



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



GLOBAL FORUM AGAINST RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

22 March 2021

CONCEPT NOTE

I. Rationale

At its 210th session, UNESCO's Executive Board affirmed a strong position by adopting the "Global Call against Racism" which acknowledges the urgent need to provide cutting-edge solutions to the increase of racism and discrimination in many regions, and called for the development of "a roadmap to strengthen UNESCO's contribution to the fight against racism and discriminations across its field of competence, with particular focus on anti-racism and anti-discrimination programmes". The Call is the result of a renewed commitment from 41 Member States, starting from Mexico, who proposed an agenda item on racism in 2019. The Republic of Korea mobilized a large group of co-sponsors and led the proposal for a global call against racism, inviting Member States to "pursue initiatives aimed at scaling up local, regional and worldwide cooperation to combat racism and discrimination".¹

With its mandate and partner networks, UNESCO is responding to this global call by seeking to build sustainable actions against racism and discriminations. The roadmap that will be developed by UNESCO will be designed in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, and built from UNESCO's established mandate, its long track record of work on racism and its recent initiatives.

II. UNESCO's longstanding efforts to combat racism

UNESCO has led the work against racism for several decades, with a long trajectory starting from the 1950s seminal work on "race" to the 1978 adoption of the *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice*. Over the years, UNESCO has established a full infrastructure that has allowed it to have a voice in the global discourse and to conduct many concrete actions on the ground, via, for example, the Slave Route Project; the General History of Africa; the Master Classes against Racism and Discriminations; the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities; the promotion of cultural diversity and value pluralism through cultural conventions; the intercultural competencies framework of the Intercultural Dialogue programme; the Prevention of Violent Extremism; the project on countering hate speech, the Global Citizenship Education programme, and Global Priority Gender Equality. Moreover, UNESCO is elaborating a Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, which will be the first global standard-setting instrument to address the ethical and social issues related to discrimination, including gender bias and stereotyping.

UNESCO organized a 15-edition webinar series entitled "Inclusion in the time of COVID-19: addressing racism, discrimination and exclusion" which brought to the fore the social dimension of the crisis and the discriminations linked to racism. In Autumn 2020, UNESCO organized a Regional Expert Consultation Series that yielded a number of recommendations in charting the way forward. As part of the roadmap that is being developed, UNESCO is conducting two major projects to further enhance its anti-racism programme: a scanning study of institutional and legal anti-racism frameworks that have an impact on the antiracism and anti-discrimination agendas of countries across the globe; and the development of a universal policy toolkit to combat racist ideologies and discriminations and promote best practices, affirmative action policies and incentives, as well as sanctions against discriminatory actions.

¹ 210 EXB/Decision 5.I.B

III. The urgency of addressing the global call against racism

Various forms of direct and indirect discrimination, targeting individuals and populations based on their ethnicity, origin, identity (including cultural and religious), gender, age, socio-economic status, disability, *inter alia*, have proliferated in societies, normalized these social ills, and exacerbated inequalities and exclusion, especially within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gender-based discriminations, including men's violence against women and girls, both online and offline, have exponentially increased during the COVID-related lockdowns and increased their vulnerabilities in all spheres of life, especially when exacerbated by racism, threatening their livelihoods, work-life balance, and mental and physical health.

IV. The Global Forum against Racism

As a response to the *Global Call against Racism*, UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Sector, with contributions from other sectors, will organize a multi-stakeholder Global Forum against Racism that will take place on 22 March 2021 in celebration of International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The Forum will be composed of four panels and will include Member States, experts, NGO communities, civil society, foundations, the private sector and media, *inter alia*. As a first major advocacy initiative to contribute to the *Global Call against Racism*, this Global Forum will:

- present and consolidate the outcomes and evidence of the UNESCO anti-racism and anti-discrimination initiatives linked to COVID, including the regional consultations, with the view to intensifying the UNESCO-wide efforts among a larger network of partners, including through the production of knowledge of what works and what does not in fighting racism and discrimination.
- foster an evidence-based dialogue among countries to identify best policy actions and benchmarks against racism and discrimination, along with examples from the private sector and civil society.
- based on the "Global Call", build a global front of partners against racism including public officials, high-level academic and scientific experts, renowned thought-leaders and change-makers, as well as foundations and donor institutions.
- foster research in innovative areas, and enhance the knowledge and awareness of these networks to advance inclusive and gender transformative actions that promotes intercultural dialogue, tackle racism and discriminations and systematically promote human rights;
- set the basis for the development of an anti-discrimination toolkit that could effectively enhance government policies and practices to recognize discrimination, boost affirmative action and foster inclusive policies;
- identify the next steps in enhancing the anti-racism roadmap, with specific proposals, in consultation with these partner networks.

V. Panels

Panel 1

How to establish anti-racist policies: policymakers at the forefront of the global fight against racism

Ministers will discuss racism and discrimination, and share their experiences in advancing practical and successful solutions in policymaking, as well as recurrent failures, good practices and lessons learned. Discussions will highlight the crucial need to establish national anti-racism action plans, and enhance existing ones, ensuring that opportunities for education, and other key enablers are made available especially for vulnerable communities.

Panel 2

How to deconstruct racism to construct an anti-racist culture: examining new forms of racism

Inviting scholars from around the world, this panel aims to unpack the various dimensions of racism in contemporary societies that juxtapose with other social constructs resulting in different types of discrimination.

Panel 3

How to promote a gender-transformative approach to fighting stereotypes, prejudices and discriminations

Zeroing in on the crucial role of gender equality as an anti-discriminatory approach, this panel will bring to bear a broad gamut of case studies in policy and practice. The discussion will encourage top-notch gender experts, policymakers and activists to share their reflections on tackling stereotypes and prejudices, designing strategies and formulating policies that take into consideration all forms of discrimination, especially gender inequities and gaps.

Panel 4

How to cultivate a global multi-stakeholder anti-racism partnership: enhancing intercultural dialogue, inclusion and diversity

With the aim of launching a multi-stakeholder partnership, this panel will invite Mayors, prominent thought-leaders, activists, artists, public figures, foundations, the private sector and media to share their diverse perspectives in the use of intercultural dialogue to construct a global anti-racism movement.