

2026 EUROPEAN ANTI-RACISM CONFERENCE

Breakout Session I - Racism as a barrier to social, economic and health outcomes.

Background and objectives

Across the European Union, communities affected by racism continue to face structural inequalities in housing, education, employment, health and access to social services. Evidence from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and Eurobarometer surveys shows that these disparities remain persistent and cumulative, reflecting systemic barriers rather than isolated socioeconomic disadvantage.

The **Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030** recognises structural racism as a major barrier to equal opportunities and social cohesion. It calls for stronger mainstreaming of anti-racism across policy areas such as employment, education, housing, healthcare and social protection, alongside improved equality data, enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation and better coordination between EU and national governance mechanisms.

At the same time, the European Union is developing a forthcoming **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**, with calls from the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) for a human-rights-based and multidimensional approach. Ensuring alignment between anti-racism and anti-poverty frameworks will be essential to avoid policy silos and prevent the reproduction of structural exclusion.

Racism operates not only through individual discrimination but also through structural mechanisms such as spatial segregation, labour market exclusion and unequal access to healthcare, education and social services, generating cumulative and intergenerational inequalities.

This session will examine how racism acts as a cross-cutting determinant of unequal social, economic and health outcomes, and how EU policy instruments can move from recognition to measurable structural change.

Speakers

- **Cristina de la Serna Sandoval**, Director of the Equal treatment Department, Fundacion Secretariado Gitano (FSG).
- **Juliana Wahlgren**, Director, European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)
- **Mila Paspalanova**, Anti-racial discrimination advisor, United Nations Human Rights, Regional Office for Europe (OHCHR Brussels).
- **Cristian Pîrvulescu**, EESC member (GR/III/Romania), Rapporteur on the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) opinion on the EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025.
- Facilitator : **Lavinia Banu**, Consultant.

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- Rapporteur: **Cerasela Banica**, Secretary of State, Equality body, Romania.

Guiding Questions

1. Which EU instruments have the greatest potential to accelerate desegregation, and where are the implementation gaps?
2. How does structural racism operate as a cross-cutting determinant of poverty and health inequalities?
3. What lessons can the EU draw from OHCHR's Human Rights Indicators Framework?
4. What barriers prevent meaningful civil society participation in EU social policymaking?

Breakout Session II - The external dimension of racism and its intersection with migration.

Background and objectives

The **Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030** frames racism as a global and structural challenge and aims to ensure that the EU's internal equality commitments are reflected in its external action and partnerships. The EU promotes non-discrimination internationally through human rights dialogues, enlargement processes and multilateral cooperation, in line with obligations such as the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

However, stakeholders note that migration and anti-racism policies are often addressed separately at EU level. Institutional silos persist between migration governance (e.g. return, border management and external partnerships) and anti-discrimination frameworks, risking inconsistencies in policy and practice. Key challenges include risks of racial profiling in detection and return practices, the disproportionate impact of xenophobia on undocumented migrants, gaps in protection—particularly for undocumented women facing gender-based violence—and limited coordination between migration and anti-racism frameworks.

The recently adopted Joint General Comment on xenophobia by the UN Committees on Racial Discrimination (CERD) and Migrant Workers (CMW) provides guidance on addressing discrimination against migrants and those perceived as such.

This breakout session will explore how the EU can ensure that its migration and border policies reflect the same human rights principles it promotes globally, and how the 2026–2030 Strategy can move from principles to concrete results.

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Speakers

- **Michele LeVoy**, Director, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM).
- **Sara Hamood, Sara Hamood**, Chief of the Anti-Racial Discrimination Section, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).
- **Andria Neocleous**, Director, Hope for Children (Cyprus) –.
- **Isabelle De Ruyt**, Policy Officer, “Migration & Human Security” Division, European External Action Service (EEAS). Facilitator : Donna-Marie Fry, PhD.
- Rapporteur : **Stéphanie Richani**, Advocacy Officer, Equinox initiative for Racial Justice.

Guiding Questions

1. How does racism manifest in the external dimension of EU migration policy?
2. How can international human rights norms and standards inform EU migration partnerships?
3. How can the EU ensure that external migration cooperation fully respects non-discrimination obligations?
4. What practical steps can bridge institutional silos between migration and anti-racism policy?

Breakout Session III: Protecting civic space in the EU.

Background and objectives

An open and enabling civic space is essential for democratic societies. Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a critical role in defending fundamental rights, supporting vulnerable communities, contributing expertise to policymaking, and holding institutions accountable. The European Union recognises this role as central to democratic participation and the protection of EU values.

However, across the EU, many civil society actors—particularly those working on equality, anti-racism and migrant rights—report increasing challenges that restrict their operating environment. These include political pressure, smear campaigns, legal and administrative barriers, funding constraints, and the securitisation of debates affecting racialised communities.

The recently proposed **EU Strategy for Civil Society** seeks to strengthen engagement with civil society and ensure an open and safe civic space, including through improved support and funding frameworks. At the same time, the **Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030** recognises structural racism as a persistent challenge and highlights the importance of partnerships with civil society to combat discrimination and advance equality.

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Despite these commitments, organisations working on anti-racism continue to face barriers in documenting discrimination, advocating for policy change, and protecting affected communities.

This breakout session will explore how civic space in the EU is evolving and how these developments affect anti-racism work, bringing together grassroots, advocacy, and institutional perspectives to identify both challenges and opportunities for strengthening support to civil society.

Speakers

- **Monica Gathuo**, Co-Founder, ARMA (Anti-Racism Media Activist Alliance) and the Anti-Racism Forum (Finland).
- **Sedra Arab**, Anti-racism Trainer and Project Coordinator, Dokustelle (Austria).
- **Aarti Narsee**, Senior Policy Officer & Lead for Rule of Law Advocacy, European Civic Forum.
- **Estelle Masse**, Policy Officer, European Commission, Directorate-General of Justice & Consumers, Fundamental Rights Unit.
- Facilitator : **Ojeaku Nwabuzo**, Consultant and Atlantic Fellow for Racial Equity.
- Rapporteur : **Céline Fabrequette**, Executive Director, #Diaspora Vote.

Guiding Questions

1. How is civic space currently being restricted or reshaped in the EU, particularly for anti-racist and equality-focused organisations?
2. What mechanisms currently exist to protect civil society actors and human rights defenders, and where are the gaps?
3. What role should EU institutions play in protecting civic space and supporting anti-racism organisations?

Breakout Session IV: From legislation to lived reality: Enforcement of anti-racism legislation

Background and objectives

Ensuring that every person in the European Union can enjoy their rights fully and equally is a key EU priority. Yet, incidents of racial discrimination, racist harassment and violence occur and often go unreported, leaving victims without the support and protection they are legally entitled to. Studies reveal persistent trust deficits, with racialised people less likely to believe they would receive fair treatment in

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their dealings with law enforcement, public administration and the judicial system. To break this pattern, the enforcement of relevant EU laws must be strengthened.

This interactive breakout session will elaborate different ways of strengthening the enforcement of applicable legislation and discuss challenges of making the anti-discrimination framework a lived reality for racialised people. It will look at the application of the Racial Equality Directive, the use of sanctions, support of and access for victims of discrimination, rights awareness, and the crucial role of law enforcement and the judicial system. The session will identify points of intervention and propose specific actions for the implementation period of the Anti-Racism Strategy.

Echoing the Anti-Racism 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, preventing racial discrimination and promoting justice.

Speakers

- **Hubert Smolinski**, Legal Officer, European Commission Directorate-General of Justice & Consumers.
- **Daris Lewis Recio**, Legal and Policy Officer, European Network of Equality Bodies
- **Alba Hernandez**, Co-founder & Gender Equality Advocate, Feminist Collective of Romani Gender Experts
- **Néphéli Yatropoulos**, Advisor on European and International affairs in the Cabinet of the Defender of Rights, France
- Facilitator: **Constantin Schäfer**, Consultant, ifok GmbH
- Rapporteur: **Sacha Lin-Jung**, Citizenship Lead at the Association of Young Chinese in France (Association des Jeunes Chinois de France)

Guiding Questions

1. What are practical **obstacles for the effective enforcement of anti-racism legislation**?
2. Based on your work and your experiences, please suggest or introduce an action or approach that you consider **promising**.
3. How would you **operationalise** the objectives of the **Anti-Racism Strategy** in your own institutional context?

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

Background and objectives

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes deeply embedded in European public services, policing, and online spaces, this session will confront a critical question: Is AI driving us toward equality or entrenching racism?

This interactive break-out session will move beyond abstract ethics to examine the tangible impacts of AI on racialised communities. By bringing together perspectives from civil society, intergovernmental bodies, and international human rights frameworks, the panel will explore how algorithms can amplify discrimination in a number of policy areas.

The discussion will serve as a call to action for stakeholders to integrate digital rights into their core work, emphasising the urgency of understanding data gathering, intersectionality, and key legislative battles such as the EU AI Act and the forthcoming Digital Omnibus.

The goal is to identify concrete policy levers, advocacy strategies, and mechanisms for redress to ensure AI serves equality, not undermines it.

Speakers

- **Blue Tiyavorabun** - Policy Adviser, European Digital Rights (EDRi).
- **Sara Haapalainen** - Anti-discrimination Cooperation (ADCU) / Hate Speech & AI (HSCU) Units, Council of Europe.
- **Sarah Chander** - Senior Advocate, Equinox initiative for Racial Justice.
- Facilitator: Alejandra Piot, Consultant.
- Rapporteur: **Oyidiya Oji**, Policy and Advocacy Advisor (Digital Rights), European Network Against Racism (ENAR)

Guiding Questions

1. Have you or your community witnessed concrete examples of AI-driven discrimination (e.g., in facial recognition, border checks, or automated social welfare decisions)?
2. What kind of tools, data, or evidence do CSOs need to effectively challenge a discriminatory AI system used by a public authority? How do we move from suspicion to proof?

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3. How do we ensure our advocacy captures the full picture of harm when AI discrimination intersects with gender, migration status, and race? What are we missing with a single-axis approach?
4. If an AI system makes a wrong decision that harms you, where do you go for justice? What are the biggest barriers to accessing effective redress?