

## Human Rights Council: Topic 2

# Eradicating modern forms of systemic racism and discrimination

### Introduction:

Racism is the belief that there is a distinct difference between races, that deems certain races inferior to others. This belief plays out in the form of hate or discrimination towards people of racial minorities that are often marginalized. Racism also plays out on a systemic level; systemic racism refers to racism that is rooted within societal organisation (the problem arises primarily in governmental practice). Granting equality for all is a fundamental principle on which countless societal values are founded. Systemic racism is seen as contradictory to the foundation of human rights, and consequently, society is sanctimonious in and of itself, as it allows for breaches of a system that is meant to protect people from hate and discrimination.

### Definition of key terms:

(These terms may be useful in debate).

- **Bigotry:** Cambridge defines bigotry as “having and expressing strong, unreasonable beliefs and disliking other people who have different beliefs or a different way of life”<sup>1</sup>, which in this case plays out as racial bigotry.
- **Cultural appropriation:** Cultural appropriation refers to the habit of claiming elements from other cultures as your own (this is not necessarily done with malice, but can be the result of cultural insensitivity).
- **Cultural pluralism:** This term describes the perpetuation of cultural diversity amongst minority ethnic groups within a larger society; the advocacy for cultural pluralism also perpetuates values of tolerance amongst a larger society, in which individuals can maintain a cultural identity while simultaneously conserving a collective identity and their intrinsic value within society.
- **Discrimination:** This refers to the act of treating a certain individual worse than others as a result of their race, sexual orientation, gender, etc...
- **Institutional racism:** Sometimes referred to as systemic racism, this refers to the policies and norms that perpetuate racism within an organisation or government.
- **Internalized racism:** Refers to the conscious and unconscious prejudices that each individual has towards other races.
- **Interpersonal racism:** Refers to the acts of explicit discrimination or racism between two (or more) people.
- **Multicultural competence:** This refers to the character set and skills that are necessary in order to live and function harmoniously in a diverse society.
- **Oppression:** Being mistreated under a higher authority for irrational reasons (such as race)
- **POC:** People of colour.

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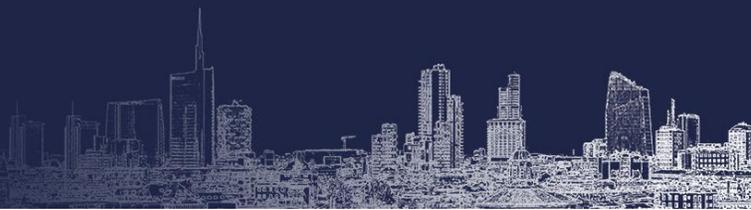
<sup>1</sup> "BIGOTRY: Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary," Cambridge Dictionary, [PAGE], accessed November 17, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bigotry>.



### General Overview:

Systemic racism affects many branches of the government. In particular, it affects social services, despite the fact that they are built on the cornerstone that everyone is equal regardless of their race. The services that are affected most often are:

1. **Criminal justice:** The criminal justice system is divided into three main institutions; law enforcement, courts, and corrections. While these are all built off the notion that people should receive consequences and rehabilitation for their crimes, there is often unintentional leniency towards Caucasian offenders in each of the three institutions. While there is a statistical trend that suggests this fact, it cannot be entirely proven that there is a causal relationship between race and sentence/mistreatment. Nonetheless, there are clear gaps in the criminal justice system that could allow for institutional racism to influence the wellbeing of people of color.
  - a. **Law enforcement:** Law enforcement refers specifically to the group of people (police officers, mainly) assigned the task of finding, identifying, and arresting/reporting people that have obstructed justice. Although the curve has gotten better over time, it is very common for POC to be the primary victims of unjust assault by officers, or even death by firing. While many of these instances are linked to an officer's individual beliefs, it becomes increasingly clear that a fault in the system allows officers with prejudices to bear firearms. This occurrence is clear in the USA, but many nations do not collect data on this so mistreatment is believed to be more common than reported internationally.
  - b. **Courts:** Courts were originally founded to end disputes between two parties, their role being largely to protect people from a higher power attempting to harm them, or a criminal who may cause danger to a community. However, courts are also a large source of corruption, as they rely on a judge or jury to return verdicts and measure the vice of an individuals' actions. This allows for a level of subjectivity that leaves space for prejudice to influence a decision made in a court.
  - c. **Corrections:** The corruption in law enforcement and courts cause a predominant percentage of people of color in prisons or correctional facilities. In the United States people of African descent make up about 33% of the population in a prison, while Caucasians make up about 30%, Hispanics about 15%, and the remaining 22% were people of other races. While this statistic outlines a mere 3% between African-American and Caucasian populations in prisons, when seen within their original proportions in society (Caucasians make up 76.3% of the population, while African Americans make up about 13%), it becomes clear that the number of African Americans that are targeted is higher than the number of Caucasians.



- 2. Economics/Financial Standing:** The media and statistics often represent the difficulty of finding employment for POC. While this is entirely true, the complexity of what causes POC to typically be born into poverty or low social status is greatly tied to the idea of market equilibrium, which aims to sustain a balance between supply and demand and limit the influence of external forces on the economy. However, when POC are at a disadvantage to start off with due to the internalized or institutional racism of employers or organizations, market equilibrium represents more than just balance based on educational attainment, but it represents disparity. Statistics show that median black net worth in the United States is, on average, one tenth of the net worth of whites. Perpetuating the importance of market equilibrium also perpetuates the disregard for this disparity, and misrepresents equilibrium as a way in which a population has equal economic opportunity.

*Note: The US collects some of the best data, and is thus often used as an example. Many nations, even in Europe, do not track the race of their citizens or of those arrested making it impossible to judge the degree of systemic racism. That said, one can assume it is widespread based on the levels seen in the US.*

**Relevant United Nations Documents and Information:**

- 1. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination:** A treaty was signed at this convention in 1966, by the member nations that can be found [here](#) (source 13 in bibliography). The objective of the treaty that was signed was to “solemnly affirm the necessity of speedily eliminating racial discrimination throughout the world in all its forms and manifestations and of securing understanding of and respect for the dignity of the human person”<sup>2</sup>. The full treaty can be found [here](#).
- 2. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly:** “Global efforts for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action”, signed on the 18th of Dec. of 2013. To read the full resolution, visit [this](#) webpage.

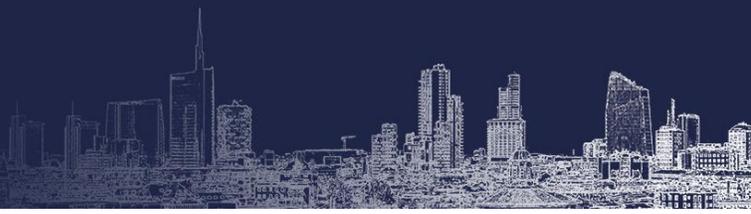
To find **additional treaties that are specific to your country**, access [this](#) webpage.

**Relevant United Nations Documents and Information:**

While the fight for the eradication of systemic racism is far from over, it is difficult to deny the significance of the research and theories on the matter today. Systemic racism is often trivialised by defining it as a form of racism that manifests itself in society. However, it is not only the integration of racism into societal norms, but it acts as a facade that covers the ulterior effects of internalized, institutional, and interpersonal racism by normalising racism in society. In doing this, it glosses over the true, brutal effects that racism has on racial minorities.

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<sup>2</sup> 2020. *Treaties.Un.Org*. [https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1969/03/19690312%2008-49%20AM/Ch\\_IV\\_2p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1969/03/19690312%2008-49%20AM/Ch_IV_2p.pdf).



## Further reading:

- <https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/08/06/american-ideas-about-racism-are-influencing-europe> <--- Excellent article!
- <https://www.economist.com/letters/2020/08/01/letters-to-the-editor> <--- Responses to the article above showing wide viewpoints

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