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PKP | INDEX

**DISCRIMINATION IS A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND IS A  
PROBLEM FOR STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY IN TIMES OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGE**

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**Abstract:** Schools can tackle discrimination by promoting democracy, respect for human rights and citizenship. To ensure that all students' needs are met equally, schools need to priorities language and cultural competences, multi perceptivity in history and gender equality. In this way, students can acquire competences for democratic culture, to fulfill their potential in school as well as in society.

**Keywords:** discrimination, gender, school, perceptivity

What is discrimination? Discrimination is treating a person badly or unfairly on account of a personal characteristic, such as national, ethnic or social origin, gender, language, religion, disability or sexual orientation. There are two basic forms of discrimination: Direct discrimination – treating someone less favorably than you treat or would treat another person in the same situation, e.g., a school refusing to admit a student because they are Roma. Indirect discrimination – applying a provision, criterion or practice in the same way for all of a group which has the effect of unfairly disadvantaging people in the group who share a particular characteristic, e.g., a school uniform policy banning headgears for girls and boys may unfairly disadvantage Muslim girls and Jewish boys.

Discrimination can occur in almost any aspect of school life, from the attitudes and expectations of teachers to school rules and codes of conduct, selection and grouping practices, curricula, teaching methods and materials, changing facilities, career

guidance, canteen food and the physical school environment. Whatever form it takes – whether it be parallel school systems for different ethnic groups, concentrations of minority or disadvantaged children in the same school, or differential access to educational provision, it means a lower quality of educational experience for the students being discriminated against. Why is tackling discrimination important at school? Discrimination is a human rights violation. Tackling discrimination is not simply a duty laid on schools by the European Convention of Human Rights, it is also important for student well-being and educational success. Children and young people who are treated unfairly or discriminated against are more likely to have:

- negative attitudes to school
- lower levels of motivation and academic achievement
- a higher risk of dropping out of formal education
- experience of bullying
- mental health problems.

Feeling different or ‘less’ than others can be an isolating experience. Over time it undermines an individual’s capacity for participation in society, e.g., their sense of self-efficacy, openness to other cultures and beliefs, tolerance of ambiguity and flexibility and adaptability - all of which lie at the heart of the Council of Europe. Lack of opportunity due to discrimination in school also damages society. It intensifies social divisions, fuels xenophobia and intolerance and undermines social cohesion. What are the challenges? One of the challenges facing the tackling of discrimination in schools is a lack of data. European-wide statistics specifically focused on discrimination in schools are scarce. Children with disabilities, for example, do not always appear in national statistics and may be ‘invisible’ to decision-makers, service providers and the public. Such children are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, however, and are often segregated in terms of educational provision. Another key challenge is the existence of negative stereotypes about minority groups among teachers, parents, students and other school stakeholders. Such stereotypes are often deeply embedded in everyday school life and practice, so much so that they are taken as ‘normal’, e.g., stories and images in



textbooks that reflect a stereotyped portrayal of the roles of women and men, girls and boys. Stereotypes help to fuel prejudiced and aggressive behavior between students, lower expectations from teachers and negative attitudes from parents, e.g., refusing to allow their children to be taught alongside refugee or migrant children. Stereotyping is difficult to root out in schools because its origins lie in wider society. This is exacerbated by the current preponderance of hate speech, fake news and conspiracy theories in digital media, especially social media. The situation is compounded when minority groups are under-represented on school staff. Students lack role - models and teachers do not have the access to information about or insights into other cultures and ways of life that come with belonging to a more diverse profession. They lack the intercultural competences with which to create inclusive and quality learning environments, e.g., openness to cultural otherness, tolerance of ambiguity, plural-lingual skills and knowledge and critical understanding of alternative cultures, religions and histories. Tackling discrimination is more challenging when there is a lack of dialogue between schools and parents. Often this is on account of language difficulties, but it is also a problem where students' parents work abroad leaving their children in the charge of elderly relatives or others.

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