

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025**

(2021/C 300/05)

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**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

## THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. welcomes the communication on *A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025*. The Committee stresses that equality is one of the fundamental values on which the European Union is founded, as reflected in the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which give the EU a mandate and responsibility for combating discrimination;
2. is concerned about the findings of the Fundamental Rights Report 2019, produced by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which confirms that ethnic minorities and migrants continue to face harassment and discrimination across the EU, despite long-standing EU anti-racism laws. According to that report, just 15 of the 27 EU Member States have specific action plans and strategies to combat racism and ethnic discrimination, and there are still gaps in national legislation aimed at criminalising racism;
3. is equally concerned about the results of the Special Eurobarometer on *Discrimination in the EU* <sup>(1)</sup>. It reports that almost 59 % of respondents consider discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin to be widespread in their country, particularly with regard to discrimination based on skin colour. However, perceptions, opinions and attitudes still vary widely depending on the group discriminated against and also from country to country;
4. welcomes the Commission's commitment to undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the EU's existing legal framework for combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia, and to monitoring the application of the Racial Equality Directive <sup>(2)</sup> and ensuring that the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia <sup>(3)</sup> is implemented correctly;
5. stresses that combating discrimination in all areas must be a priority for the EU, but notes that, as it stands, there are gaps in the EU's anti-discrimination legislation in that certain grounds for discrimination are only covered in the areas of employment and occupation. The Committee calls on the Member States' representatives in the Council to conclude the negotiations on the horizontal Equal Treatment Directive <sup>(4)</sup>, which has been blocked since the Commission proposed it in 2008;
6. welcomes the fact that the Commission has for the first time acknowledged that structural racism exists and is part of the social, economic and political system we all live in, and that it sees the need to address this issue through a comprehensive policy. There therefore needs to be a change in the EU's approach to racism;

<sup>(1)</sup> [https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2251\\_91\\_4\\_493\\_ENG/resource/afca8c2e-a0a8-4a22-84ef-29a3a1fb9a1b](https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2251_91_4_493_ENG/resource/afca8c2e-a0a8-4a22-84ef-29a3a1fb9a1b)

<sup>(2)</sup> Directive 2000/43/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin

<sup>(3)</sup> Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA

<sup>(4)</sup> Proposal for a Directive on the principle of equal treatment, COM(2008) 426 final.

7. welcomes the fact that the action plan proposes a series of measures bringing together all decision-making levels in society, together with civil society and equality bodies, to combat racism more effectively in Europe, for example by means of national anti-racism action plans;

8. notes that the action plan represents a step towards achieving the sustainable development goals in the 2030 Agenda, in particular Goal 10 on reducing inequality;

9. anticipates that the action plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights, to be published in 2021, will provide additional support for equality in the labour market, including for people from minority racial <sup>(5)</sup> or ethnic backgrounds;

### **Structural racism — tackling the underlying problem**

10. highlights the importance of recognising the historical roots of racism. Ensuring that colonialism, slavery and the Holocaust are remembered is an important element in promoting inclusion and understanding. The Committee calls for counter-narratives condemning racism, promoting social inclusion and empowering people regardless of racial or ethnic origin;

11. underlines that one crucial step in effectively addressing structural racism is identifying areas where racism persists, such as education, housing, healthcare, employment, access to public services, the legal system, law enforcement or migration control, and political participation and representation;

12. urges the Commission to consider the anti-racism action plan from a broader perspective and in conjunction with EU immigration policy and the common European asylum policy;

13. highlights the need for comprehensive data on discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin in Europe. Unless we measure and quantify the extent of discrimination and inequality, it will be very difficult to tackle them effectively. Equality data can offer powerful tools to combat discrimination and exclusion and highlight the situation of groups at risk of discrimination, the aim being to plan inclusive policies and ensure their implementation;

14. takes the view that equality data provides insight into the extent of structural racism and how it can be combated, but that there is a need for new methods of collecting data on discrimination and equality. Full compliance with constitutional standards, EU data protection law and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is a prerequisite, in order to mitigate potential risks of misuse or abuse;

15. welcomes the decision of the Commission to collect data on racial and ethnic diversity of its staff, using a dedicated survey on a voluntary and anonymous basis, thus fully respecting data collection rules. Stresses in this regard the need for all EU bodies to carry out similar assessments, as racial and ethnic representation at all levels of the EU public administration is key to achieving equality;

16. once again emphasises ‘the importance of implementing an intersectional perspective, which is necessary for involving in the implementation of the strategy vulnerable individuals who may face multiple forms of discrimination’ <sup>(6)</sup>, with special reference to vulnerable groups such as, inter alia, migrant women, unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents or LGBTI people. Therefore, the CoR asks the European Commission to further develop this intersectional approach, in cooperation with the Member States, and draw up guidelines to facilitate the implementation of this approach in the planning, management and evaluation of public policies;

17. points out that unaccompanied foreign minors are a group that is very vulnerable to racism and require special attention in line with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-2024);

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<sup>(5)</sup> The use of the term ‘racial origin’ in this document, as in the action plan, does not imply an acceptance of theories that attempt to determine the existence of separate human races.

<sup>(6)</sup> CoR opinion 2016/2020 on A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

18. calls for anti-racism policies to be mainstreamed into all EU policies. The European Committee of the Regions stresses that all anti-discrimination policies should also have an intersectional approach in order to tackle multiple discrimination effectively;

19. believes that the economic dimension of structural racism is often ignored. It entails significant economic costs, as it prevents people from reaching their potential. A society that is less racist will be economically stronger;

20. underlines that COVID-19 has highlighted and exacerbated Europe's existing inequalities, marginalisation and discrimination, and has reinforced structural racism. Already vulnerable people are being even harder hit. In addition to the millions of workers who have lost their jobs and incomes, the people most severely affected are migrants at the borders, those with precarious jobs, undocumented people, low-income families, homeless people, older people, women, and people with disabilities or chronic diseases — including many racial and ethnic minorities. Therefore, any response to the pandemic should take an anti-discrimination approach and have direct and indirect impacts on racism in various areas of society;

21. reiterates its call for 'robust measures to defend civil liberties and democracy in an increasingly digitalised era, including steps to reduce the risks of a "digital big brother" and to fight fake news, disinformation campaigns, hate speech and discrimination, particularly racism, in the digital realm, regardless of whether these negative phenomena originate within or outside the EU' <sup>(7)</sup>;

22. also reiterates that 'a pivotal element of any future regulatory framework applying to artificial intelligence is the introduction of safeguards to ensure that artificial intelligence is free from bias and does not reproduce discrimination on grounds of gender, ethnicity age, disability or sexual orientation' <sup>(8)</sup>;

23. stresses the need to address discriminatory attitudes among law-enforcement authorities, police brutality and racial profiling of certain racial or ethnic groups, and believes that police and law-enforcement authorities must lead by example in the field of anti-racism and anti-discrimination;

24. considers it essential, in those Member States where local and regional authorities have responsibility for policing, to take action to combat and prevent racism in law enforcement, to scrutinise policing practices, to invest in the training and development of these authorities, and to process data relating to racial profiling in a transparent way. Local and regional authorities should also develop comprehensive community violence-prevention programmes, based on public safety and full respect for EU non-discrimination standards in policing;

25. once again stresses that 'a society in which the human rights of all groups in the population are fully guaranteed and that complies with international and legal standards, including with regard to combatting discrimination and racism and other forms of intolerance, will play a central role in preventing and combatting violent radicalisation' <sup>(9)</sup>;

### **Local and regional authorities on the front line**

26. welcomes the fact that the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025 puts local and regional authorities at the heart of the fight against racism. The Committee notes that, due to their proximity to the general public, local and regional authorities play a crucial role in promoting and respecting European values and are on the front line when it comes to tackling racism and hate crime, protecting vulnerable groups and minorities, and promoting social cohesion;

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<sup>(7)</sup> CoR opinion 2354/2020 on A strategy for Europe's digital future and a strategy for data.

<sup>(8)</sup> CoR opinion 2014/2020 on Artificial Intelligence — A European approach to excellence and trust.

<sup>(9)</sup> CoR opinion 6329/2015 on Combatting radicalisation and violent extremism: prevention mechanisms at local and regional level.

27. calls for local and regional authorities to be recognised as strategic partners in designing, implementing and monitoring the national action plans, in view of their responsibilities and the important anti-racism work they are already undertaking within their areas of competence;

28. highlights the key role played by local and regional authorities in promoting awareness-raising, training and education to combat racism, especially among young people;

29. considers it to be of the utmost importance to earmark financial resources for local and regional authorities in the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, from EU funds and from Next Generation EU, in order to promote social inclusion and combat racism and discrimination in areas such as access to the labour market, education, social welfare, healthcare and housing. This includes paying special attention to the more vulnerable groups and earmarking funds for safeguarding unaccompanied foreign minors, since in many cases this is the responsibility of local and regional authorities;

30. believes that, in addition to adopting anti-racism action plans at national level, it may be useful to have local and regional action plans. They could help address structural racism by means of concrete measures. This also reflects the position taken by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in its 2019 report, in which it stresses the need to have action plans at all levels in the fight against racism. Local and regional authorities should be duly supported when drafting sub-national action plans, including through ad hoc initiatives for capacity-building;

31. could be involved in this and serve as a platform for the further development of measures to combat racism at local and regional level, for example by supporting social integration, combating energy poverty and promoting access to decent housing;

32. underlines the importance of involving national, regional and local authorities, as well as civil society, in order to give the national anti-racism action plans legitimacy and to combat racism in Europe more effectively. It is also important to share good practices between different countries and local and regional authorities, sharing the objectives and measures set out in anti-racism plans elaborated by different levels of governance;

33. believes that, in order to fulfil the potential of the Commission's forthcoming proposals for national anti-racism action plans, there must be robust processes to ensure that they are implemented within the timeframe set, with clear and measurable targets, and that progress is monitored at both national and European level, with the Commission taking full responsibility for its part of the follow up;

34. stresses that an evaluation of the effectiveness of the national anti-racism action plans should be scheduled two years after their establishment, with full information from local and regional authorities;

### **The European Committee of the Regions, the EU institutions and anti-racism initiatives**

35. supports UNESCO's European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR) initiative and particularly welcomes European projects related to the fight against racism, including the recent 'SUPport Everyday Fight Against Racism' (SUPER), within the framework of the European Commission's Rights Equality and Citizenship Programme;

36. urges the Commission to formally involve the Committee each year when it designates one or more 'European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity', as a way of recognising and highlighting cities' efforts to introduce robust inclusion strategies at local level;

37. is very keen to participate as a formal partner in the organisation of the anti-racism summit on 21 March 2021, which will be held in conjunction with the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination;

38. believes that, as the Committee and local and regional authorities are on the front line in the fight against racism and discrimination, they should play a formal role in exchanges, regular consultations and dialogue with the EU institutions;

39. welcomes the Commission's extensive efforts to strengthen policies based on fundamental values and to build the EU's Union of Equality through a number of action plans and strategies to address discrimination on specific grounds (race, gender equality, LGBTIQ, Roma, people with disabilities, antisemitism). However, given the cross-cutting nature of the aforementioned strategies, the Committee considers it appropriate to have not only individual progress reports but also intersectional ones, evaluating the interaction between the different strategies and their cumulative effects in the case of multiple forms of discrimination at national, regional and local levels;

40. supports the Commission's efforts to develop a Union of Equality that, with the help of the new internal equality task force, will safeguard the interests of all people, regardless of racial or ethnic origin, by integrating equality and intersectionality into all EU policies, legislation and funding programmes;

41. looks forward to being involved and cooperating with the future coordinator for anti-racism to be appointed by the Commission;

42. will follow the Commission's call to set a good example and improve the representativeness of CoR staff through recruitment and selection measures.

Brussels, 7 May 2021.

*The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions*  
Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS

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