



**European Network
Against Racism**

CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO

**A Critical Analysis of the
Diversity Trends in the
European Parliament**

FACT SHEET



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This fact sheet offers insights into the shifting landscape of diversity within the European Parliament (EP). As the only directly elected body in the European Union (EU), the EP shoulders the responsibility of representing a diverse European population across dimensions such as nationality, gender, age, language, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. The question of whether the EP authentically mirrors this diverse EU population is crucial for evaluating the legitimacy of EU institutions and the broader state of European democracy.

The information provided in this fact sheet is based on the full report 'Diversity Trends in the European Parliament.' The full report, to be published by the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) in 2024, provides comprehensive insights into diversity trends within the European Parliament. Please refer to the report for detailed analyses, findings, and methodological index.

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INTRODUCTION

Diversity is not just a buzzword. It is a strategic necessity for effective and democratic governance of the European Parliament.

The interconnectedness of **diversity** and representation is critical. While diversity refers to the presence of individuals with diverse backgrounds, **representation**, particularly in the context of institutional bodies, means ensuring that these diverse perspectives are meaningfully reflected in the decision-making processes. **True representation goes beyond tokenism and checking-off quotas.** It calls for more than merely inviting individuals from racialised communities to the table. It demands understanding that racism is a systemic, structural and institutional issue that requires collective, intersectional and holistic efforts to be dismantled from the very fabric of our European society.

In the pursuit of our commitment to evidence-based advocacy, the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) has undertaken a comprehensive research initiative to assess diversity trends within the European Parliament over the past two mandates (2014–2019 and 2019–2024). Through an intersectional lens, this research analyses not only quantitative data but also the perspectives and strategies of political groups in promoting diversity within the parliamentary framework.

It is our hope that this research will serve as a crucial tool in informing efforts to drive meaningful change towards a more inclusive, diverse and representative European political landscape.

METHODOLOGY

The information provided in this fact sheet is based on the report ‘Diversity Trends in the European Parliament,’ to be published by the European Network Against Racism in 2024.

A combination of **three methods** was adopted to capture the complexity of diversity in the European Parliament:

- diversity mapping,
- a survey among all current Members of the European Parliament (MEPs),
- semi-structured interviews with selected MEPs, assistants, and other EP staff.

The **diversity mapping** provides an overview and comparison of the population of MEPs in the current 9th (2019–2024) and previous 8th (2014–2019) legislative terms. Accounting for outgoing and incoming MEPs during both terms, we collected information on 860 MEPs for the 8th mandate and 859 MEPs for the 9th mandate. While the initial number of elected MEPs was 751 (8th mandate) and 705 (9th mandate), the analysis also accounts for MEPs who resigned or died while in office, and who had to be replaced.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This fact sheet provides insights into the shifting landscape of diversity within the European Parliament (EP) over the last decade. As the sole directly elected body in the European Union (EU), the EP shoulders the responsibility of reflecting the diverse EU population. Examining diversity trends within the context of the 2014 and 2019 elections, the study focuses on two aspects: the evolution of diversity across key dimensions such as nationality, gender, class, ethnicity, racial background, religion, and sexual orientation, and the perspectives of political groups and MEPs on these trends.

The analysis conducted in the report underpinning this fact-sheet shows that over the course of the EP's mandates, two key dimensions have shown a steady evolution. Gender distribution has seen improvements towards a more equitable representation. Additionally, analysis of citizenship data across all nine mandates (1979–2024) reveals a notable shift, particularly in the rise of MEPs holding dual citizenship, with a noticeable increase in second citizenships outside the EU.

However, despite these advancements, disparities persist in reflecting the EU's demographic reality. The proportion of MEPs identifying as belonging to racialised minorities remains modest, representing approximately 3.4% of all MEPs in the

8th mandate and 4.3% of all MEPs in the 9th mandate. Moreover, the 2020 departure of the United Kingdom MEPs, a significant source of minority representation, further challenged efforts towards demographic parity.

Individuals with disabilities also remain underrepresented, as do MEPs identifying as part of the LGBTIQ community.

Our findings also underscore the significant role of individual biographies in shaping MEPs' commitment to specific aspects of diversity.

Looking ahead, the composition of the next European Parliament (2024–2029) raises concerns about potential decreases in diversity and representation. In tandem with the existing challenges revealed by our analysis, these concerns underscore the ongoing need for proactive measures to foster inclusivity within the EP and address the complexities of diversity and discrimination effectively.

In conclusion, while progress has been made in addressing diversity-related shortcomings within the European Parliament, significant gaps remain in truly reflecting the diverse population across the European Union.

REPRESENTATION AND THE DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Despite the increasing presence of racialised communities within European societies, racialised decision-makers remain significantly underrepresented in both national and EU political arenas. Their participation and representation remain central concerns for ENAR.

This disparity poses fundamental questions about the democratic legitimacy of the institutions, particularly the European Parliament. As the sole directly elected body in the institutional framework of the European Union, the European Parliament is **called to represent the heterogeneous European population**. As a result, the question of whether and in what sense the institution is representative of the diverse EU population is highly relevant to assess its legitimacy and the state of European democracy more broadly. **Failing to reflect the demographic diversity of the EU population—including factors such as race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability, age, and sometimes gender—undermines the efficacy and legitimacy of the European Parliament in addressing issues of equality and non-discrimination.**

Embracing diversity within decision-making bodies extends beyond **superficial gestures of political correctness or**

tokenism; it is essential for shaping policies that address the needs and concerns of all segments of society. Tokenism, characterised by the mere inclusion of individuals from underrepresented groups without genuine consideration of their perspectives, upholds the status quo and perpetuates systemic biases. In contrast, incorporating perspectives from diverse backgrounds allows EU legislation and policies to adopt a more holistic, intersectional approach. This approach reduces the risk of unintentionally perpetuating harm or exclusion by ensuring that the voices and experiences of all communities are authentically represented and considered in decision-making processes.

The persistent lack of representation and meaningful participation of racialised groups within political spheres is **a consequence of deep-rooted structural racism**. This systemic issue traces back to historical categorisations of racialised people as inferior, coupled with the deliberate systemic denial of their power and agency. Addressing this critical matter remains at the heart of ENAR's work and represents a central tenet of our [#EuropeForAll](#) Manifesto published in light of the 2024 European Parliament election.

KEY LEARNINGS

Representation Gaps

Belonging to a racialised minority group

Despite advancements, the proportion of MEPs identifying as belonging to a racialised minority remains modest. Racialised MEPs accounted for approximately 3.4% of all MEPs (28 out of 860) in the 8th mandate, with their share increasing to 4.3% (37 out of 859) in the 9th mandate. While this can be seen as an improvement, racialised individuals remain severely **underrepresented** compared to their proportion in the population, with previous ENAR studies estimating that racial and ethnic minorities make up at least 10% of the European Union population.

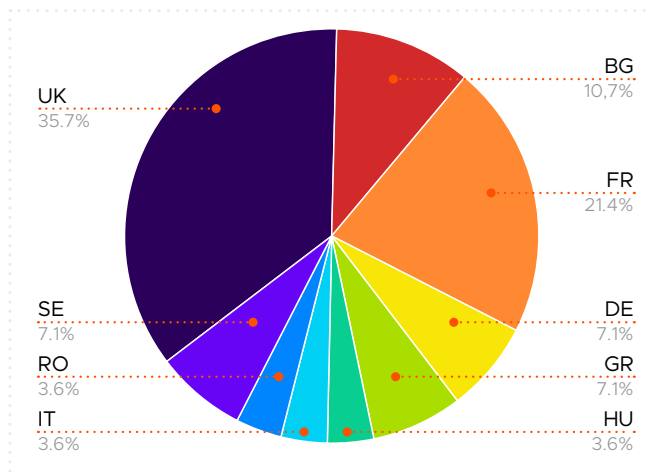


Figure 1: MEPs belonging to a racialised minority, by country, in the 8th mandate (2014–2019)

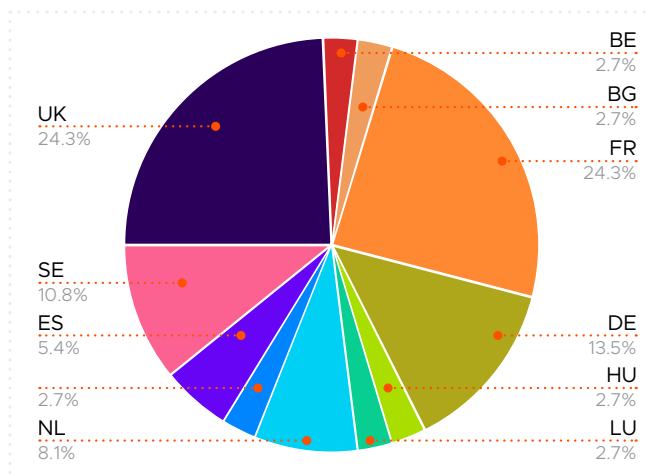


Figure 2: MEPs belonging to a racialised minority, by country, in the 9th mandate (2019–2024)

Racialisation and gender

When looking at dimensions of discrimination from an intersectional approach, we see that currently, most racialised MEPs are women. **After Brexit, women represent close to 57% of all racialised MEPs in the 9th mandate, an increase from 39% in the 8th mandate.** Such increase might be linked to a number of British MEPs leaving the EP in 2020, since the United Kingdom had a comparatively strong representation of racialised men, especially MEPs of Pakistani heritage.

Of the 21 racialised women MEPs elected in the 9th mandate, France emerged as the frontrunner with six female racialised MEPs elected, outpacing Germany, Sweden, and the UK, each with three; and Spain with two. Belgium, Hungary, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands each elected a single female racialised MEP. As for racialised male MEPs, which are 16 in total, the UK elected six; France elected three; Germany and the Netherlands two each; Bulgaria, Slovakia and Sweden one each.

Racialised representation across political groups

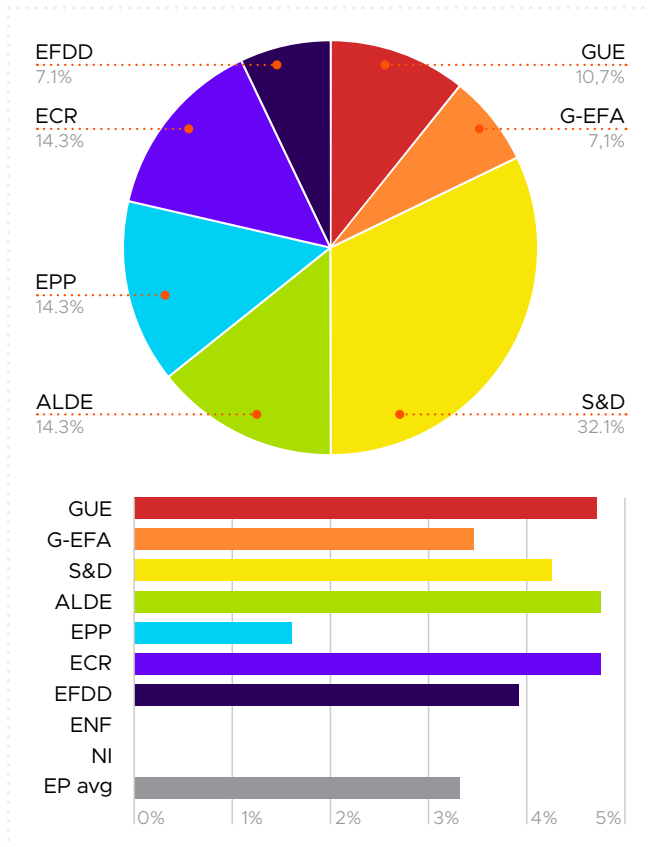
The current (9th) mandate is marked by **a stark contrast between left-wing and centre parties—which demonstrate some degree of representativity of racialised minorities—and right-wing parties, where such representation is low, if not entirely absent.** Certain political factions, such as the Europe of Nations and Freedom and Identity and Democracy groups, completely lack representation from racialised minorities. This polarisation becomes even more evident when compared to the more balanced distribution during the 8th mandate.

The Impact of Brexit

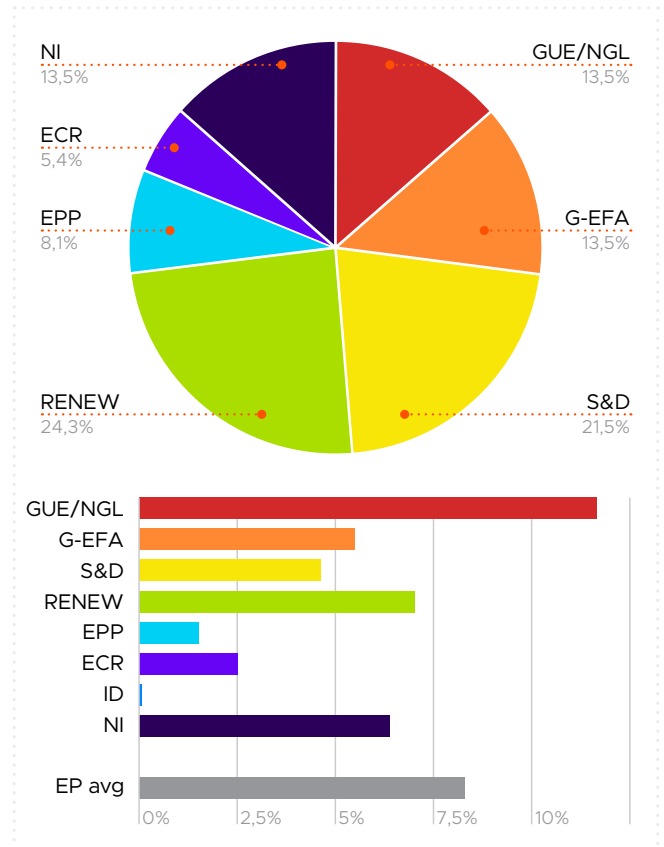
As a consequence of Brexit, the departure of the United Kingdom MEPs in 2020 led to a decrease in diversity within the European Parliament. The percentage of racialised minority MEPs fell to 3.5% in February 2020, down from 4.4% at the beginning of the 9th mandate (2019 – 2024). This is due to the significant number of racialised MEPs elected in the UK: 10 out of 28 in 2014 (8th mandate), and 9 out of 37 in 2019 (9th mandate).

Although the percentage has since risen to 3.8% due to subsequent MEP replacements, it remains below the 2019 level.

Diversity Trends in the European Parliament



Figures 3a and 3b. Racialised MEPs by EU Political Group in the 8th mandate (2014–2019) in absolute numbers (3a) and weighted by the size of the political group (3b).



Figures 4a and 4b. Racialised MEPs by EU Political Group in the 9th mandate (2019–2024) in absolute numbers (4a) and weighted by the size of the political group (4b).

LGBTIQ

LGBTIQ individuals remain severely **underrepresented** in the European Parliament, representing only 1.5% of total MEPs in both the 8th and 9th mandate. Among the underrepresented LGBTIQ community in the EP, the majority are men, even for parties that have reached gender parity.

Disability

Individuals with disabilities also remain **underrepresented**. Over the past two mandates, only three MEPs (8th mandate) and seven MEPs (9th mandate) identified as having a disability, in striking disparity to more than a quarter of the EU population having some form of disability.

Citizenship

Over the past nine mandates, the number of MEPs holding more than one citizenship has **steadily risen**. Initially, only six MEPs held dual citizenship during the first direct European Parliament elections in 1979, a figure that surged to 22 by 2019. This notable increase is primarily driven by MEPs who hold a second citizenship from a non-EU country, with their numbers more than quadrupling since 1979.

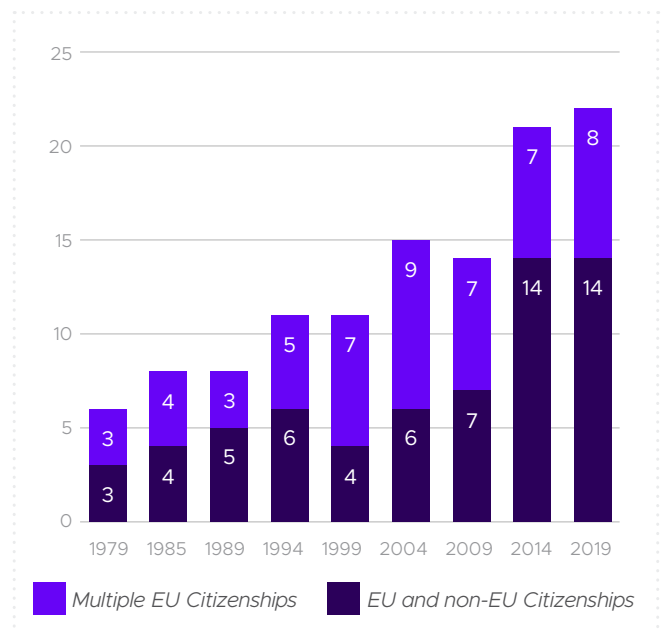


Figure 5. Number of MEPs holding more than one citizenship, either an additional EU or non-EU citizenship.

In most cases, these MEPs hold **'traditional' dual citizenships**. Typically, they hold nationalities from two neighbouring countries. Examples include citizenship combinations such as Hungary and Ukraine; Romania and Moldova; Estonia and Russia; Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, some dual citizenships are rooted in historical ties linked to **European colonialism and emigration patterns**, such as Spain and Argentina; Spain and Venezuela; France and Algeria; France and Morocco; or Ireland and The United States of America.

Although we lack comparative data on the percentage of MEPs with dual citizenships against the overall prevalence of dual citizenships at the European level (to the best of our understanding, such data is unavailable), we can infer a rising trend. This aligns with the clear global pattern of the increasing recognition of dual citizenship.

While only a small fraction of MEPs holding more than one citizenship overlap with MEPs from a racialised minority, this development nonetheless enriches multiculturalism and language diversity in the European Parliament – especially when dual citizenship reveals origins outside the European Union.

Intersectional insights

The research also examined the intersection of racial background and disability; racial background and belonging to the LGBTIQ community; as well as belonging to the LGBTIQ community and disability. The findings indicate that the European Parliament **lacks sufficient diversity** across these dimensions of representation.

European Parliament Committees and Intergroups Promoting Diversity and Inclusion

The establishment of European Parliament Committees and Intergroups that focus on the promotion of diversity and inclusion signals ongoing efforts to address specific dimensions of diversity (racial diversity, religious diversity, disability rights, sexual orientation, and gender). Under the current mandate, the following Committees and Intergroups work on different dimensions of diversity:

Committees:

- Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM): Gender equality,
- Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE): All other forms of discrimination.

Intergroups:

- Intergroup on Anti-Racism and Diversity (ARDI),
- Intergroup on Christians in the Middle East,
- Intergroup on Disability,
- Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance,
- Intergroup on LGBTI,
- Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages.

Membership data offers valuable insights into the **dynamics of representation and solidarity** within the European Parliament. Roughly half of racialised MEPs are members of ARDI, while a similar proportion of LGBTIQ MEPs are affiliated with the Intergroup on LGBTI rights. However, there is minimal overlap between these cohorts: only one MEP from the LGBTIQ community is involved in ARDI, and few racialised MEPs participate in the Intergroup on LGBTIQ rights.

Moreover, **certain political groups remain inactive** in the Intergroups' efforts towards the inclusion of racialised minority and LGBTIQ representation. While the FEMM and LIBE Committees, alongside the Intergroup on Disability and the Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, encompass MEPs from all political groups, the same cannot be said for ARDI, LGBTI, Religious Tolerance, and the Christians in the Middle East Intergroups. Particularly the latter two display significant partisan divisions, underscored by the lack of participation from left-wing MEPs.

MEPs' Perspectives on Diversity

Exploring the perspectives of eleven interviewees, primarily MEPs, reveals **the significant influence of personal backgrounds in shaping their interests and commitments towards different aspects of diversity and non-discrimination.**

These interviews underscore how lived experience enriches political debate, facilitates engagement with external stakeholders and fosters internal allyships among MEPs. Diversity discussions within the European Parliament reach various policy domains and take place during various initiatives, indicating that these conversations are not limited to diversity-focused Intergroups or Committees.

Interviewed MEPs and staff offer a mixed assessment of diversity within the European Parliament. While some acknowledge positive trends such as greater gender equality, there is a widespread perception that certain groups, such as religious minorities of colour and individuals with disabilities, continue to be notably underrepresented.

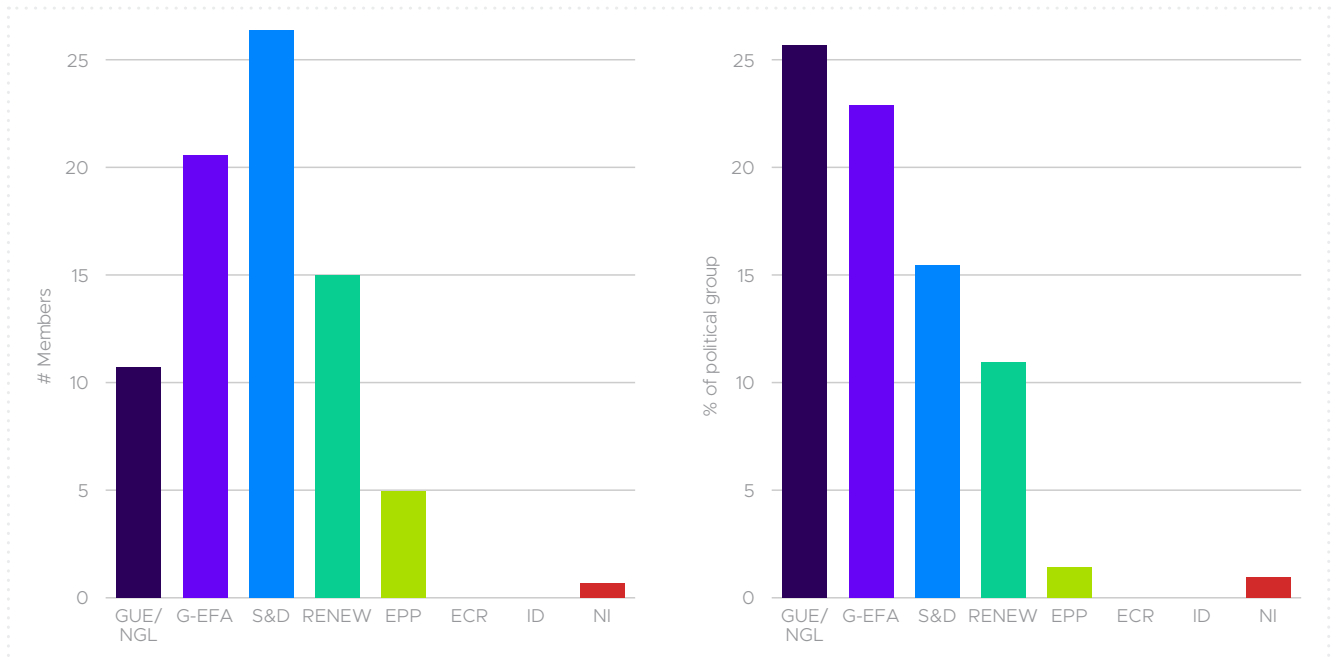


Figure 6a and 6b. Composition of the Intergroup on Anti-Racism and Diversity (ARDI, IG9-02), by political group, first in absolute numbers and then weighted according to group size.

In stark contrast to the largely homogenous administrative and political staff of the European Parliament, respondents highlight the racial and socioeconomic diversity among local (sub)contractors in Brussels, such as cleaning firms and catering services, reflecting the city’s social fabric.

The interviewees pointed out that challenges persist in implementing gender-inclusive and disability-friendly measures during recruitment processes. Although complaint mechanisms and anti-harassment policies are in place, the regulations do not explicitly address psychological harassment linked to discrimination.

Despite generally expressing sensitivity to diversity and inclusion, respondents’ perceptions of the Parliament’s social composition sometimes **diverge from our actual diversity mapping findings**. Notable discrepancies include minimal acknowledgment of more heterogeneous minority backgrounds, including racialised individuals, as well as to the lack of socioeconomic diversity.

When discussing internal political dynamics (support or opposition) related to diversity issues within the EP, respondents suggested that this generally mirrors the left-right divide. However, support significantly varies depending on the issue at hand. **While LGBTIQ rights and disability advocacy enjoy broad support, racial diversity initiatives face challenges in gaining even symbolic support.** Aspects such as religion also receive comparatively less attention. Dimensions like socioeconomic status and migratory/legal status often remain overlooked within exist-

ing diversity initiatives. The topic of ethnic and racial diversity and anti-discrimination appears to be most strongly supported by the Greens and the Left groups, with conditional support coming from the S&D and occasionally by individual MEPs in Renew. Particularly the Greens political group has emerged as influential backers of racial non-discrimination due to their greater numbers of elected MEPs and allocated Parliamentary resources.

Our findings also highlight **a notable gap between professed commitments to diversity and actual political actions**. This disparity is particularly evident concerning overlooked issues such as religion, class, workers’ rights, as well as intersectionality.

Other Ongoing Developments

There are other recent developments within the European Parliament that indicate progress, particularly within the Directorate General for HR Support and Social Services of the Directorate General for Personnel (DG PERS). Here, the role of the **Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Unit** is undergoing substantial changes and expansion.

During the current mandate, the Unit has expanded in both size and scope. Currently, it is dedicated to strengthening diversity across multiple dimensions such as gender, sexual orientation, racialisation, and disability, guided by the Gender Roadmap (adopted in 2021 on the basis of the 2020 Gender Action Plan) and the Diversity Roadmap (adopted in 2021).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: A ROADMAP FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Based on the extensive research into diversity trends, ENAR has developed a set of recommendations to ensure meaningful representation and enhance diversity within the European Parliament. These measures aim to ensure that the EP delivers on its core responsibility – to accurately reflect and represent the diverse population of the European Union. They lay out concrete first steps to creating an inclusive political environment where all segments of our society are valued and respected.

ENAR calls on the European Parliament, MEPs and political groups to:

1. **Incorporate an intersectional approach in legislative and policy files**, where non-discrimination on all intersecting grounds serves as a foundational principle rather than a mere sectorial or partisan agenda.
2. **Implement voluntary data collection on various dimensions of diversity within the European Parliament and other EU institutions**. Data can provide insights into the representation and experiences of different groups, informing targeted interventions and policy development.
3. **Consider the introduction of quotas or alternative systems to ensure greater diversity in the composition of the Parliament**. Quotas can serve as a proactive measure to counteract systemic barriers and promote the inclusion of underrepresented groups in decision-making processes.
4. **Strengthen the complaint mechanisms and modify the definition of psychological harassment** to include racial discrimination as an aggravating circumstance.
5. **Develop and implement diversity training programs** for MEPs and parliamentary staff to raise awareness about structural racism, unconscious biases, meaningful representation, promote cultural competency and foster a more inclusive working environment.
6. **Implement measures to ensure that recruitment processes for parliamentary staff and MEPs are inclusive**, for example through diversity targets and anonymised recruitment practices.
7. **Ensure that parliamentary Committees and Intergroups focused on diversity and inclusion encompass a wide range of political affiliations** and actively engage with MEPs from diverse backgrounds.
8. **Increase resources for Intergroups focused on diversity** to broaden their scope, including via the hiring of dedicated staff, particularly addressing migration from a non-securitized perspective.
9. **Create more opportunities for Intergroups to cooperate** to enhance an intersectional approach. For example, a specific working group/task force on intersectionality could be set up to bridge the efforts of individual Intergroups.
10. **Enhance recruitment outreach efforts** to attract a more diverse pool of candidates.
11. **Upgrade the EP's physical infrastructure and improve regulations to ensure accessibility**. Measures such as providing accommodations for religious practices and for people with disabilities are essential for an inclusive working environment.
12. While diverse political representation is vital, it's imperative to **recognise that representation alone does not guarantee progress in combating racism** as racialised individuals can also espouse far-right ideologies. Exploiting diversity rhetoric for their own agenda contributes to **'diversity washing'** that legitimises racism and anti-democratic policies. Therefore, alongside improved representation, there must be a clear commitment to equality and anti-racist policies to effectively combat discrimination and promote inclusion.
13. In the absence of concrete representation, it is imperative to **establish robust participatory mechanisms that empower racialised groups to engage in policymaking processes**. By ensuring their meaningful involvement, democratic deficits can be addressed, allowing marginalised communities to have a voice in shaping policies that directly affect them.



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