

## White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue

### Key points

- Intercultural dialogue can be described as the open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, and groups from different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect.
- The Council of Europe has made it a priority to promote intercultural dialogue in order to ensure a better understanding between cultures, social cohesion and stability on the basis of the principle of accepting others, with their differences.
- In May 2008 the Council published a “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue”. This was drafted following an open and inclusive consultation process of all stakeholders in intercultural dialogue.

### Summary

Our cultural environment is changing quickly and becoming more and more diversified. Cultural diversity has economic, social and political aspects, which need to be developed and adequately managed. However, increasing cultural diversity brings about new social and political challenges. It often triggers intolerance, stereotyping, racism, xenophobia, discrimination and violence that can threaten the peace of local and national communities.

Dialogue between cultures is an antidote to rejection and violence. It is the oldest and the most fundamental mode of democratic conversation. Its objective is to enable us to live peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world and to develop a sense of community and belonging. Intercultural dialogue is a tool for the prevention and resolution of conflicts by promoting the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

These universally-shared values are rooted in Europe’s cultural, religious and humanist heritage. They constitute the very foundation of the Council of Europe. The Organisation makes great efforts to develop intercultural dialogue in Europe and to strengthen co-operation between its member states.

In order to formulate a long-term policy for the promotion of intercultural dialogue within Europe and between Europe and its neighbours, the Council of Europe has prepared a “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue”. The White Paper is addressed at policy-makers and civil society at national, regional and local levels. It serves as a reference document providing guidelines, as well as analytical and methodological tools for the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

The White Paper of the Council of Europe also formulates the political orientations of the Organisation in the area of intercultural dialogue. In order to make the White Paper as relevant as possible, the Council of Europe has collected examples of best practice and will make these available to the public.

The White Paper is the end result of an “open and inclusive” consultation process with the governments of the Council of Europe member states, experts, international organisations, NGOs, representatives of ethnic and religious communities and the public at large. This process took into account the experience of these stakeholders thus ensuring that the White Paper, once published, can lead to a practical implementation by as many partners as possible.

## Questions and Answers

### What is a “White Paper”?

“White Papers” are policy documents containing background information and proposals for action in a specific political area. The name and concept of White Papers originates in parliamentary practice, particularly in England in the first half of the 20th century, where this type of document was bound in white instead of the customary blue paper cover. The Council of Europe has published very few White Papers in the past. In 2000, the Organisation published the “White Paper on the protection of the human rights and dignity of people suffering from mental disorder, especially those placed as involuntary patients in a psychiatric establishment”; and in 2003, a “White Paper on the principles concerning the legal consequences of parentage”.

### How long will the consultation period on White Paper last?

The consultation period ran from the end of 2006 to May 2007. The White Paper was adopted in May 2008.

### What is an example of best practice?

The power of good examples is usually much stronger than the effects of abstract principles. When selecting examples of best practice, the Council of Europe applies a number of loosely defined criteria. For instance, in order to qualify, projects or programmes must be able to show that they promote intercultural dialogue and can be continued beyond the experimental period. Examples of best practice can relate to one or several of the main areas of intercultural dialogue. They can be proposed by everybody and every institution.

### How does the Council of Europe organise consultations with various stakeholders?

Consultations are organised through written questionnaires, discussions and dialogue events, written reports and individual contributions, such as through the CoE official web site at [www.coe.int/dialogue](http://www.coe.int/dialogue). In order to facilitate consultations, the Council of Europe developed a “consultation document”, which can be downloaded on the website. The document presents the background, the aims and the mechanisms of the consultation process and outlines the envisaged messages of the White Paper. It also contains more than 30 questions.

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## What other activities does the Council of Europe carry out in order to promote intercultural dialogue?

The Council of Europe has introduced numerous instruments in pursuit of a common and coherent policy in the field of intercultural dialogue. Standard-setting work on human rights and the protection of minorities, training and information activities in the areas of education in diversity and respect for others, the promotion of social cohesion and the management of migration in the light of the Organisation's values are features of our policy. Recently the Council also organised activities regarding the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue, such as the conferences on "Dialogue of Cultures and Inter-Faith Co-operation" in Nizhniy Novgorod (2006) and the "Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue" in San-Marino (2007). From June 2006 to September 2007, the Council of Europe ran a European Youth Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation under the title "All different – All equal".

On numerous occasions over the past few years, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations and the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe have taken position and launched initiatives for the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

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