

MINORITIES (NATIONAL OR ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND LINGUISTIC)

Excerpt from the
UNDG Guidance Note on Human
Rights for Resident Coordinators
and UN Country Teams

2017



UNITED
NATIONS
DEVELOPMENT
GROUP

Minorities (National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic)

Key points and messages that the Resident Coordinator should know about the issue

- There is no definition of who constitutes a minority.
- The lack of a definition can create problems regarding recognition by the State, which is important to secure the rights of minority groups within a State.
- Such recognition does not provide minorities with additional rights; rather, it enables minorities to enjoy and secure human rights to which they may not have easy access due to their status as minorities.
- Recognition of minority status is not solely for the State to decide.
- Minorities are the ones to decide on their own identity based on objective and subjective criteria.
- The right of minorities to self-identify on the basis of their national, ethnic, religious and/or linguistic characteristics is related to the obligations of States to ensure non-discrimination against individuals and groups, which is a central principle of international human rights law.
- A minority is a group that is numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State and in a non-dominant position, whose members possess ethnic, religious and/or linguistic characteristics that differ from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language.
- In most instances, a minority group will be a numerical minority, but in others, a numerical minority may be dominant or a majority may find itself in a minority-like or non-dominant position. In some situations, a group that constitutes a majority in a country may be in a non-dominant position within a particular region of the country.
- Minority rights are based on four pillars: protection of existence, protection and promotion of identity, equality and non-discrimination, and the right to effective participation.

Relevant international standards

- Protection of the rights of minorities and the obligation of States to protect minorities are provided for under article 27 of the ICCPR and article 30 of the CRC.
- Adopted by consensus, the 1992 Minority Declaration, which interprets the provision of article 27 of the ICCPR, constitutes a central reference in protecting minority rights.
- The Special Rapporteur on minority issues is to promote the implementation of the Minority Declaration.
- The [Forum on Minority Issues](#) is to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to minorities, as well as thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the [Special Rapporteur on minority issues](#).
- In the lead-up to the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration, the Secretary-General established, in 2012, the [UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities](#), to enhance dialogue and cooperation on issues of racial discrimination and minority rights protection among relevant UN departments, agencies, funds and programmes. The Network, coordinated by OHCHR, now comprises 23 UN entities. Through OHCHR, the Network developed the [Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities](#) and a four-year Network Action Plan that responds to its recommendations. OHCHR and other Network members are implementing activities designed to support the Network in achieving the full aims of the Guidance Note.

Role that the Resident Coordinator and UN Country Team can play in promoting the issue

- All three pillars of the UN—human rights, development, and peace and security—are concerned with discrimination and minority rights violations, and efforts to combat them require system-wide engagement and cooperation.
- The Network Action Plan to support the implementation of the Guidance Note aims inter alia to establish a strong foundation for future UN system efforts to address racial discrimination and protection of minorities while addressing the gender dimension associated with violations. In terms of strategy, priority is placed on the UN Country Teams in order to strengthen the work on anti-discrimination and protection of minorities at the country and regional levels.
- Under the Action Plan, capacity-building at UN Country Team level is to be achieved inter alia through knowledge exchange on practice, including training on anti-discrimination and minority rights in order to help develop, include and/or support minority-related issues in efforts such as implementation, programmes to combat racial discrimination and protection of minorities.
- Through training provided to UN Country Teams, colleagues are better equipped with focused knowledge to engage and assist governments in creating conditions for better protection of minorities, including minority women.

Support and tools available from the United Nations system

- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) (articles 27 and 25);
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC) (article 30);
- [Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities](#) (1992);
- [Commentary to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities of the Working Group on Minorities](#) (E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2005/2);
- [Recommendations from the sessions of the Forum on Minority Issues](#);
- [Promoting and protecting minority rights: A guide for advocates](#);
- [Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities](#);
- [Minority rights: international standards and guidance for implementation](#).