Shaping change: a summary on key learnings from the conference on *Racism, discrimination, and health: a human right-based approach*

6 November 2023

Co-organised by the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) and the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), the conference on 'Racism, discrimination, and health: a human rights-based approach', took place on November 6, 2023. The discussions ranged from highlighting challenges and barriers of addressing racism and discrimination at national and European levels to exploring tailored solutions. This short summary provides an overview of the key insights of each of the sessions of the day. This is meant to encourage a commitment to further dialogue and collaborative action across policy levers and sectors.

Opening the dialogue: racism, discrimination and health equity

- Racism and discrimination continue to persist and **constitute a major barrier** towards achieving equitable healthcare
- **Confronting the roots of structural racism** is crucial to recognising and combatting patterns, hierarchies, classifications, and unequal power distribution that perpetuate social exclusion in racialised and marginalised communities
- Creating **a collective effort and responsibility within the EU** is imperative to understand the various forms of racial discrimination and prejudices that are present both within and outside the healthcare system

Understanding racism, discrimination, and health: what does the science say?

- Racism and discrimination impact **physical and mental health** outcomes of individuals across the lifecourse and across generations, affecting minoritised and racialised communities from the prenatal stage onward
- Racism and discrimination undermine the **acceptability, availability and accessibility** as well as the quality of healthcare
- We need to work towards a world that does not center on separation and hierarchy, but **equity and togetherness**

From theory to practice: Exploring the local and national perspective

- It is imperative to consider **linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and health literacy** in the provision of healthcare services, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach to meet the diverse needs of individuals
- Integrating **anti-bias training into the medical curriculum** is essential to foster a healthcare environment that values diversity, promotes cultural competence, and ensures equitable treatment for all patients
- If you can't measure it, you can't fix it: we need to work towards a harmonised approach to **disaggregated data collection (both quantitative and qualitative)**, that allows for disaggregation by indicators on various grounds on which people may be discriminated against; using an intersectional approach

Advancing health for all: European initiatives on racism, discrimination, and health

- Anti-racism means **changing and challenging systems**, organisations, structures, policies, practices and legislation with the objective of achieving true equality; this must stand as the foundational starting point for transformative action
- We must shift our perspective on racism from being solely interpersonal to recognising it as a **systemic issue deeply embedded in policy structures** by designing policies and legislation with this understanding at their core
- **Language, definitions and narratives matter** when using the tools of the European Commission (drafting policies, proposing legislation and funding) to ensure tangible action

Hands-on approach to racism and discrimination: implementing the right to health

- It is imperative to reaffirm EU Member States' commitment to the nine core international human rights treaties, specifically those related to **health and the elimination of racism**, such as the **General Comment of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** which defines the elements of the right to health
- To ensure that all relevant EU policies and interventions take a **human rights-based approach**, efforts to implement international recommendations must be strengthened and used to inform the design of new EU and national policies on racism and health, and economic, social and cultural rights
- Improving **data collection systems**, particularly on the national level, using the OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Framework, is crucial for **monitoring the implementation of human rights** for all individuals and assessing the impact of public policies on human rights

Enabling the right to health: the role of civil society

- It is essential to educate ourselves about the challenges and experiences of people, underlining the significance of active listening and the inclusion of people with **lived and living experiences** in policy making
- Ground-level stakeholders must be included in all stages of policymaking to ensure the development of policies that **reflect on-the-ground needs**, the construction of practical accountability frameworks, and the effective implementation of policies
- We need to **create and nurture conversations** to develop organisational policies that safeguard topics centred around racism, discrimination and health

Implementation of the right to health: the WHO perspective

- The WHO emphasises a human rights-based approach rooted in law, recognising that **legal determinants of health** within existing legal systems and societies solidify underlying structural and global inequities
- A human rights-based approach calls for laws that not only reflect existing power structures but **actively challenge them**. It is crucial to incorporate the voices of diverse community service users to ensure that power structures are scrutinised and contested, to localise human rights and promote health equity
- A rights-based approachthe implementation of right-based norms, and understanding of issues through an **intersectional** and **intersectoral** lens. This recognises that **health transcends the boundaries of the health sector**, underscoring the need to engage across sectors

Engaging for change: dialogue on anti-racism/-discrimination in health policy

- We must build on the ongoing DisQo work and foster a **shared, accurate, and precise language** around racism, discrimination and health to align definitions with their intended scope and contextual usage and ensure precision in communication (in the media and policymaking)
- CSOs are pivotal in posing **inquiries to ministries**, as the resulting data and evidence are instrumental in shaping implementation strategies at the (inter)national level.
- We must work policies that ensure a **human rights-based approach to health** to develop rights-compliant, effective, gender transformative and integrated public health measures

In conclusion, the insights gained underscore the urgent need for transformative action. Persistent barriers to equitable healthcare rooted in structural racism demand collective efforts, policy changes, and inclusive practices. From recognising the structural nature of racism to ensuring a human rights-based approach in health, this call to action aims to foster a healthcare landscape that values diversity, promotes inclusivity, and ensures health equity for all.

For more information and a detailed schedule please visit the event page:
www.epha.org/events/racism-discrimination-and-health-a-human-rights-based-approach/

To watch the event recordings, please visit our YouTube channel:
www.youtube.com/@epha_eu

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