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Addressing Racism through Fact-based Education and Fact-based Policies

Policy Report

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This report aims to contribute towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with particular focus towards:

- **SDG 4 - Quality Education:** Obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development
- **SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities:** To reduce inequalities, policies should be universal in principle, paying attention to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized populations.

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1. Summary

Racism persists as an important issue and challenge to societies in all European countries. Racism is discrimination against individuals or groups based on their ethnicity, heritage, skin colour or similar traits. These discriminatory practices remain active and are on the rise despite many attempts to reject and ban them both ideologically and politically. Such tensions between the intentions of policy and law makers on the one hand and the rise of racist or generally discriminatory practices on the other hand make it necessary to review contemporary approaches to the problem. This report solves this tension by showing that what current strategies lack is implementing how the facts contradict racism.

This report has four sections. In the first one, the report gives an overview over how racism and racist discrimination persists in EU countries today. The second section introduces the distinction between values and facts, which will be important in analysing both official declarations and recommendations about how to educate against racism.

The third section focuses on regulations, which were implemented between members of the EU (and beyond) in order to officially condemn racism. This analysis reveals that these documents almost exclusively focus on values: reasons on the basis of ethical beliefs about what is right and what is wrong. In contrast, the documents almost completely lack any discussion of facts about what race actually is.

The fourth section provides an overview of the most important scientific findings for the understanding and rejection of racism. The report reviews that both the anthropologist and biologist communities have provided good reasons to reject any notion of race as it is used in racial discrimination. Any classification, which has some scientific grounding is on the basis of heritage and have nothing to do with the traits, which play a role in acts of discrimination. These facts can be used in declarations and education to demonstrate why racism must be rejected: they are either meaningless because the notion of race is not properly defined or they are wrong if a scientifically based notion of race is applied.

The last section draws some conclusions from the previous sections and on this basis forms recommendations on how to address racist practices. Its purpose is not to argue that the regulations and documents already in place are wrong or misguided. Rather, it is argued that they are unnecessarily weak because they do not stress one of the most important reasons to dismiss racism: its lack of any grounding in the facts.

2. The Persistence of Racism

A particularly significant report about the current state of racist discrimination in the EU is the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (FRA, 2017) conducted by the FRA. The survey considers the responses of about 25000 participants across all 28 member states of the EU from different ethnic backgrounds. One of its main observations is that 38% of all respondents answered that they experienced discrimination on the basis of traits often associated with race or ethnicity, i.e. skin colour, religion, names etc. The contexts of discrimination are very different, including but not limited to employment, education, housing

and health services. 24% of all participants of the survey responded that they were victims of hate-motivated forms of harassment, including physical attacks.

These numbers make clear that discrimination on the basis of beliefs having to do with race and ethnicity still prevail in European countries. Additionally, these beliefs have real-life consequences for the victims in terms of disadvantages in every sector of society and even disrespect towards their most fundamental human rights. Naturally, these problems raise the question about how they are supposed to be tackled. Two of the most important strategies are i) official documents in which countries, via their representatives, confess themselves to equal rights regardless of race, and ii) educational programmes against racist ideologies or which prevent their rise in the first place. The role of education is for example made precise in the Fundamental Rights: Challenges and Achievements 2014 report (FRA, 2014: p. 97):

Education builds, grows and nourishes inclusive pluralist societies. EU Member States may address this need by providing curricular and extracurricular activities at school promoting equality, social cohesion and active citizenship. Such measures are important to prepare all children to develop their full human potential and live together in diversity. The key to this process is informing schoolchildren about the different cultures in society, including those of a country's migrant minority ethnic groups.

3. Values and Facts

An important distinction to assess reasons to dismiss racism is between values and facts. Values have to do with classifying things as either right or wrong, important or unimportant etc. To dismiss torture on the basis of a belief that no individual should be harmed makes the dismissal value-based. The justification for dismissing such practices cannot be derived from facts about the world - the mere occurrence of torture does not entail that it is morally wrong and should be abolished. Such reasons are called value-based.

On the other hand, believing that the earth is flat is wrong as well - but wrong in a different way. It being wrong has nothing to do with ones values. Rather, this has to do with empirical facts about measurements and well-confirmed theories, which entail that the earth is not flat. This is an example of a fact-based reason to accept or dismiss a belief.

The distinction between value-based and fact-based reasons will be crucial in the assessment of strategies against racism. Its importance becomes more obvious considering their difference with respect to how binding they are.

As it turns out, value-based reasons are easier to dismiss than fact-based ones. Here are some reasons why. First, normative reasons are often seen to be relative both with respect to the time in which they are adopted and with respect to the group of individuals, which adopts them. This simply means that certain individuals may adopt certain values during certain times but not by others or by the same individuals during another time. The problem with this relativity is that it makes it harder to educate individuals to adopt the position in question. For if the normative reasons are not universal but only accepted by some individuals at certain times, it becomes questionable for the individual as to why exactly it should accept the respective values.

This is different when it comes to fact-based reasons. Their truth is neither relative to the individuals who adopt them nor to the times at which they are adopted. Especially the knowledge gained in modern biology, anthropology, genetics etc. is taken to be universal. They hold regardless of who adopts them. This makes it easier to convey messages based on fact-based reasons since they are based on how the world actually looks like rather than what values are adopted by a certain group of people at a certain time.

Another reason why the distinction is important has to do with issues of tolerance. A modern value found especially throughout European societies around the world is tolerance toward personal opinions. This includes the belief that every individual is entitled to its own opinion. One reason for such tolerance is the relativity discussed above. If some values are relative to a group of individuals, other individuals cannot criticise them for it because the values are relative. But precisely this tolerance can become problematic in educating individuals. For if one is supposed to be tolerant towards other values and normative reasons in

general, then one can also be tempted to be tolerant towards racism. Such tolerance may give the wrong impression that racism is just another matter, which is up for personal opinion.

As before, these problems do not arise in the fact-based case. Due to the lack of relativity, there is also no issue with tolerance. Opinions or theories contradictory to facts need not (and in fact should not) be tolerated since they are simply wrong rather than alternative opinions, which might be relative to groups.

4. Regulations to End Racism

4.1 Signed Declarations

The first and most historic document is undoubtedly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 (see UN, 1948). Being especially motivated by the horrors and crimes against humanity committed in the Second World War, the declaration seeks to ascribe universal rights to any human being. The universality is highlighted in two ways. First, every article is formulated in a universal way: The articles begin by noting "All human beings are born free and equal [...]" (UN, 1948: Article 1), or negated universals like "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude [...]" (UN, 1948: Article 4). Already these linguistic forms make it clear that there is no room for discrimination when it comes to these rights because they are ascribed to every individual of the human species.

The second way universality is conveyed is more explicit by stating factors on which these rights do not depend: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." (UN, 1948: Article 2). It is crucial to recognise that these rights do not depend on the individuals belonging to a certain race. It is neither specified what such a race within human kind is, nor under what conditions have to be met for an individual to belong to such a race. Nevertheless, it is made clear that, even given that such ascriptions of race to individuals can be made, they play no role in them having the rights mentioned in the declaration.

The document provides value-based reasons for these rights, which have to do with the consequences of either succeeding or failing to recognise these rights: For example, it is argued that the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world [...]" (UN, 1948: Preamble). Disrespecting or denying these rights on the other hand ends in "barbarous acts, which have outraged the conscience of mankind [...]" (UN, 1948: Preamble).

Other declarations which follow the UDHR are mostly enforcing what has already been declared in it and do not provide any new forms of justification as to why racism must be abolished. In particular, the document never mentions any fact-based reasons. The only exception is to be found in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (see UN, 1965). Here it is shortly declared that all signing members are "[c]onvinced that any doctrine of superiority based on racial differentiation is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous, and that there is no justification for racial discrimination, in theory or in practice, anywhere [...]" (UN, 1965: p. 1).

4.2 Other Declarations

There is a somewhat stronger focus on fact-based reasons to reject racism not in official, signed declarations but in documents given out by organisations, in particular by UNESCO. One example is the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (see UNESCO, 1987). The Declaration begins in the first paragraph by noting that "All human beings belong to a single species and are descended from a common stock." (UNESCO, 1987: p. 62).

Later on there is a subsection, which deals with facts regarding racial discrimination (UNESCO, 1987: p. 62):

Any theory which involves the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to dominate or eliminate others, presumed to be inferior, or which bases value judgements on racial differentiation, has no scientific foundation and is contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity.

Although the declaration mentions fact-based and value-based reasons in one line, it is clear that the current scientific position is known and acknowledged: All such theories lack any scientific foundation whatsoever and are therefore false and not 'merely' contradicting the values of the EU.

4.3 Recommendations Regarding Education

Having official documents, which highlight why racism must be abolished is a step in the right direction. However, it also needs real world actions, which help to transport these declarations and commitments to the people. It is straightforward that education needs to be shaped accordingly in order to convey the information necessary to combat racism. The necessity of education in the overall fight against racism is generally acknowledged. In the General Policy Recommendation N°1 (see ECRI, 1996), published by ECRI, it is written: "Recalling that medium and long-term preventive strategies based on educational and other measures are crucial for curbing the various manifestations of racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance [...]."

Given that the importance of shaping education specifically to inform pupils, students or people in general on why racism (and other forms of discrimination) are to be abolished, what do recommendations for educational institutions such as schools look like?

The information published by the UN itself is part of its Let's fight racism programme, which offers some recommendations in its 'In the classroom' section (see UN, 2018). The recommendations are mostly value-based and concentrate on the idea of introducing as much cultural diversity as possible. Actions towards this end may include to invite people of other races or to study achievements by such individuals. Crucially, there are no recommendations, which give fact-based reasons against racism. The importance of teaching what race means and that any claim about the inferiority of one race over another does not become clear at all.

What are missing are the facts against racism. The recommendations above may improve pupils' abilities to recognize and value a multicultural society. However, they do not give any recommendation, which puts emphasis on the fact that the very notion of race used in racist discrimination is false. The point is that not only does the denial of racism bring benefits with it, but also that racism in itself is simply wrong.

The recommendations given by ECRI in its Recommendation No.10 Combating Racism and Racial Discrimination in and through school education (see ECRI, 2006) are not much different. The first section highlights the importance of providing an environment for education which is not only free of discrimination but which also helps to overcome barriers between pupils of different backgrounds e.g. by implementing language courses or translators. The recommendation policies also include a section on "ensur[ing] that school education plays a key-role in the fight against racism and racial discrimination in society." (ECRI, 2006: p. 6).

The recommendation also emphasises another aspect of education. It also focuses on the banning of any kind of racist content. For example, it is recommended that one removes "from textbooks any racist material or material that encourages stereotypes, intolerance or prejudice against any minority group [...]" and to teach pupils "to use the Internet as a means of learning how to combat racism and racial discrimination, while providing for the necessary resources, such as filtering software, to protect them against any racist messages [...].". No mention of any fact-based reasons to overcome and disregard racist thought is made in the whole recommendation.

5. The Facts about Race

UNESCO puts emphasis on the lack of facts behind racism both in its recommendations and other forms of publications. In an edition of the UNESCO courier (see UNESCO, 1950), they summarise the opinion on the matter by a group of scientists, including biologists and anthropologists. Some important points of their general opinion are summarised here:

Historical and sociological studies support the view that the genetic differences are not of importance in determining the social and cultural differences between different groups of Homo sapiens and that the social and cultural changes in different groups have, in the main, been independent of changes in inborn constitution. Vast social changes have occurred which were not in any way connected with changes in racial type. (UNESCO, 1950: p. 1)

In assessing the scientific facts about racism it makes of course sense to have a clear conceptual view on what racism is. Under which conditions is a view on the human population racist? Generally speaking, the idea of racism can be cooked down to the ideas that

1. members of the human species can coherently be divided into different groups on the basis of some characteristic;
2. these groups can coherently be assigned relevant differences in characteristics like intelligence, social compliance etc.;
3. on the basis of the characteristics assigned in 2., some groups are to be regarded as inferior, i.e. less worthy than others

The first point of racism has support from the facts and the scientific community. However, points 2. and 3. are nevertheless false. Enemies of racism sometimes claim that there is no coherent notion of a human race whatsoever and thus this terminology should be abolished completely. But this is not correct. It is true that the scientific community accepts the view that "there is more genetic variation within a group socially designated as a race than between so-called groups socially identified as different races [...]." (Ifekwunigwe, 2017: p. 422).

But this does not imply that there are no meaningful genetic distinctions between groups to be made whatsoever. In fact, there are a few genetic variations, which are used to track the global migrations of different populations around the globe. But it is crucial to see that "these variations should not be confused with the belief in discrete races because these variations are considered clines, which are gradients of gene frequencies from one population to another based on geography [...]." (Ifekwunigwe, 2017: p. 423). The two things to notice here are that i) there are a few traits, which can be coherently tracked throughout populations but ii) these traits allow one to track geographical connections rather than traits regarding skills and predispositions.

This has direct implications for the second racist claim regarding the connection between so-called races and their traits. The genetic differences found and used to group members of the human species into different groups (for the purpose of understanding migration) have nothing to do with the traits discussed in racist arguments. The latter typically include traits such as intelligence, predisposition to crime, cultural traits, empathy, the ability to comply with societal norms and many more. It is crucial to acknowledge that these traits have nothing to do with the few genetic differences, which are used by scientists to track migration of populations.

It follows that the third aspect of racism about the inferiority of some races has to be dismissed as well. The mere fact that an individual belongs to a genetic group, which has a different history of migration, is not a reason to regard him or her as inferior. So we can summarise the facts on the matter by noting that although there are genetic groups in the human species, they do not allow for a categorisation with respect to traits other than their geographical heritage. Thus no ranking between them can be based on a notion of race, which has scientific support. These points are nicely summarised in the publication, which is part of the UNESCO courier cited above:

All normal human beings are capable of learning to share in a common life, to understand the nature of mutual service and reciprocity, and to respect social obligations and contracts. Such biological differences as exist between members of different ethnic groups have no relevance to problems of social and political organization, moral life and communication between human beings. (UNESCO, 1950: p. 1).

6. Recommendations

This last section presents some recommendations on how to educate against racist ideologies based on what has been discussed in the previous sections:

1. Recognise the distinction between value-based and fact-based reasons. Where value-based reasons are often relative to individuals, facts are universal.
2. Recognise the difference in justificatory power between value-based and fact-based reasons. If something can be justified in terms of fact-based reasons, there are no issues with it being relative to a group of individuals or issues with other opinions, which would have to be tolerated.
3. Take into account the standard with respect to issues of race in the human species from the point of view of the sciences - in particular biology and anthropology. Recognise that although sciences use genetic traits to group individuals, these traits do not allow for the interpretation that one so-called race may be inferior to another.
4. Implement fact-based reasons into signed declarations. Countries, via their representatives, must recognise and accept the facts on the issue of race.
5. Implement the facts into educational programmes. Although value-based reasons are important as well, it must be made clear in schools and other educational institutions that the very idea of racism is simply false and is not a matter of political or some other form of opinion.

The policies described above are not meant to replace the strategies of the declarations and recommendations mentioned above. Rather, they are to be understood as supplementary recommendations. Successful education and successful regulations need both value based, and fact-based reasons against racism. As such, implementing fact-based reasons into declarations and recommendations fills a gap in current approaches. Although making clear in policies that racist discrimination is against the law is an important measure, it is also clear from the data that it is not enough. It must be made clear to every individual that racism is not an issue of personal opinion but that it can be assessed on the basis of facts and that the facts show that it is simply wrong. Understanding this gives every individual a powerful base to dismiss racism and racist discrimination.

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