

# MINORITY CHILDREN AND EDUCATION IN THE WORK OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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# Contents

Purpose: to demonstrate the relevance of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the Advisory Committee (AC) for minority children by: identification of **problems** they face in the field of education AND **recommendations** how to address them (practice elsewhere and core principles).

1. The legal context: the FCNM and its AC
2. Minority children and education
3. Contribution of the AC:
  - a) access to education
  - b) performance of children
  - c) substance of education and teacher training
4. Conclusions

# 1. The legal context

- ▣ Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995/1998; 39 + 1)
- ▣ Monitoring of its implementation (AC + CM):
  - Advisory Committee: 18 independent experts (examine state reports, visit states parties, analyse other relevant information, adopt OPINIONS)

The screenshot displays the Council of Europe's website for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). The header includes the Council of Europe logo and the text 'National Minorities (FCNM)'. A navigation bar contains links: Home, At a glance, Monitoring, Advisory Committee, Resources, Events, History, and Contact. Below the navigation bar, a breadcrumb trail reads: 'You are here: National Minorities > Monitoring > Country specific monitoring'. The main heading is 'Country specific monitoring'. Underneath, it says 'State Reports, Opinions, Comments and Resolutions'. A list of countries is provided, organized in three columns. The first column lists: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Cyprus. The second column lists: Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, and Hungary. The third column lists: Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Republic of, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, and Slovenia. To the right of this list, there are two more columns: one for 'Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Ukraine, United Kingdom' and another for 'Other: UNMIK Kosovo\* (agreement)'. On the right side of the page, there is a graphic with silhouettes of people and the text 'Forum' and 'Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities FCNM'. At the bottom right, there are sections for 'SHORTCUTS' and 'Resources'.

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE**  
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**National Minorities (FCNM)**

Home ▾ At a glance ▾ **Monitoring ▾** Advisory Committee ▾ Resources ▾ Events ▾ History ▾ Contact

You are here: National Minorities > Monitoring > Country specific monitoring

## Country specific monitoring

State Reports, Opinions, Comments and Resolutions

Albania	Czech Republic	Ireland	Netherlands	Spain
Armenia	Denmark	Italy	Norway	Sweden
Austria	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Switzerland
Azerbaijan	Finland	Liechtenstein	Portugal	"The former Yugoslav
Bosnia and Herzegovina	France	Lithuania	Romania	Republic of Macedonia"
Bulgaria	Georgia	Malta	Russian Federation	Ukraine
Croatia	Germany	Moldova, Republic of	San Marino	United Kingdom
Cyprus	Hungary	Monaco	Serbia	Other:
		Montenegro	Slovak Republic	UNMIK Kosovo*
			Slovenia	(agreement)

Forum

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities  
**FCNM**

**SHORTCUTS**

**Resources**

# The Framework Convention: access to minority rights

- ▣ Minority rights are an integral part of human rights
- ▣ GOAL: To achieve effective equality (in law and in practice)
- ▣ To this effect, **special measures** are needed to:
  1. prevent discrimination,
  2. achieve equality,
  3. enable the preservation and development of minority identity – language, culture, religion.

WHO is involved?

Everyone – persons belonging to minorities and those belonging to the majority.

FINAL OUTCOME – at two levels:

INDIVIDUALS: equality + identity

SOCIETY: integrated (minorities accepted as its integral part)



## 2. Minority children and education

- ▣ Educational policies – benefitting minority children only if they combine two elements (Spilipoulou Åkermark 2010):
  - Identity affirmation and development
  - Inclusion-oriented content and form of the entire educational system
- ▣ Practice - many difficulties:
  - education (secondary socialisation) often a tool for nation-building by prioritising the dominant identity group (language, culture, history, practices);
  - focusing on individuals who need to 'integrate' (= assimilate)
- minority children particularly vulnerable
- HENCE: crucial to guarantee their equal access to education, which is appropriate also for their needs

# 3. The contribution of the AC

- ▣ FCNM: state parties “shall encourage a spirit of **tolerance and intercultural dialogue** and take effective measures to promote **mutual respect and understanding** and co-operation among all persons living on their territory ... in particular in the fields of **education**, culture and the media.” (Art. 6(1))
- ▣ In education (Art. 12) – states must promote the **knowledge** of national minorities and the majority population in an intercultural perspective; provide for **teacher training and textbooks**; secure **equal opportunities** for access to education.
- ▣ PRACTICE: the AC has observed many **problems!**

# 3a. Access to education

PROBLEMS faced by minority children:

- ▣ Unequal opportunities (for children in a double minority situation), discrimination, overrepresentation in 'special schools', underrepresentation in higher levels of education...

OBSTACLES to be addressed:

- ▣ Birth registration (remove obstacles + raise awareness);
- ▣ Poor infrastructure and poverty;
- ▣ Austerity measures (rationalisation felt in minority language schools);
- ▣ Lack of awareness of home-state's (not kin-state's) responsibility;
- ▣ Verbal harassment and prejudice towards minorities (diminishes parents' confidence in education);
- ▣ Legal status of areas (camps, autochthonous settlement)



## 3b. Performance of children

PROBLEMS faced by minority children:

- ▣ Absteentism, drop-out rates, particularly girls; disproportional placement into 'special schools', underrepresentation in higher levels of education

OBSTACLES to be overcome include:

- ▣ Lack of pre-school education
- ▣ Lack of language skills (extra help - minority assistants; remove linguistic barriers at lower level - fluency in minority and official language – qualified teachers!)
- ▣ Discriminatory attitudes and segregation in classes, schools, educational system (to increase, not reduce, contacts!)



# 3c. Substance of education and teacher training

## PROBLEMS:

- ❑ Lack of good teaching materials; and of qualified teachers with knowledge and skills to function in a diverse environment; often homogenising (nation-building) curricula

## OBSTACLES to be overcome include:

- ❑ Develop, in co-operation with minorities, good teaching materials (not simply import them from a kin-state), including in minority languages
- ❑ Teaching curricula: to include information on minorities and to recognise diversity as an integral part of a society
- ❑ Awareness-raising: teachers, parents, the media...

## 4. Conclusions

- ▣ The Framework Convention (the AC work) – multi-faceted relevance for minority children in the field of education:
  - Recognition, protection and promotion of minority identity
  - Promotion of societal respect for diversity in general
  - Focus on individuals and the broader society through the perspective of access to rights (different types of minorities!)

# Important for any thinking about educational policies

- ▣ Context-specific approaches, but the **goals** have to be equal opportunities and recognition/protection/promotion of different identities
- ▣ **Effective participation** of minorities
- ▣ **Diversity** – inter-group and intra-group (women, youth, rural-urban etc.)
- ▣ **Equality** of everyone and the duty of the **entire population** (societal integration!)



- ▣ Thank you for your attention.
- ▣ Further details in: Petra Roter (2015): Minority Children and Education in the Work of the Advisory Committee. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 22, 202–231.