

Annual seminar of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI 2022)

Speech

Dear Chair of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance,
Dear representatives of Equality Bodies across Europe,
Dear colleagues, Tendayi and Petra,
Dear distinguished participants,

For many years, ECRI and the Council of Europe have contributed considerably to fighting racism, discrimination, and intolerance in Europe. This is also a priority for the Commission.

Cases of racism and discrimination continue to rise.

The pandemic has further highlighted and exposed underlying structural inequalities and fundamental problems in areas of social, economic, and political life.

While the war in our neighbouring country, Ukraine, dictates more than ever the need to stay vigilant and active.

Two years ago, I called on all Member States to adopt national anti-racism action plans by the end of 2022 to effectively tackle racism and discrimination at the national, regional, and local level.

At the time, the European Commission adopted an ambitious EU anti-racism Action Plan that sets out measures over five years and aims to mainstream the fight against racism into all EU policies.

Importantly, the Action Plan recognises the structural dimension of racism, This is a major step forward.

Racism is often deeply embedded in our societies' history, intertwined with its cultural roots and norms.

It can be reflected in the way society functions, how power is distributed and how citizens interact with the state and public services.

The Action Plan acknowledges that different forms of racism exist, for example anti-black and anti-Asian racism, antigypsyism, antisemitism, and racism that links religion or belief with ethnicity in the form of anti-Muslim hatred.

All share the reality that the value of a person is undermined by stereotypes based on prejudice.

Annual seminar of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI 2022)

Racism can also combine with discrimination and hatred on other grounds, including gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability or against migrants.

This needs to be considered through an intersectional based policy approach. Intersectionality is built on the premise that inequities are never the result of single, distinct factors.

Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences.

In our fight against discrimination and racism, we need proactive policies at all levels of governance and through different measures.

An intersectional perspective deepens understanding of discrimination and racism and can make responses more effective.

The EU Anti-racism Action Plan therefore includes legal measures and measures addressing social attitudes, stereotypes or economic concerns. It also has a strong emphasis on collecting substantial equality data.

Comparable and regular data collection on equality and non-discrimination, which prevents us from reaching out to the most marginalised in our society, is still lacking.

The Commission is fully committed to step-up the collection of equality data. To support Member States on improving the collection of data disaggregated by racial or ethnic origin, the Subgroup on equality data, with the expertise of the Fundamental Rights Agency, published guidelines last year on how it can be done.

But national equality bodies across Europe are also the best placed to assist victims of discrimination.

Equality bodies are essential for ensuring that EU rules on equal treatment are properly enforced; that individuals and groups facing discrimination can enjoy their rights in full; and for promoting equality.

And they should be able to effectively perform the tasks assigned to them under EU law.

Yet, the Commission knows well that equality bodies still struggle with different levels of independence and competencies.

Annual seminar of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI 2022)

The Commission will therefore adopt new legislation on binding standards for equality bodies by the end of 2022.

ECRI recommendation n°2 on equality bodies provided inspiration for developing the new standards.

Among others, they would cover the equality bodies' mandate, powers, independence and resources.

We also envisage extending the competence of equality bodies from the current four to a total of six directives.

This will extend their scope of activities to two new fields and four new grounds of discrimination: disability, sexual orientation, age and religion or belief.

I believe this will help in further developing the intersectional approach you will be discussing today.

It is most important that equality bodies have strong powers and are accessible to all victims, at no cost.

I thank the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the Equality Bodies across Europe for your strong commitment and support.