

2026 EUROPEAN ANTI-RACISM CONFERENCE

Background Paper

2026 European Anti-Racism Conference

17 March 2026

“Europe’s independence is about protecting our freedoms. The freedom to decide. To speak out. To move around the whole continent. The freedom to vote. To love. To pray. To live in a Union of equality”

-President Ursula von der Leyen. September 2025, State of the Union-

Introduction

On 20 January 2026, the European Commission introduced its first [Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030](#), as outlined in the [2024-2029 political guidelines](#). The Strategy reaffirms the Commission’s dedication to combating racism and racial discrimination across the EU, focusing on addressing racism in all forms, using a whole-of-society approach. It supports the Union of Equality and aims to ensure a discrimination-free environment for all EU residents.

The Strategy highlights that racism goes beyond personal biases or isolated events, pointing to structural barriers that limit access to education, jobs, housing, and healthcare, leading to long-term inequalities affecting communities and even generations. Data from the [EU Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\)](#) illustrates that structural racism can manifest in patterns that translate into social exclusion, overqualification, material deprivation, and even shorter life expectancy. Furthermore, structural racism is often deeply embedded in our societies’ history and intertwined with its cultural roots and norms.

The Strategy stresses the importance of addressing racism with an intersectional approach, considering how racial or ethnic discrimination intersects with gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or religion to enhance understanding and response effectiveness. Building on the [EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025](#), which highlighted racism as a threat to Union values and contributed to increased equality, institutional coordination, and support for civil society, the Strategy addresses widespread racism in many areas of European life.

To launch the Anti-Racism Strategy and mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the European Commission and the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU will host the 2026 European Anti-Racism Conference on 17 March 2026. This event will initiate the Strategy’s implementation, gathering representatives from EU institutions, Member States, international bodies, civil society actors, academia, equality bodies and grassroots organisations to discuss concrete implementation methods and enhance anti-racism efforts at EU, national and local level.

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From the Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025 to the first Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030

The EU's journey towards an inclusive Union has been characterised by several key milestones. The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025 laid critical groundwork by addressing structural racism and emphasising intersectionality across domains such as education, employment, and health. The action plan introduced key measures to safeguard individuals from racial discrimination, increase public awareness, and enhance the capacity of civil society organisations to advocate for equality awareness in the EU at all levels, including stronger institutional coordination, enhanced support for civil society, and the adoption of national action plans by a growing number of Member States.

The [Racial Equality Directive](#) has ensured the legal protection against discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin for over two decades. It prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin in the areas of employment and occupation, education, social protection including healthcare, social advantage, and access to and supply of goods and services available to the public, including housing.

The [Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia](#) by means of criminal law aims to ensure that serious manifestations of racism and xenophobia are punishable by effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal penalties throughout the EU. Its effective implementation is essential to guarantee that hate speech and hate crimes receive an effective criminal response and that victims of crimes are recognised and provided with an effective remedy. The Framework Decision is complemented by the [Victims' Rights Directive](#), which amongst other things aims to ensure justice, protection and support for victims of hate crimes and hate speech.

In December 2022, the European Commission proposed [Directives to strengthen the role and independence of national equality bodies](#). The proposed Directives entered into force in June 2024. The new binding standards aim to enhance the independence, resources, and powers of equality bodies, enabling them to better assist victims and enforce anti-discrimination legislation. They also highlight the role of equality bodies in preventing discrimination, highlighting the significance of intersectionality, and encourage equality bodies to improve the outreach to groups with limited access to information.

To support national efforts, the European Commission established the Expert Group on the National Implementation of the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan, which developed [Common Guiding principles for national action plans against racism and racial discrimination](#). 14 Member States have adopted stand-alone National Action Plans Against Racism (NAPARs), including initiatives implemented at the regional level. To further support Member States, the European Commission created a [checklist and reporting tool](#) for the development, implementation and monitoring of NAPARs.

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A key objective of the previous Action Plan was to enhance the availability of data to identify patterns of discrimination. Accessibility of information on racism and racial discrimination is crucial to shape the Union's anti-racism policies and constitutes one of the priorities that will be further advanced in the 2026–2030 Strategy. In this regard, the European Commission collaborates with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), which provides key surveys and reports. In the new Strategy, data collection remains a major priority. The European Commission will prepare a set of recommendations to improve the collection, analysis, and use of disaggregated equality data, in line with national legal frameworks and take any additional administrative burden into account.

As part of the commitments of the action plan, and to strengthen the Commission's response to the fight against racism, in 2021 the Commission appointed a dedicated "[Coordinator on Combating Racism](#)". To further strengthen the role, the Commission recently published a [mandate](#) for the Coordinator. In parallel, the European Commission has advanced broader policy frameworks on Roma equality, inclusion and participation, as well as on the protection of fundamental rights and the fight against hate speech and hate crime.

Building upon the achievements of the 2020-2025 Action Plan, the Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030 seeks to amplify efforts by enhancing enforcement mechanisms, establishing robust partnerships, and embedding anti-racism considerations into various policy domains. The Strategy recognises the shifting societal dynamics and emerging challenges, such as those posed by technological advancements and global migration. It embraces a whole-of-society approach, ensuring collaborative, comprehensive measures that address both systemic and individual aspects of racial discrimination.

Central to the Strategy is the objective of strengthening the enforcement of existing anti-discrimination laws. By doing so, the Commission seeks to ensure that policies designed to protect its citizens are not only robust but also effectively implemented across Member States. This entails imposing stronger sanctions and compliance mechanisms to reinforce these laws, thereby ensuring they are adhered to, and that violations are met with appropriate consequences.

The Strategy is also committed to embedding anti-racism into the daily lives of EU citizens. Recognising that racism can manifest through invisible barriers in employment, education, healthcare, and housing, the Strategy advocates for a holistic integration of anti-racism measures into these domains. This approach is designed to dismantle systemic obstacles that hinder access to opportunities and services, thereby fostering an inclusive environment where diversity is embraced and inequality is challenged.

Another pivotal aim of the Strategy is to enhance the role of partnerships at various levels—global, EU, regional, and local. Through collaboration with civil society, international organisations, and Member State institutions, the Strategy seeks to generate a united effort towards combating racism. These

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partnerships are envisioned as dynamic platforms for knowledge exchange, innovative solutions, and shared best practices, all of which contribute to a concerted push for equality.

Furthermore, the Strategy recognises the pressing need to address emerging challenges posed by advancements in technology, particularly the advent of artificial intelligence. By scrutinising algorithmic discrimination and ensuring that digital tools uphold human-centric values, the Strategy seeks to safeguard equality in this new technological era, preparing the EU for a future where innovation and inclusivity coexist.

Scope and objectives of the Conference

The 2026 European Anti-Racism Conference will create a dedicated space for networking, coalition-building, and the identification of common actions, with the overarching goal of ensuring that the new Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030 becomes a dynamic and effective framework that meaningfully improves the lives of individuals at risk of racism across the European Union.

This event aims to:

- **Launch the Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030**
The conference serves as a platform to introduce the Strategy's framework, goals, and planned initiatives, emphasising collective commitment and collaboration among stakeholders.
- **Reflect on Lessons Learned**
By looking back at previous initiatives such as the 2020-2025 Action Plan, participants will critically assess the successes and areas for growth. This retrospective analysis is crucial for refining strategies and ensuring future efforts build upon a robust foundation, adapting to the changing landscape of racial equity challenges.
- **Facilitate Networking and Coalition-Building**
The conference aims to create a dynamic space where stakeholders can connect, share insights, and forge collaborative networks. By facilitating cross-sector partnerships and engagement, it seeks to generate actionable commitments and cohesive efforts that drive progress towards inclusive environments across the EU.

The conference not only serves as a forum for dialogue but also functions as a springboard for implementing the Strategy. Through collective action and shared commitments, the Commission aims to catalyse transformative change, reinforcing its vision of a Union where equality, dignity, and justice are accessible to all citizens.

The Conference in detail

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The objective of the five parallel breakout sessions is to facilitate in-depth discussion of the thematic priorities outlined in the Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030. These sessions will be conducted as interactive workshops, using a participatory approach to encourage active engagement and meaningful dialogue.

Panel 1. Tackling Structural Racism: Building Social Cohesion through Evidence and Action

Understanding Structural Racism: By focusing on structural racism, the session encourages a deeper understanding of how policies can be crafted and refined to tackle deeply entrenched discriminatory practices, aligning with the Strategy's emphasis on a systemic approach to anti-racism. By discussing evidence-based strategies, participants will explore how to dismantle systemic barriers and foster social cohesion.

Panel 2. Action Plans Against Racism: From the Global to the Local Level

Building Anti-Racism Partnerships: This panel is directly linked to the Strategy's focus on forming robust partnerships at the global, EU, Member States, and regional/local levels. It aims to encourage collaboration between various stakeholders, ensuring that local initiatives are informed by global best practices.

Break-out Session I: Racism as a Barrier to Equal Social, Economic, and Health Outcomes

This session aims to explore how racism manifests as a barrier to achieving equal opportunities and outcomes in social, economic, and health sectors. Participants will engage in discussions focused on identifying systemic hurdles and developing evidence-based strategies to dismantle these barriers.

The session directly aligns with the strategy's goal to embed anti-racism into everyday life, ensuring equitable access to critical services and opportunities. It will also reflect on the importance of aligning anti-racism policies with the forthcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy to avoid policy silos and address structural exclusion. Through dialogue and collaboration, participants will work towards creating environments where diversity is celebrated and obstacles to equality are removed.

Break-out Session II: External Dimension of Racism and Intersection with Migration

This session addresses the external dimensions of racism as it intersects with migration. Participants will also reflect on how EU migration and integration policies can better align with anti-racist objectives and international guidance.

The discussions will focus on human rights dialogues, enlargement processes, multilateral cooperation, reflecting the Strategy's commitment to building robust global partnerships. These efforts aim to ensure

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equality for migrants and ethnic minority communities, fostering environments that welcome and integrate individuals while combating xenophobic and discriminatory attitudes.

Break-out Session III: Protecting Civic Space in the EU

This breakout session will examine how civic space in the EU is evolving as a foundational element of democratic participation and anti-racism advocacy. Discussions will explore the challenges faced by civil society organisations, including political pressure, smear campaigns, legal and administrative barriers, funding constraints, and the securitisation of debates concerning communities affected by racism.

The session will be framed around the EU Strategy for Civil Society and the EU Anti-Racism Strategy both of which advocate for a stronger civil society involvement and enabling civic space. By fostering dialogues around civic freedoms, participants will identify key challenges as well as opportunities to strengthen support for civil society organisations working to advance equality and combat racism across the EU.

Break-out Session IV: From Legislation to Lived Reality: Enforcement of Anti-Racism Legislation

This session focuses on translating legislative frameworks into tangible, lived realities for individuals across the EU. Participants will explore strategies for enforcing anti-racism laws, highlighting the importance of sanctions and compliance mechanisms to ensure effective implementation.

Echoing the Strategy's commitment to strengthening enforcement measures, this workshop seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice. By collaborating with legal experts, attendees will discuss ways to enhance judicial and socio-political environments, ensuring laws are not just written but actively enforced, safeguarding against racial discrimination and promoting justice.

Break-out Session V: Safeguarding Equality in an AI-Driven Society

Addressing the emerging challenges posed by artificial intelligence, this session will discuss how algorithmic discrimination can undermine equality objectives. Participants will explore critical dialogues on monitoring, regulating, and safeguarding data-driven technologies to ensure they uphold human-centric values.

As the Strategy seeks to address algorithmic discrimination under the Racial Equality Directive, this session will focus on harmonising technology development with anti-racism principles. Participants will explore initiatives designed to scrutinise AI systems, ensuring they reflect the diversity and equality goals of the Strategy, preparing the EU for an increasingly digital society.