

# POLICY BRIEF

**The NIDEA project ("Narrativization of Ethnic Identity in Adolescents from Culturally Dominant and Minority Backgrounds and the Role of the School Context") is the result of collaboration among psychologists from three scientific research institutions: the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade, the State University of Novi Pazar, and the State University of New York (SUNY, Old Westbury).**



[www.nidea.f.bg.ac.rs](http://www.nidea.f.bg.ac.rs)

## Acknowledgment

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## Project Goal

The NIDEA project focuses on the **development of ethnic identity** among adolescents in Serbia, examining differences between **culturally dominant and minority groups** in shaping identity. It incorporates perspectives from **students, parents, teachers, and professional associates**. Special emphasis is placed on the influence of schools, as well as the broader social context.

## Implementation

In the first phase of the research (May – September 2023), the study included **20 secondary schools** across different regions of Serbia, including **12 vocational schools** and **eight grammar schools**. Data was collected from **2,886 participants: 1,846 students, 409 teachers, 617 parents, and 14 professional associates**. The topics explored covered school climate, multicultural practices, ethnic socialization, sense of belonging, violence, discrimination, and student well-being. The second phase (November – December 2023) involved **380 high school students** from **seven schools**, who completed narrative tasks describing hypothetical situations of ethnic discrimination and predicting possible outcomes. The third phase (January – March 2024) included **interviews with 25 students** of Serbian and Roma ethnic backgrounds, offering deeper insights into the process of ethnic identity development and the role of the school environment in that process.

## Outcome

Beyond its scientific contribution, the project aims to improve the school climate and intergroup relations, ultimately reducing dropout rates, enhancing education quality, and promoting greater equity in education.

## Key Findings

### Multicultural Practices:

Teachers and parents believe schools promote multiculturalism, but students feel there is little interest in social issues affecting their ethnic group. Majority-group students have more opportunities to learn about their ethnicity. However, overall school climate (peer relationships, teacher-student interactions, fair rules, and clear expectations) is more important for students' well-being and sense of belonging than specific multicultural practices.

### School Climate and Violence:

Teachers are generally satisfied with the school climate but see peer violence as a major issue, with experienced teachers recognizing it more often. Students perceive the climate more negatively than parents and teachers.

### Ethnic Socialization:

Parents from mixed families emphasize ethnic values more, and financial status influences ethnic socialization. Serbian students associate their ethnic identity with family traditions (e.g., religious celebrations), while Roma students link it primarily to experiences of discrimination.

### Ethnic Discrimination:

Most students rarely report discrimination, but when they do, it is more often institutional than direct. Girls experience it less than boys, while minority students face it more than their Serbian peers. Discrimination is linked to depression, and half of the affected students do not discuss it with anyone. Many students, especially boys, are pessimistic about resolving it but see school staff as a resource for support.

### Well-being:

Students are relatively satisfied with their lives but see financial status and academic performance as concerns. A stronger sense of belonging to school is linked to greater well-being and lower risk of depression.

## Recommendations for Decision-Makers

### Strengthening Intercultural Competencies of School Staff:

Through initial education and continuous professional development programs, ensure that teachers, professional associates, and other school staff are well-equipped to address issues of interculturality, ethnic identity, and inclusion. Provide them with the necessary skills to recognize and effectively respond to ethnic biases and discrimination.

### Enhancing the Sense of Belonging in Schools:

Encourage student and staff participation in decision-making. Increase school and staff autonomy while reducing excessive centralization.

### Promoting Multiculturalism:

Integrate content and activities that foster inclusion and respect for diversity. Secure funding for field trips and extracurricular activities that connect students from different backgrounds.

### Developing Socio-Emotional Competencies:

Design and implement programs that support the development of emotional regulation skills, promote dialogue, enhance communication, and encourage constructive conflict resolution among students, as well as all school employees.

### Strengthening Educational Policies Against Violence and Discrimination:

Enhance institutional support in the fight against discrimination and violence by improving protocols for identifying and responding to incidents of violence and ethnic discrimination in schools.

### Increasing Parental and Community Involvement:

Encourage greater participation from parents and the community in activities that promote mutual respect and cooperation. Additionally, advocate for the public promotion of these values in media and community spaces.

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