.⁵⁹ These tragedies reflect a broader issue: policies that prioritise border control over humanitarian needs. Significant shortcomings exist in how each EU Member State treat children on the move. These include documented cases of systematic beatings and pushbacks. The racist and discriminatory aspects of these practices are undeniable and must not be overlooked.

In the **Netherlands**, children seeking asylum are sometimes placed in overcrowded or unsuitable shelters, while **Spain** has been criticised for inadequate reception conditions for unaccompanied minors. In **Greece**, children face poor living conditions in *Closed Controlled Access Centres on the Aegean islands*.⁶⁰ Migrant children in **Cyprus**, **Malta**, and **Poland** encounter challenges accessing essential services. In **Belgium**, unaccompanied minors and asylum-seeking children lack sufficient support.⁶¹

These conditions put children at higher risk of going missing. Between 2021 and 2023, the cross-border journalism project *Lost in Europe* uncovered that 51,433 child migrants went missing after arriving in European countries—a significant rise compared to their 2021 findings, which reported at least 18,000 unaccompanied minors missing between 2018 and 2020.⁶²

The 2024 Migration and Asylum Pact risks normalising the arbitrary use of immigration detention, including for children and families, and increasing racial profiling. By invoking “crisis” procedures to justify pushbacks and returning individuals to so-called “safe third countries” where they might face risks of violence, torture, and arbitrary imprisonment, the

⁵⁶ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2024, April 10). [Addressing racism in policing](#)

⁵⁷ Youth Justice Board for England and Wales & Ministry of Justice. (2025, January 30). [Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024](#). GOV.UK.

⁵⁸ Revolving Doors. (2024, October 24). [Addressing racial disparity in the youth justice system: Promising practice examples](#) (Commissioned by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales). Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

⁵⁹ UNICEF. (2025, April 15). [Approximately 3,500 children have died in the Central Mediterranean over the past 10 years](#).

⁶⁰ Eurochild (2025) [Flagship sub-report on child protection systems in Europe](#)

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² van den Hof, E. (2024, April 30). [More than 50,000 unaccompanied child migrants have gone missing after arriving in Europe](#). *Lost in Europe*.

Pact could perpetuate discrimination and human rights violations. Such practices may entrench injustices rather than protect the rights and well-being of migrant children.⁶³

Furthermore, EU migration agreements with non-EU countries such as Libya have contributed to externalising border control to regimes with well-documented records of abuse. These arrangements, often lacking transparency and oversight, shift responsibility away from the EU while reinforcing discriminatory systems that deny children their rights and dignity.^{64 65}

11. Racism and international relations

Racism is also linked to the “othering” and media portrayal of children. This often reduces complex issues to oversimplified stories, further entrenching stereotypes and biases, and can lead to a lack of empathy for groups perceived as “different.” Racism also shapes the way children are perceived, represented, and treated, particularly in contexts of crisis, displacement, and humanitarian aid.⁶⁶

One striking example of unequal treatment is the stark double standard in the reception of displaced people from different backgrounds. At the onset of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, children fleeing the country were rightly welcomed with empathy and swift support. However, the discriminatory treatment of non-white people evacuating Ukraine has been documented across several European countries, where many were subjected to detention.⁶⁷

Moreover, the support provided to Ukrainian children stands in sharp contrast to the treatment of children from non-Western countries, who continue to face hostile border policies, detention, and inadequate protections. These disparities reflect racialised perceptions of victimhood and humanity, where empathy and solidarity are unequally distributed based on background or region of origin.⁶⁸

Further, the reluctance or refusal of many Western governments and institutions to offer meaningful political or humanitarian support to Palestinians cannot be fully understood without recognising the role of racism in shaping public opinion, policy debates and media coverage.⁶⁹

Another risk is the persistence of perspectives shaped by colonialism, where perceptions of equality are often framed in ways that ignore the rights and individuality of children and

⁶³ PICUM. (2024, October). [Children’s rights in the 2024 Migration and Asylum Pact: PICUM analysis.](#)

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch. (2019, January 21). [No escape from hell: EU policies contribute to abuse of migrants in Libya.](#)

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch. (2025, January 16). [EU migration policies fuel abuses across borders.](#) Human Rights Watch.

⁶⁶ Valentina Baú, ‘Rethinking the Representation of Refugee Children and Adolescents in the Media. Views from Italy’s frontline’ (Open Migration, 9 March 2021)

⁶⁷ Carly McLaughlin, “‘They don’t look like children’: child asylum seekers, The Dubs amendment and the politics of childhood’ (2018) 44(11) Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 1757.

⁶⁸ PICUM (2022, March 18). [Non-Ukrainians fleeing the war met with detention.](#)

⁶⁹ United Nations. (2024, November 5). [States must combat ‘deep-rooted’ racism against Palestinians, neo-Nazism, hate speech targeting minorities, experts tell Third Committee](#) (Press release GA/SHC/4425). United Nations.

families, treating them instead as recipients of charity. In such cases, aid may be provided, but the country's sustainable development is not supported. These attitudes have contributed, for example, to the rise of orphanages that focus on separating children from families rather than supporting family preservation. In several African countries, orphanages are a colonial-era legacy that still disrupt traditional family and community-based care systems.⁷⁰

Recommendations for the EU anti-racism strategy

1. Apply a child rights lens across all pillars of the Strategy

- **Embed child-specific indicators:** Ensure the 2026–2030 EU Anti-Racism Strategy includes explicit, measurable indicators that reflect the rights of children across all relevant policy areas.
- **Support national implementation:** Encourage and assist Member States in developing national anti-racism strategies that include child-specific objectives and address racial discrimination against children that intersects with migration status, disability, poverty, gender, descent, religion, and other grounds.
- **Support efforts to prevent statelessness:** Efforts to prevent childhood statelessness in Europe must ensure the right to **inclusive and non-discriminatory birth registration systems**, legal safeguards to ensure that every child born on a state's territory can acquire a nationality if they would otherwise be stateless, and targeted outreach to marginalised communities.

2. Strengthen equality data collection and monitoring

- **Mandate harmonised data:** Require all Member States to systematically collect disaggregated equality data—including by age, ethnicity, and migration/residence status—using consistent methodologies.
- **Ensure ethical standards:** Guarantee that data collection respects voluntary participation, self-identification, anonymity and data protection.
- **Invest in targeted research:** Fund EU-wide studies to examine the overrepresentation of children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin in child protection and justice systems, and use findings to inform policy reform.

⁷⁰ Hope and Homes for children (2022, March 13). [The harm of orphanages \(part 2\): Weakening family and community structures in Africa.](#)

- **Involve racialised people and the civil society:** Ensure the participation of racialised people, including children,⁷¹ as well as civil society organisations,⁷² in the monitoring of this initiative.

3. Tackle child poverty through targeted policies

- **Focus on children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin in the European Child Guarantee:** Ensure that children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin are explicitly supported in the implementation of the European Child Guarantee National Action Plans.
- **Strengthen inclusive social protection:** Ensure that income support measures and social protection systems effectively reach children with migrant and ethnic backgrounds, addressing barriers linked to discrimination, residence status, administrative access, or lack of awareness.

4. Combat systemic racism in education systems

- **Expand access to quality early childhood education and care:** Ensure children with a migration background have equitable access to quality early childhood education, including through language support, cultural mediation, and outreach to parents.
- **Promote inclusive education and prevent school dropout:** Provide tailored support to all children, especially those with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin, to reduce school dropout rates and ensure inclusive, supportive educational environments.
- **Integrate human rights education across the curriculum:** Embed human rights education at all levels of schooling, explicitly acknowledging the historical roots of structural racism, such as colonialism and slavery.
- **Prevent and address segregation in schools:** Take proactive measures to eliminate both de jure and de facto segregation in education systems. This

5. Ensure equal access to healthcare for all children

- **Guarantee universal healthcare access:** All children, regardless of migration status, must have equal access to healthcare services. This should be supported at the EU level, including through the European Child Guarantee.
- **Expand mental health services for children on the move:** Increase access to trauma-informed and culturally competent mental health support to the specific needs of refugee and asylum-seeking children.

⁷¹ Eurochild. (2025). [Flagship sub-report on child participation in Europe.](#)

⁷² Eurochild. (2025). [Flagship sub-report on civil society organisations working with children in Europe.](#)

6. Address housing inequalities impacting children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin

- **Prioritise housing through EU funds and initiatives:** Utilise EU instruments, such as the European Child Guarantee, to prioritise access to secure, quality housing for children with a migrant background or ethnic minority origin, particularly those residing in reception centres or informal settlements.
- **Monitor and address inadequate living conditions:** Establish mechanisms to regularly monitor and mitigate overcrowding, unsafe conditions, and prolonged stays in emergency accommodation for all children.

7. Reform child protection practices

- **Address bias in child protection systems:** Monitor and actively address systemic biases that result in the disproportionate separation of children from families with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin. Ensure all efforts are made to keep families together, unless separation is clearly in the best interests of the child.
- **Promote family- and community-based care:** Support Member States in transitioning from institutional to family- and community-based care alternatives. Ensure that no child is left behind in the implementation of deinstitutionalisation strategies.
- **Protect children from racially motivated violence:** Guarantee that children who are victims of racially motivated violence are promptly identified, protected, and provided with tailored support.

8. End discriminatory practices in the youth justice system

- **Monitor racial disparities in justice outcomes:** Systematically track and report on discrimination within juvenile justice systems, including arrest rates, detention rates, and sentencing outcomes.
- **Prioritise alternatives to detention:** In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, promote non-custodian measures for all children, particularly those in migration contexts.
- **Train justice system professionals:** Provide mandatory training for police officers, prosecutors, judges, and other justice actors on anti-racism, children's rights, and principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Definitions

Children on the move

A broader umbrella term that encompasses all children who are moving or have moved, regardless of the reason or their legal status.⁷³

Children with a migrant background

A person with a migratory background is defined as someone who has:

- (a) migrated into their present country of residence; and/or
- (b) previously had a different nationality from their present country of residence; and/or
- (c) At least one of their parents previously entered their present country of residence as a migrant.⁷⁴

Children with a minority ethnic origin

This term generally refers to children whose parents or family members have a different national or ethnic origin from the majority population in the country where they reside. It encompasses various aspects, including ancestry, cultural heritage, language, and shared traditions. In the context of anti-discrimination efforts, "ethnic origin" is recognised as a ground for protection under EU law. The Racial Equality Directive (Council Directive 2000/43/EC) prohibits discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin in various areas, including employment, education, and access to goods and services.⁷⁵

Foreign-born children

Children who have ever migrated from their country of birth to their current country of residence.⁷⁶

Migrant children

Children who have migrated across borders, including asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented children, and regular migrants.⁷⁷

Native-born children

Children who are born in their current country of residence.⁷⁸

⁷³ UNICEF. (n.d.). *Global Programme Framework on Children on the Move*.

⁷⁴ European Migration Network (EMN). (n.d.). *Person with a migratory background*.

⁷⁵ Council of the European Union. (2000). *Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC)*.

⁷⁶ OECD. (n.d.). *Foreign-born population (indicator)*. OECD Data.

⁷⁷ European Migration Network (EMN). (n.d.). *Migrant*.

⁷⁸ OECD. (n.d.). *Native-born employment rate (indicator)*. OECD Data.

Racialised children

Race is a social construct and has no stable biological grounding but is instead a set of categories and meanings created and maintained by societies over time.⁷⁹ Racialisation refers to the process by which socially constructed categories are actively applied to people or groups, with real social, political, and economic consequences.⁸⁰ The term "racialised" refers to a person or group to whom they have ascribed racial identities, often leading to differential treatment and systemic inequalities.⁸¹ While not explicitly defined in EU legislation, the concept is acknowledged in discussions on racism and discrimination, including in the Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025.⁸²

Racial discrimination

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination defines racial discrimination as: "Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."⁸³

Refugee children

A refugee is either a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.⁸⁴

Unaccompanied minor

A minor who arrives on the territory of an EU Member State unaccompanied by the adult responsible for them by law or by the practice of the EU Member State concerned, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person; or who is left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the EU Member State.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ UNESCO. (1950). *The Race Question: UNESCO's Statement on Race*. Paris: UNESCO.

⁸⁰ National Human Genome Research Institute (n.d.). [Race](#). In *Talking Glossary of Genomic and Genetic Terms*.

⁸¹ [Racialize](#). (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*.

⁸² European Commission. (2020). *A Union of Equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020–2025*.

⁸³ United Nations. (1965). *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Article 1*.

⁸⁴ European Migration Network. (n.d.). [Refugee](#). European Commission.

⁸⁵ European Migration Network. (n.d.). [Unaccompanied minor](#). European Commission.

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