

## Media, Education and Diversity

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The EU enlargement process as well as the both long-lasting and recently increased presence of third country nationals have in the last decade changed the shape of the EU, making it more and more culturally and ethnically diverse. The principle of non-discrimination, as set forth in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty of the European Union, has been strengthened to provide for additional guarantees for the respect of such a multicultural diversity. Prohibition of any kind of discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation has become a key value in the EU integration process. To give substance to the general principle, as set forth in the Treaty, the EU adopted anti-discrimination Directives, the underlining principle of which is that everyone has to be treated equally and is to be given an equal chance of realising its potential and achieving its objectives. Concurrently, the EU also started running a Community Action Programme to combat Discrimination (2001-2006), aimed at help bring about changes in the society's behaviours and attitudes by raising awareness and improving understanding of discrimination.

Can we say that such a legislative effort is reflected in a generalized positive attitude of society toward diversity? Findings reported in surveys carried out by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) reveal contradictory attitudes toward diversity and minorities. According to a EUMC study, whilst the majority of citizens in the EU are open to concepts of diversity, the Eurobarometer data indicate that the questioning of diversity varies when reference is made to specific political, social and economic areas of influence. Immigration is one of the study's selected areas. Although reported data varies from country to country within the EU, society's attitudes toward and perception of diversity, minorities and discrimination call for the continuation of the development of an integrated set of policies and initiatives, for the promotion of intercultural understanding and community cohesion.

When addressing the issue of combating discrimination, with regards to immigrants and ethnic minorities in particular, the role of mass media and its potential of influencing society's attitudes cannot be left aside or overlooked. Indeed, as highlighted by the European Commission, media and political support for dimensions of ethnic exclusionism are both influenced by and in turn influence majority populations' attitudes towards minorities. Immigrant and ethnic minority communities need to be provided with positive role models and information, and the majority society needs to be transmitted a more balanced portrayal of these groups with a realistic view on the present multicultural society.

For this model to be provided and the message to successfully reach out to the large society, specific attention should be placed to enhance the educational side of media, as one of the ways to form opinion, to change attitudes and mentalities when facing all grounds of discrimination, and thus to avoid that the media's power of shaping reality turn into a double-edged sword, particularly when coupled with specific political climates, as frequently is the case when issues related to immigration, ethnic minorities and asylum seekers are at stake. Broadcasters and printed press operators need to be aware of the special role that radio, television and newspapers can play for the future of Europe in fostering cohesion, inclusion and integration of the growing number of different communities residing in EU Member States, while at the same time their action must be supported by a political will to mainstream diversity and non-discrimination in to all aspects of society.

Whilst the EU adopted an array of tools and operational programmes, such as Television without Frontiers and the MEDIA Programme, as part of an EU integrated strategy to promote cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and combat discriminatory attitudes and racism, increasing attention must be placed on specific training activities targeting media professionals, as it has been stressed in the 2002 EUMC report on "Racism and Cultural

Diversity in the Mass Media” and also by the Committee on Migration of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Media professionals should be provided with the adequate tools and guidance to enhance the awareness of the educational role they can play and treat information accordingly.

Actions could range from the adoption of a code of conduct, including appropriate terminology, and guidelines on how to report on migrants issues , to the general awareness of media operators on the different media tools/programmes/networks available at the EU level on the representation of diversity and multiculturalism, so as to attract greater attention on diversity issues. A particularly interesting tool to campaign for the promotion of cultural diversity and anti-discriminatory attitudes, among others, is the information programme PRINCE, reported as being the first serious attempt supported financially to develop programmes geared towards the large EU public. Finally, activities geared towards media operators, professionals and broadcasters should also be complemented by a set of activities targeting the young audience and the children in particular through the involvement of schools, another area which can impact on integration and discrimination, in order to enhance their critical approach towards information provided.

Public concerns, political agendas and the interests of the media can strongly influence each other and the ultimate message conveyed to the large society could be biased both reflecting and influencing negative attitudes. Initiatives to enhance the audience’s critical approach on the one side, and increase the awareness and train the media professionals on the other, are crucial to avoid such a detrimental dynamic and ensure a positive one.