OHCHR Consultation on Sports, Ageing and Racial Discrimination

Implications on the Right to Health



The consultation was organised by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and its Representation Office to the European Union, in collaboration with the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) and DisQo pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 60/24 on 9 October 2026. It forms part of a series of participatory-consultative seminars on racism and health running since 2023, through which the convening institutions have addressed racism and discrimination as key determinants of health in Europe, and have strengthened the positioning of the right to health in the EU agenda through the EU Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030.

In the world of sport, the participation of older racialised persons remains largely absent from research, policy and practice. The consultation therefore aimed to:

- Deepen the understanding of the experiences of racialized older persons in sport in the EU.
- Explore the systemic barriers and challenges in sport that hinder racialized older persons from participating in sports in the EU.
- Discuss the relevance of intergenerational experiences in sport.
- Explore and recommend how EU anti-racism, sport and healthy ageing initiatives, including the next 2027 European Week of Sport, can address the intersection of ageing, ageism and racial discrimination and its impact on the enjoyment of the right to health by older racialized persons.

Outcomes of the discusssion

Key Challenges Identified

1 Structural barriers, cumulative exclusionary experiences including intersecting forms of discrimination

Participation in sport is shaped by structural barriers and cumulative exclusionary experiences across the life course. Racism and other intersecting forms of discrimination often begin affecting opportunities from an early age, limiting access to sport, reducing confidence and participation, and contributing to long-term inequalities in health and wellbeing. Early experiences of exclusion can also restrict opportunities to develop skills, social networks and a sense of belonging within sporting environments later in life.

Stereotypes reinforce exclusion in sports and establish barriers for the participation of Roma and older racialized women. The latter are also less likely to use outdoor sports facilities due to public safety concerns.

Racialised older persons are underrepresented in sport-related research, policy development and data collection. There is lack of disaggregated and intersectional data reflecting how age, race, gender, disability, religion, migration status and other characteristics interact to influence experiences, participation and outcomes in sport.

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epha european public health alliance
DisQo anti-discrimination & health equity

2 Economic challenges and poverty

Economic inequalities and poverty constitute significant barriers to participation in sport and physical activity among racialised older persons. Financial constraints can affect access to facilities, equipment, transportation and organised activities, thereby limiting opportunities for regular participation and healthy ageing.

The cumulative effects of physically demanding work, combined with family and caregiving responsibilities, leaves older racialised persons with fewer opportunities, resources and time to engage in sport and physical activity.

Access to sports is hindered by digital challenges and linked to age, poverty and economic disadvantage. While technology can facilitate participation through online resources, fitness apps and virtual communities, increasing reliance on digital systems creates new barriers for older persons, especially those belonging to racialised communities and living in poverty.

3 Sport in the context of right to health is not a priority

Sport and physical activity are often perceived through competitive, elite-performance models, which can exclude racialised groups and discourage some older persons from seeking support, reinforcing the view that physical activity is optional rather than essential to healthy ageing and the right to health.

States' efforts to provide education and public health messaging on the benefits of physical activity in older age, particularly strength and balance training, are insufficient.

4 Lack of data, research and representation

There are major gaps in disaggregated data and research on older racialised persons' participation in sport, limiting understanding of barriers, discrimination, health outcomes and the effectiveness of existing policies and programmes.

Older racialised persons remain underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles across sport, reducing their influence on programmes, funding and anti-discrimination measures and increasing the risk that policies do not reflect their needs and experiences.

International and regional human rights frameworks

International and regional human rights frameworks relevant to the rights of older persons include the establishment of the mandate of the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Older Persons in 2013 followed by the establishment of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Human Rights of Older Persons (IGWG-HROP) by the Human Rights Council in 2025, mandated to elaborate a relevant legally binding international instrument on the human rights of older persons, which remain in progress.

There is a distinction between ageism and age-based discrimination. Ageism is the stereotyping, prejudice and assumptions associated with older age, while age-based discrimination refers to distinctions, exclusions or restrictions based on age that impair the equal enjoyment of human rights. Age is not solely a biological or chronological concept but is also shaped by social, cultural, economic and political contexts. The category of "older persons" should not be understood as a fixed or homogenous group, and responses to ageing, ageism, and age-based discrimination should take account of the diversity of experiences across different contexts and lived realities.

European Union frameworks are potential entry points. Greater attention could be paid to the experiences of older racialised persons within the implementation of the EU Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030, the EU Work Plan for Sport 2024–2027, and future editions of the European Week of Sport. At the regional level, examples of regional frameworks include the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons (2016) and the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons (2015).

Recommendations

Address structural and systemic barriers to participation by adopting a life-course and intersectional approach to sport policies and programmes, ensuring that the cumulative impact of racism and other forms of discrimination is recognised and effectively addressed.

Adopt a life-course and intersectional approach to sport policies and programmes, ensuring that the cumulative impact of racism, ageism and other forms of discrimination is recognised and effectively addressed. Particular attention should be paid to experiences of exclusion occurring during childhood and adolescence, women and girls, recognising their long-term impact on confidence, belonging and participation in older age.

Ensure reporting and complaints mechanisms are available, and adequately resourced, with a clear accountability measures.

Strengthen efforts to reduce economic barriers to participation through affordable, community-based and publicly funded sport and physical activity opportunities, with targeted support for racialized older persons and those experiencing poverty or social exclusion.

Promote sport and physical activity as a component of the right to health and healthy ageing by expanding public awareness initiatives and encouraging inclusive, non-competitive and culturally appropriate forms of participation that are accessible to older persons.

Improve the availability of data and evidence by investing in research that includes racialised older persons and collects disaggregated, intersectional data. Such efforts should inform the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes aimed at promoting equitable access to sport and physical activity for all older persons.

Acknowledge their agency and capacity and thus create pathways for older racialised persons to participate in sports governance, leadership and decision-making roles, including as coaches, volunteers, and community leaders. Work in partnership with trusted local organisations, civil society actors and community leaders to co-design, implement and evaluate initiatives with older racialised persons. Encourage opportunities for intergenerational dialogue enabling the exchange of sporting skills, knowledge.

Collect disaggregated data and evidence by investing in research that put racialised older persons at the Centre. Such efforts should inform the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes aimed at promoting equitable access to sport and physical activity for all older persons of all backgrounds, including racialized groups.

Mainstream an intersectional and human rights-based approach to sport and physical activity policies, recognising participation in sport as an important determinant of health, wellbeing, social inclusion and equality for racialized older persons throughout the life course.