



EUROPEAN NETWORK AGAINST RACISM

The voice of the anti-racist movement in Europe

#COVIDIMPACT

LIFTING STRUCTURAL BARRIERS: A PRIORITY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM

Structural racism is¹:

- Preventing people at risk of discrimination and exclusion, including migrants, from accessing justice and basic human needs
- Discriminating racialised groups in access to quality, secure and decent jobs, healthcare, education, goods and services, etc.
- Profiling, brutalising and sometimes killing people because of their perceived ethnic or religious background, including by police and border management authorities

The Covid19 crisis has led to:

- Disproportionate numbers of deaths within racialised communities in some areas
- More precarious lives for all those who are already racially discriminated against
- Scapegoating racialised minorities as being the cause of the disease
- Closing or reducing remaining support services to victims of racial discrimination
- Governments and authorities enforcing racially discriminatory policies
- More power to the police to control social behaviours, especially in areas where many racialised groups live

Despite fundamental rights obligations and equality laws at EU and international levels.

The pandemic has had one clear consequence in the lives of racialised groups: it has exacerbated existing and historical systemic inequalities in society, and is having a particular impact on racialised groups². It has made visible the face of structural and institutional racism in all its specific forms³. Measures to fight the pandemic have sometimes been used as pretext to further racially motivated discrimination and violence. The COVID-19 crisis has been a catalyst of many existing issues in our society. Now is the time for policy makers to adapt their policy priorities, address structural racism as a priority to ensure a fair, equal and inclusive society for all. **A change in the approach to racism/racial equality is therefore crucial in the EU.**

1 According to our research, including Shadow reports against racism in Europe: <https://www.enar-eu.org/Shadow-Reports-on-racism-in-Europe-203>

2 Black persons, people of African, Arab, Asian, Caribbean, Latin American, Roma or Sinti descent or belonging to a religious group such as Muslims or Jews

3 Antigypsyism, Islamophobia, Afrophobia, Antisemitism, etc.

The COVID-19 crisis has had far-reaching consequences on racialised groups. As a result of racial discrimination, many of them, in particular asylum seekers, undocumented people and Roma but also people of Asian, African, Arab and Latin descent, Jews and Muslims (or perceived as such), encounter serious challenges due to the coronavirus, such as:

- Lack of alternative or adequate housing during confinement
- No access to health services and essential infrastructures, such as water, electricity and mobility
- Overrepresentation in precarious – although often frontline – work with job and financial insecurity as well as health risks (caretakers, health workers, working in hospitals, supermarkets, factories, etc.) with lack of protective measures
- Scapegoating and racist speech, victims of online and offline racist abuse, including by politicians
- Increase in racial profiling and police brutality
- Enforcement of [racially discriminatory policies](#) (especially in Roma and refugee camps)
- Closure or reduction of support services' activities, leaving many without access to justice and basic services or moral support, and even leading to homelessness as in the case of asylum seekers
- Risk of unemployment and poverty of employees working in frontline organisations which provide support to victims of discrimination

This is evidenced by [ENAR's data collection project collecting 191 cases](#) between January and April 2020.

1. **Housing** has been one of the most common challenges experienced by racialised groups in the context of COVID-19, considering the obligation to stay confined at home in many EU countries. Because of the pervasive discrimination they encounter, these groups often live in overcrowded accommodation where it is nearly impossible to keep the advised distance from one another. In refugee camps and Roma settlements, lack of access to water and sanitation has made people unable to comply with hygiene measures to contain the spread of the virus.

“Il Corona Virus non discrimina” is a formal complaint from migrants living in reception centres in Bologna, Italy. They have written an open letter to local and regional authorities calling for improvements in living conditions to reduce the chance of transmission of COVID-19. Supported by the migrant rights organisation Coordinamento Migranti, the migrants in Bologna point the overcrowding of reception centres as a risk for contagion. Besides those living in these centres, people living in informal settlements, both in rural areas and big cities, are at risk.

2. **Police abuse** has become a dangerous – and sometimes lethal – trend especially as a result of lockdown measures. Arbitrary checks with clear indications of racial profiling have occurred and, in some cases, led to use of disproportionate force against people from racialised groups. There have also been cases in which individuals were shot by the police for allegedly disobeying a police warning and/or lockdown measures or died during incidents of this nature involving law enforcement authorities.

A 19-year-old Belgian of Moroccan origin died on April 10 in Brussels after he fled from police who were checking if he was respecting lockdown measures. The incident happened when a police patrol in the neighbourhood of Anderlecht noticed two teenagers on scooters and carried out an inspection due to current lockdown guidelines. Motorcycle or scooter driving is allowed to go to and from work, according to the guidelines in the fight against the coronavirus.

3. **Structural racism in employment and healthcare** has been exacerbated considerably for racialised groups. In the UK, for instance, COVID-19 has highlighted not only the inequalities faced by Asian, black and ethnic minority health workers but also the fact that Asian, black and ethnic minorities were disproportionately contracting the coronavirus and its severe forms. They, as well as Roma people, frequently work in informal, low-paid and precarious jobs or are essential workers, which does not allow them to self-isolate or work safely from their homes. People of colour, and especially women of colour, are also disproportionality working in the health, care and cleaning sectors. Undocumented migrants are one of the most affected groups by the pandemic. They do not have access to the formal job market and are not entitled to any type of governmental social protection. They were among the first to lose their jobs due to the coronavirus crisis.

Two individuals (one in Belgium and one in the Netherlands) with coronavirus symptoms reported they were not able to access medical facilities without medical insurance. In the UK, more than 40% of NHS medical staff are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, and almost 30% of doctors do not have UK citizenship.

4. Since the early months of the spread of COVID-19, ethnic and religious minorities have been victims of **racist speech online and offline**. In most cases, Asians, but also Roma, people of African descent, Jews and Muslims are blamed for the coronavirus and its spread in Europe. There have also been several reports of racist violence. It appears that racist speech fuels violence in the context of the Covid pandemic and has a ripple effect. It not only affects the individual but also the community they represent.

Jessica, a Malaysian girl living in Tallinn was victim to racist hate speech attacks on a tram due to a fear of the coronavirus. “You, Chinese, you bring the virus” was shouted at her. She was wearing a mask for her and everyone else’s protection. In Slovakia, politicians and media claimed that Roma people can be a security threat, given their lifestyle and lack of discipline - a clear example of institutional racism.

5. In addition, **civil society organisations** which have been key in supporting victims of racism and exclusion and protecting their rights, are now undergoing an economic crisis which is increasing the precariousness of the sector, already lacking structural support from Member States.

As a result of these different elements, **racialised groups experience a triple “penalty”**:

1. Being more exposed to the disease or other related issues (e.g. stress disorder)
2. Being more at risk of racism and related inequalities
3. Being less likely to be supported by Member States when facing racism

Existing structural and institutional barriers have led to a disproportionate impact of the crisis on racialised groups. Therefore, ENAR asks for a change of approach in the fight against racism in the EU to address structural racism in an intersectional way. Racial equality and justice are some of the most powerful conditions to overcome this and future crises with resilience and solidarity.

Concretely, for public policies, this means:

1. Structural racism as a focus of racial equality policy (including recognition of all forms and dimensions of racism)
2. Equality data collection mechanisms disaggregated by race
3. Racial equality mainstreaming in all policies (intersectional approach)
4. Group-specific policies (e.g. National Action Plans Against Racism)

To achieve this, ENAR asks for concrete measures at national and EU level:

1. In mainstream policies/initiatives, European and national institutions adopt specific measures/provisions for all groups at risk of racism by:

- Ensuring that new emergency funds and more flexible funding programmes have specific allocation criteria to benefit people at risk of racism and civil society organisations supporting them;
- Adopting recovery plans which include measures that address the specific situation of groups at risk of racism (e.g. grant/extend permits to migrants, give specific attention and more severe sanctions in case of housing and employment discrimination, adopt initiatives to combat fake news including racial scapegoating, etc.);
- Establishing strong consultative mechanisms involving civil society from racialised communities, who can voice the specific concerns of their constituencies;
- Prioritising research on the impact of COVID-19 on racialised groups in mainstream research programmes, through the application of racial and gender equality lenses;
- Ensuring that group-specific policies are implemented through mainstream socio-economic policy frameworks.

2. In group-specific policies/initiatives, European institutions and national governments adopt a stronger focus on tackling structural racism by:

- Adopting comprehensive National Action Plans Against Racism as a way to address structural racism and discrimination, that would help mitigate the disproportionate impact of crises and improve existing measures and legislation in place. It would support more inclusion-focused approaches such as in the national action plans for third-country nationals and National Roma Integration Strategies;
- Establishing mechanisms to collect equality data disaggregated by race (including ethnicity and religion) based on self-identification and anonymity in order to understand why racialised communities have been more impacted by the crisis and to inform future policies;
- Adopting and implementing guidelines/measures to combat racism in law enforcement (including to prohibit racial profiling, adopt more severe sanctions against police violence, increase racial diversity and trainings, etc.);
- Granting resident permits to undocumented migrants, to lift the barriers that prevent them from being protected and included in society;
- Establishing firewalling protocols to prevent the expulsion of undocumented migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, as well as facilitating their integration and access to health and other services;
- Adopting the new [strategic framework for Roma equality, Social and Economic Justice and Combatting Antigypsyism](#), with a specific focus on combating structural and institutional racism.

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