

Annual Workshop-Conference

Racism, discrimination and health

2025 Edition: From racial trauma to redress through words and tales

Wednesday 29 October, 9:30 - 17:30 (in person and online)

Location: UN House, Boulevard du Régent 37, 1000 Bruxelles

Register [HERE](#).

Background and Rationale

This workshop and consultation are the third in a series jointly convened by OHCHR Regional Office for Europe (OHCHR ROE), the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) and over 60 partner organizations represented through the Anti-discrimination and Health Equity network (DisQo) to address the nexus between racism and health. The first two gatherings explored the broad impact of racism on physical and mental health, while this third event, co-organized with PAD Belgium will focus on the potential of cultural expression - through literature, storytelling, oral history, and the arts - to redress racial trauma and foster collective and individual healing. Simultaneously, in line with previous events, the event outcome includes a series of recommendations for policy makers in the areas of non-discrimination, racism, health, cultural rights, participation and reparations.

Trauma is the psychological, emotional, and physiological response to deeply distressing or threatening events that overwhelm a person's ability to cope. It may manifest in anxiety, depression, hypervigilance, and physical health problems. Racial trauma refers to the cumulative, chronic, and pervasive harm caused by racism and racial discrimination. Unlike single-event trauma, racial trauma is ongoing, transmitted across generations, and embedded in structural inequalities. It not only erodes mental health but also contributes to physical morbidity through chronic stress, heightened inflammation, and reduced access to quality healthcare.

The health impacts of racism: Research shows that racism is a social determinant of health. The World Health Organization has highlighted that racial discrimination is associated with increased risks of hypertension, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes, often mediated by chronic stress and reduced healthcare access. In mental health, studies demonstrate higher prevalence of depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation among racialized groups exposed to persistent discrimination. Extensive research, on the physical and mental health impacts of trauma and stress demonstrates also less known but detrimental health implications such as elevated risks of heart attacks and stroke through elevated blood pressure and clotting; suppressed immunity; weakening and thinning of the bones; contributing to abdominal obesity and elevating the risk of metabolic and cardiovascular problems, to mention just a few. Noteworthy to stress, Dr. Elizabeth Balckburn's (Nobel prize in medicine for her work on telomeres) work has demonstrated that racism affects our genetic and molecular functioning and shortens lifespan.

Differential impact on women: Black women experience racism in combination with sexism and often with higher exposure to all forms of violence. This dual burden leads to disproportionate mental health challenges. Evidence from the U.S. “Black Women’s Health Study” shows elevated risks of hypertension and obesity linked to chronic stress from racism and gender discrimination. In Europe, research on African-descendant women indicates greater prevalence of depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms than men in similar contexts. Black women are also more likely to face barriers in accessing mental health services, reinforcing cycles of exclusion. Integrating this intersectional approach is crucial in addressing the impacts of racism on health, through taking into consideration how multiple determinants (such as race, gender, sex, lived experiences, income etc) intersect to create unique experiences of privilege and oppression, leading to distinct health outcomes and inequalities.

The Role of Art, Literature, and Storytelling

Cultural expression has historically served as a means of resilience and healing in communities across the globe. Literature, oral history, and storytelling provide spaces to articulate pain, affirm identity, and reclaim dignity. Artistic practices can facilitate collective recognition of trauma, challenge stereotypes, and promote empathy across communities. By amplifying lived experiences, art and literature help transform individual suffering into collective strength, and provide therapeutic benefits, including improved mental well-being and community cohesion. This transformative power of culture is rarely reflected at policy level, it is seldom recognized by society in general or by health professionals and at best it is integrated in the work of psychologists.

Our annual events aim at addressing persistently overlooked anti-racism policy gaps and also human rights concerns which are not sufficiently articulated and addressed. The backbone of our work is the international normative framework, as well as European Union commitments regarding combatting racism, policy guidelines, and crosscutting human rights principles such as transparency, participation and accountability. Among others, the workshop will be anchored in the framework of the:

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and its Article 12 that recognizes “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health”; and Article 15 affirming “the right of everyone to take part in cultural life,” including access to cultural heritage, self-expression, and the use of cultural practices as a source of identity and resilience.
- General Comment No. 14 (2000) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) elaborates on the right to health, stressing that it must be available, accessible, acceptable, and of good quality, without discrimination.
- General Comment No. 21 (2009) on the right to participate in cultural life emphasizes that cultural practices are integral to dignity, identity, and participation, and must be protected against racial discrimination.

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD): obliges States to combat racial discrimination in all its forms and guarantee equality in access to health and culture.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (2001) recognizes the need to address the legacies of racism, slavery, and colonialism and highlights the role of culture in promoting reconciliation and healing.

This normative framework sets the stage for States, including those in the European Union, to take steps to address racial trauma through cultural rights and ensure the right to health of all those who suffer from racial discrimination, including people of African descent.

Objectives of the Event

The one-day workshop aims to open the venues for:

Redressing trauma: Explore how cultural expression through literature, storytelling, and oral history can serve as tools to acknowledge, process, and heal racial trauma.

Advancing the right to health: Promote understanding of how artistic and cultural practices contribute to the mental health and well-being of people of African descent, in line with Article 12 ICESCR.

Strengthening cultural rights: Highlight the importance of protecting and promoting cultural rights as a means of resilience and empowerment.

Formulating policy recommendations: Develop actionable recommendations for policymakers at EU level to integrate cultural and health rights approaches in addressing racism and its impacts.

Promoting intersectional approaches: Ensure that the specific experiences of women and girls are recognized, and that policies reflect their unique needs.

Expected Outcomes

Greater awareness among policymakers, civil society, and public health actors of the impact of racial trauma on health and the role of cultural expression in healing.

A set of policy recommendations for EU institutions and Member States on integrating cultural rights and health strategies to address racism.

Strengthened collaboration between human rights and public health stakeholders to advance the right to health of people of African descent.

Enhanced visibility of cultural voices, narratives, and lived experiences as a foundation for resilience, advocacy, and policy reform.

Agenda (Draft)

9:30 – 10:00	Registration & coffee
10:00 – 10:10	Welcoming remarks <i>Christina Meinecke</i> , Representative OHCHR Regional Office for Europe
10:10 - 10:30	Words of Union and Rythm of the Day: circle activity <i>Modi Ntambwe</i> , PAD Belgium Observatory & EPAFPAD
10:30 - 10:45	Racism and Health: what have we done so far? <i>Tomas de Jong</i> , EPHA
10:45 - 10:55	Cultural Spark “Ode to Peace” poem written and read by Aicha Bacha
10:55 – 11:15	Impacts of Racism on Mental and Physical Health <i>Mila Paspalanova</i> , OHCHR ROE
11:15 – 11:20 (pen and piece of paper)	Self-Reflection Moment: Pain... where, why, since when
11:20 - 11:35	Coffee break
11:35 - 11:50	A story on racism and health <i>Jaqueline Bowman</i> , Senior Health Leader and Founder Fondation Pacte Adiposite
11:50 – 12:05	A story of words through words <i>Dorrie Wilson</i> , Cultural Curator
12:05 - 12:45	Interactive exchange with the public. Share Where it hurts. Express through words or image or gesture
12:45 – 13:00	Presenting afternoon workshops and Diving into groups
13:00 – 13:45	Lunch Break
13:45-14:30	1. On Redress, Reparation and Healing. Guiding Questions: What do we need NOW? What are the manifestations of Racism in health NOW? At personal and Community level

14:30 – 14:45	Inspirational Spark: Storytelling for healing, a decolonial perspective: Lessons from LEAP: LEgacy in Progress". Stefanie Gilbert-Roberts
14:45 - 15:30	2. On Culture and Words for Healing. Guiding Questions: What is the power of cultural expression How do we envision redress through culture What do we want?
15:30 - 15:45	Coffee Break <i>Open Mic Artistic-Lab</i>
15:45 - 16:00	Inspirational Spark: Experience of Youth. Racism and Politics Agnes Mfoumou
16:00 - 16:45	3. Brainstorming on policy proposals.
16:45 – 17:15	Conclusions and agreements
17:15 Onwards	Networking

Umbrella event: Launch of the Second International Decade for People of African Descent

Tuesday 28 October,

9:30 – 12:00 Launch of the Second Decade for People of African Descent (*online*)

We invite you to complete at the following link your [REGISTRATION for the Launch of the Second International Decade.](#)

You can also find more information on the [agenda](#) and the event [HERE](#), and join the webinar [HERE](#).