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# DEMOCRACY TREE

Bank of cases of racism, discrimination and xenophobia in the EU



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## Contents

Aim of this document: .....	3
Cases of racism: .....	3
Cyprus .....	3
Estonia.....	4
Portugal.....	5
Ireland .....	7
Bulgaria: .....	8
Türkiye: .....	9
Recommendations: .....	10
Conclusion.....	11
References: .....	11



## **Aim of this document:**

DEMOCRACY TREE aims to educate young people on democratic values through a virtual journey in history exploring the beginning of democracy, its development, and finalizing the journey reviewing how democracy forms the basis of European values. Through this project, the partner organizations will promote democratic values, eliminate racist/xenophobic/discriminatory attitudes among youth in Europe.

The aim of the DEMOCRACY TREE cases of racism, discrimination and xenophobia document aims to gather together all the cases of racism that have reported by partners in their country (Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Cyprus, Portugal and Türkiye) during the field research phase of the project. The information provided was gathered through questionnaires shared via partners. The below cases will be divided into national contexts.

## **Cases of racism:**

### **Cyprus**

Cypriot participants were asked through the questionnaire whether they have been a victim of racism and/or discrimination. 60 % of participants expressed that they have been a victim of racism and/or discrimination while 40% of the participants expressed that they have not.

In addition, those who felt comfortable shared some related events regarding their experiences. To ensure privacy, all inputs were anonymous so that the respondents could not be recognized. Also, the question was not obligatory to ensure that respondents shared their experiences only when they felt comfortable.

### **Islamophobic incident**

- A respondent described the treatment as a Muslim woman when she wears her scarf and is treated in a negative manner in comparison to when she does not wear it.

### **Racial Harassment**

- A respondent shared their experience at a time when they were a student in the UK (prior to Brexit). The respondent expressed that they were always targeted by specific nightclubs and other entertainment venues as "non-admissible" with many times being told it is a "British only" kind of venue. Occasionally, the respondent experienced people shouting 'Go back to your country' when they were in the street.

### **A Case of Anti-Migrant racism**

Apart from the questionnaires, this report will include information on the anti – migrant protest that took place in Cyprus on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 ([Al Jazeera](#), [Stephan, L.](#), [Amnesty International](#), [incyprus.com](#), [Kambas, M](#) ). The protest was attended by about 500 people that were holding a sign that included the statement 'Refugees not welcome' while also shouting racist slogans such as 'Cyprus is Greek'. Foreigners were targets of attack during the



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protest. Various incidents were reported towards migrants such assaults of at least 5 delivery drivers, destruction of vehicles and properties.

For example, an Egyptian and Vietnamese grocery store were included in the store fronts that were smashed.

## Estonia

In the context of Estonia, 66.7% of the responders have been a victim or have witnessed a situation of racism/xenophobia, some real examples will be presented below. Despite progress in promoting diversity and inclusion, discrimination continues to occur in various areas of life and affects individuals based on their race, ethnicity, religion or nationality. This reality is exacerbated by the emergence in some European countries of political movements that promote xenophobic or nationalist ideologies. Although Estonia has seen a decline in racism over time, media outlets around the world continue to document incidents of discrimination, racism and xenophobia, reflecting the ongoing challenges in addressing these deep-rooted social problems.

- Witnessing a situation of discrimination as a woman in a working environment:
  - I haven't been a victim myself, but I have witnessed a situation of discrimination against a friend of mine. When my friend entered the new working environment, she faced many challenges as a woman, receiving less salary and the tasks assigned to her weren't that competitive in order to lead to a further professional development, as it was for few of the other employees.
- A case of racism for a single mother in a working environment because of her origin:
  - I am a single mother and most of the time it was difficult to find a job. I don't have a university degree, and sometimes this limits my options to work in another field except tourism as a housekeeper, or in a bakery which was my most common job so far. I have dreams and now I am attending classes to finish school, so I can work as an aesthetician. At my workplace, I have faced racism. As a foreigner living in Estonia, I have received comments regarding my origin, and the way I look. Also, because of my lack of qualification, my salary is low, even though I have been working in the same job for 3 years now. There are times that I have overworked and not been paid extra.
- A case of discrimination in public services
  - In public services, foreigners are treated with less respect, and priority is given to higher status people.
- A case of racism for a mixed culture kid at school
  - My son is of mixed heritage and has been on the receiving end of upsetting racist comments.



- A case of a racist incident in Estonia
  - In 2023, a serious racist incident occurred in Estonia involving a Nigerian man. The man, who has lived in Estonia for more than 10 years, said he has frequently been subjected to racism and xenophobia. He has been subject to verbal abuse and threats, especially in public places and on social media, because of the colour of her skin and her immigration status. The situation highlights the widespread racism and xenophobia that non-Estonians face in the country.

## Portugal

In the context of Portugal, 18.2 % of the participants expressed that they have either been a victim of racism/xenophobia or they have witnessed such a situation. The cases can be found below:

- Xenophobic remark from the Nordic Countries:
  - Participant A, a Portuguese individual, shared an unsettling experience while interacting with someone from the Nordic country. Upon revealing their nationality, the Nordic individual expressed surprise, remarking that the Portuguese participant was "white and normal". This incident underscores a form of racial stereotyping and ethnocentrism, where the assumption was made that individuals from Portugal would not typically fit the perceived norm of being "white". This encounter reflects the persistence of racial biases even within regions known for their diversity and acceptance, highlighting the need for increased awareness and education to challenge such preconceived notions.
- Workplace discrimination in an urban setting
  - Participant B, a young professional working in a bustling urban setting encountered discrimination in the workplace. Despite their qualifications and skills, they faced subtle yet persistent biases based on their ethnicity. Colleagues made stereotypical assumptions about their cultural background, questioning their competence and contribution to team projects. Additionally, Participant B observed a lack of inclusivity in professional networking events, where they often felt isolated due to their ethnic identity. This case study illustrates how racism can permeate professional environments, hindering career growth and perpetuating unequal opportunities. The experience of Participant B emphasizes the need for organizations to foster diversity and inclusion, promoting a workplace culture that values individuals for their skills and talents rather than perpetuating discriminatory stereotypes. Addressing



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these issues at the workplace level is crucial for creating an environment where everyone, regardless of their ethnic background, can thrive and contribute to their full potential.

Participant A, upon encountering the xenophobic remark from the Nordic individual, experienced a range of emotions, including surprise, discomfort and perhaps even a sense of being singled out. Participant B, facing discrimination in the workplace, likely experienced a complex mix of emotions, including frustration, disappointment and perhaps a sense of isolation. In both case studies, the emotional impact of racism is significant, touching on feelings of marginalization, frustration and the desire for a more inclusive and accepting societal and professional environment.

- Violent Attacks

In the early hours of Saturday, May 3, a series of violent attacks targeted North African migrants in Porto, Portugal. The incidents unfolded as follows:

1 am: A group of four or five individuals attacked two immigrants at Campo 24 de Agosto, then fled the scene.

3 am: Another migrant was assaulted on Rua Fernandes Tomás by suspects, one of whom brandished a firearm.

10 am: A group of ten hooded individuals, armed with clubs, forcibly entered a house on Rua do Bonfim and attacked a group of mostly Algerian migrants, using racist slurs during the assault. Following these attacks, six men were identified, and one was arrested for illegal possession of a weapon. At least one suspect is linked to the 1143 Group, a Sporting CP fan group known for ultranationalist and neo-Nazi views.

President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa condemned the racial violence and xenophobia, emphasizing that such practices are unacceptable in Portuguese society. Prime Minister Luís Montenegro expressed solidarity with the victims and reiterated a zero-tolerance policy towards hatred and xenophobic violence, commending the efforts of security forces. Socialist Party leader Pedro Nuno Santos criticized the atmosphere that incites hatred and division, calling for unwavering efforts to combat such violence. Chega leader André Ventura suggested the attacks might be retaliatory, casting doubt on the motivations behind the violence. Porto Mayor Rui Moreira emphasized the need for responsible and rational management of public resources and suggested abolishing AIMA (an unspecified organization).

This is not the first instance of racially motivated violence in Portugal: June 10, 1995: Alcindo Monteiro, a Cape Verdean, was beaten to death by skinheads in Lisbon. The attackers were sentenced for murder and bodily harm. July 25, 2020: Bruno Candé, an actor of Guinean origin, was shot by a neighbor in Loures after a racially charged argument. 2023: In Olhão, a group of youths assaulted and robbed several Asian migrants, sharing their attacks on social media. The attackers were indicted for robbery, aggravated assault, and causing damage. Portugal has seen a 38% increase in hate crimes in 2023, with a total of 347 crimes reported—77 more than in 2022. This rise is particularly notable in rural areas. Additionally, one out of



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three foreigners in Portugal lived at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2022, with the majority coming from outside the EU.

## Ireland

In the Irish context, the response, with 70% indicating "yes" and 30% indicating "no", suggests regarding whether participants have been a victim, or they have witnessed a situation of racism/xenophobia, a significant portion of the respondents have either experienced or witnessed instances of racism or xenophobia, while a smaller percentage have not encountered such situations.

The affirmative responses (70%) indicate a prevalent exposure to or awareness of racism and xenophobia among the respondents. This may encompass personal experiences or observations of discriminatory behavior directed at themselves or others based on factors such as race or nationality.

- Discrimination Based on Perceived White Privilege:
  - "I have often faced discrimination and prejudice because I am white. I have been assumed to have 'white privilege'. I have been in a situation where other races are given financial discounts because of their race, but me, actually poorer, have had to pay more."
- Discrimination in Employment:
  - "Yes, the friends in Germany who couldn't get a job with their 'ethnic' names as described above. I've also experienced it in France where I lived with a white host mom who had terribly racist things to say about the North African communities in France. I personally am white, so I guess she thought it was okay to say that to me, but her racist comments made me highly uncomfortable to be honest."
- Witnessing Racism and Feeling Helpless:
  - "I have witnessed a situation of racism, and it was very uncomfortable as the person couldn't be heard and helped."
- Racist Attacks
  - "A Nigerian asylum seeker in his 30s reported being the victim of a racist attack in Dublin city centre on April 7, 2024. While waiting in a park near Bridgefoot Street for a charity-run homeless centre to open, he and other International Protection applicants were targeted by a group of teenagers who hurled racial slurs, eggs, and stones at them. The situation escalated with verbal exchanges and involvement from older men, resulting in the asylum seeker being assaulted and hospitalized. Since arriving in Ireland two weeks ago, he had



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been sleeping outside the International Protection Office on Mount Street, but a volunteer has provided him with accommodation for the night."

- "A 22-year-old woman, Shubhangi Karmakar, was traumatized after a violent racist attack in Rialto, Dublin. While walking with a friend towards St James' Hospital after a medical placement, a group of young men approached them at a street crossing. One of the men hurled a racial slur at Shubhangi and then violently shoved her into her friend, causing injuries to her mouth, jaw, and neck. As a result, she is unable to open or close her jaw properly and experiences significant pain and restricted movement in her neck. Shubhangi, a British citizen born in India, described the incident as terrifying and continues to suffer from its physical and emotional aftermath."

### Bulgaria:

The respondents in the field research in Bulgaria, when asked **if they have been a victim of racism/xenophobia or have witnessed a situation of racism/xenophobia, the respondents, 60% answered "yes"**, which meant that the majority of the respondents have either experienced or witnessed these issues in the community. When asked to **give more information about the situations**, if they felt comfortable, the respondents shared the following:

- Threat or mockery towards my veiled friend.
- No, because I am white, heterosexual and cis.
- When I was in school some teachers repeatedly insulted and discriminated a Muslim classmate of mine.
- Attacks on my friends of other ethnicities.
- I have witnessed racist chants in stadiums, racist speeches on the street, etc.

In addition to these findings, **a recent case study on violence against migrants in Bulgaria** was researched. In April 2024, Bulgaria witnessed several alarming cases of physical violence against migrants. Major media outlets reported that violent videos were circulating in closed channels on the Telegram platform. According to these posts, the attacks targeted migrants and individuals of Arab origin. Groups of young people, primarily around metro stations in Sofia, were seen questioning individuals who appeared to be migrants. If the suspects could not speak Bulgarian, they were attacked. A woman of mixed origin testified that these groups used social media to coordinate the time and place for attacking people of Arab origin.

One of the victims of the violent attacks in April 2024 was Javet Nuri, an Afghan national who has been living in Bulgaria since 2006 and is married to a Bulgarian. Javet and his wife were violently attacked by a group of young people, estimated to be around 16 years old, in front of their home. The attackers used stones, wooden, and metal sticks to assault them ([BTV](#)).





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These examples of discrimination and violence against people from different backgrounds are alarming and call for specific measures to address this major social issue. The situations described both in the field research results and in the case study emphasize one more time the existing discrimination towards minorities, especially based on religion and ethnicity. They range from interpersonal conflicts and hate speech to behaviors in public spaces and even institutions, such as schools, where even educators have had discriminatory behaviors towards a student. All this evidence shows the real need to support and implement actions to raise awareness about EU values and their importance for social cohesion and for a healthy society for all.

The possible measures to address the issue of discrimination and violence towards people from different backgrounds could include: enhancing hate crime legislation and its enforcement, and increasing surveillance on the one hand, and working with the community on the other hand. Engaging the local community could be done through public awareness campaigns and educational programmes at school and in out-of-school settings.

In addition, supporting victims is also an important aspect of addressing the issues - support centers, hotlines and reporting mechanisms could be developed and improved, in order to make victims of discrimination, violence and hate crimes feel safer and supported.

In order to foster the integration of people with different backgrounds in society, new capacity-building and intercultural exchange programmes can be developed, including language and cultural courses and social events that could encourage participation from both migrants and locals to foster mutual understanding.

By adopting these recommendations, Bulgaria can take significant steps toward creating a safer, more inclusive society where people from diverse backgrounds can live without fear of discrimination and violence.

### Türkiye:

In the context of Türkiye, when asked about whether they have been a victim of racism/xenophobia or witnessed such a situation, 38.5% of respondents stated 'Yes' while 61.5% stated 'No'. When asked to elaborate further if they felt comfortable, they stated:

- "I have seen racist remarks numerous times on social media."
- "While speaking with a few American girls, they used the term 'NIGA'."
- "I never felt comfortable; I experienced a sense of being excluded."
- **A case of racism in Türkiye**
  - In 2007, a well-known murder situation happened in Turkey. Festus Okey, a Nigerian student was murdered. He was arrested in Istanbul by police for drug possession and later on shot and killed by police officer Cengiz Yıldız at the Beyoğlu Police Station. The conditions which were surrounding the shooting were extremely controversial and contentious, which raised serious concerns about systemic racism. Eventually, Yıldız received a four-year and two-month prison sentence for involuntary manslaughter, after a trial process that people highly criticized for its lack of transparency.



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Later on, this case attracted extra attention from many other human rights organizations, for example, the Human Rights Association (IHD) and the Association for Solidarity with Refugees and Migrants (Mülteci-Der), which backed justice and highlighted cases of racism and authority brutality in Turkey. Protests, objections, and renewed requests for legal reforms had risen due to public rage. The Festus Okey case has henceforth become figurative of Turkey's larger issues of racial discrimination and police misbehavior, and it still continues to impact discussions over human rights and juvenile treatment. Finally, many human rights organizations continue to raise awareness of the need to have systematic and orderly changes in law. While substantial problems remain, these initiatives are crucial beginnings toward addressing the core causes of racial discrimination and delivering justice for victims of police abuse in Turkey.

### **Recommendations:**

Unfortunately, it appears that various cases of racism, xenophobia and discrimination are still happening across Europe including the countries of the partnership proving once again the importance of the Democracy Tree project and its outputs.

Further development and implementation of laws and policies against hate crimes are needed more than ever as well as their rigorous enforcement combat and prevent future actions fuelled by racism and discrimination. Apart from legislation, public condemnations and solidarity actions such as bans, support from public figures and media outlets to ensure unity and support towards vulnerable groups are threatened by discrimination.

Some actions that can be further established to ensure equity and prevent discrimination can be: training in diversity and inclusion, anonymous reporting systems and promotion of equality-based policies.

It is highly recommended that youth workers, educators, and professionals working within the context of democracy such as decision- makers encourage the promotion and actual implementation of the EU common values such as Human Dignity, Freedom, Democracy, Equality, Rule of Law, and Human Rights.

It is important that underlying causes and effects of discrimination, racism and xenophobia are thoroughly investigated and analyzed in order to design effective responses and preventative measures across Europe. Great emphasis must be given on intercultural dialogue among different communities to cultivate acceptance of diversity through the promotion of feelings of respect. Such sentiments can be cultivated and further enhanced through comprehensive educational programs and intercultural dialogues in schools and communities aiming to promote diversity, tolerance and the importance of multiculturalism. As a result, mutual respect can be established while also dismantling any stereotypes.



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Thus in summary the Democracy Tree partnership recommends:

- Further enhancement of laws and policies as well as immediate implementation
- Public condemnations and acts of solidarity towards groups that are being discriminated against
- Further establishment of equity and prevention of discrimination through actions such as : diversity and inclusion training, anonymous reporting system, use of equality-based policies, etc.
- Exploration and analysis of underlying causes of discrimination, racism and xenophobia as well as mapping out the relevant prevention measures.
- Enhancement of educational materials through diversity and inclusion friendly materials and well as establishment of intercultural dialogues between different groups

## Conclusion

In Conclusion, It seems that cases of racism, xenophobia and discrimination are still prevalent in Europe and in partner countries. Based on the responses gathered from the field research showed how various incidents are still prevalent both in social media and in real life. This further highlights the importance of the Democracy Tree project which aims to promote democratic values, eliminate racist/xenophobic/discriminatory attitudes among youth in Europe.

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