

Action programme to combat Afrophobia



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Racism has no place in our society. Racism leads to discrimination, inequality, segregation and puts people at risk of social exclusion. In recent years, there have been numerous initiatives to prevent and combat racism, for example within the framework of the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime, adopted in 2016. The plan is the Government's tool for preventing and combating racism and polarisation in society. The plan addresses racism in general as well as different types of racism; that is, Afrophobia, antisemitism, antigypsyism, Islamophobia and racism against Sami.

In the autumn of 2021, work was initiated on specific action programmes to combat different forms of racism as one of several commitments by Sweden, in connection with Remember – ReAct, the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating antisemitism.

The action programmes intend to complement the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime, and include both measures aimed at bringing to light and combating each form of racism, and measures aimed at combating racism at large. The action programmes are based on four of the strategic areas set out in the plan: More knowledge, education and research, Strengthening preventive measures online, A more active legal system and Civil society: greater support and more in-depth dialogue. The work will be monitored within the present structures of the plan in accordance with the fifth strategic area of the plan, Improved coordination and monitoring.

The action programmes have been developed based on dialogues with representatives of civil society, reports on the prevalence of racism and hate crimes in Sweden and recommendations from regional and international human rights bodies. They also raise the level of ambition in the effort to combat different forms of racism, in line with the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020–2025.

The action programme to combat Afrophobia contains measures for the period 2022–2024. A comprehensive presentation of the Government's work in the area cannot be accommodated within the action programme. However, together with the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime, it forms a common basis for the Government's continuing efforts to combat Afrophobia.

The terms “racism” and “Afrophobia”

The terms “racism” and “Afrophobia” are subject to constant development and discussion. In the action programme, the Government proceeds based on the definitions set out in the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime. By “racism”, the Government means views that people – due to assumptions concerning race, national, cultural, or ethnic origin, religion, skin colour or other similar circumstance – are essentially different from each other and that they therefore can or should be treated in different ways.

The plan also uses the term “structural racism” in the sense that racist actions are not always based on an individual’s political convictions but can occur unconsciously. This means that racism, in various forms, exists as part of the structures of society. The term “Afrophobia” is used in the sense of ideologies, beliefs or values that express hostility towards Afro-Swedes.

Strategic area More knowledge, education and research – needs and actions

The fact that the vulnerability of Afro-Swedes is apparent in all major sectors of society – such as education, health, housing and working life – has been raised in dialogues with organisations representing Afro-Swedes. It has also been expressed that a catalogue of measures is needed in efforts to combat Afrophobia. The need for a wide range of initiatives to combat Afrophobia has also been highlighted in the UN resolution, which has proclaimed 2015–2024 the International Decade for People of African Descent (a/RES/68/237).

Afro-Swedes have a lower salary than the rest of the Swedish population with the same level of educational attainment. Also, it is almost ten times more common for people from the rest of the population to gain managerial positions compared to Afro-Swedes. This is shown in the report of the Stockholm County Administrative Board “Antisvart rasism och diskriminering på arbetsmarknaden” (*Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in the labor market*) (2018). Researchers at Lund University have prepared the report “Vita privilegier och diskriminering – processer som vidmakthåller rasifierade ojämlikheter på arbetsmarknaden” (*White privilege and discrimination – processes that perpetuate racial inequalities in the labor market*) (2021). The report shows that people who are perceived as non-white feel worse in their workplaces and that there are clear links between sense of well-being and experience of different forms of discrimination in the workplace due to ethnicity/skin colour.

The Living History Forum has produced an overview of insights into experiences of racism in contacts with Swedish authorities and other public-sector operations (2021). Therein, studies are described regarding how stereotyping leads to failure to treat people according to their specific needs in the healthcare system, which can lead to providing them with inferior or no treatment. There are also experiences of down prioritisation or deprioritisation. Experiences of offensive treatment in the healthcare system, including in obstetric care, have also been highlighted in dialogues with civil society. It has also been described how subjection to different types of racist behaviour causes stress and ill health.

The slavery of people from Africa throughout history and the transatlantic slave trade can, as a whole, affect the occurrence of racism against people of African descent worldwide. Illuminating the history of slavery might therefore be useful in efforts to prevent and combat Afrophobia today.

The inequality of Afro-Swedes in relation to the majority population needs to be illuminated. This has been expressed by civil society, which has also emphasised the importance of equality data in this context. Furthermore, it has been expressed that there is a lack of knowledge about how different types of discrimination covary and risk leading to particular vulnerability, for black Muslims for example.

Statistics Sweden has produced a report (2022) showing that people born outside Europe, and those born in Sweden with a non-European background, and who have lived for a long time in Sweden, more frequently find themselves in what can be described as poorer socioeconomic conditions than people born in Sweden with parents born in Sweden. The report also shows that, among women and men born in sub-Saharan Africa, and women and men with at least one parent born in sub-Saharan Africa, there are the greatest unexplained differences in terms of earned income, and that further knowledge is needed to clarify whether it is racism and discrimination or some other factor causing this.

Develop efforts to combat racism on the labour market

- The County Administrative Boards will develop efforts to combat racism in the labour market. The objective is to bring to light restrictive norms associated with skin colour and to help remove obstacles to provide Afro-Swedes, and other people at risk of falling victim to racism, with access to equal rights in the labour market. The Stockholm County Administrative Board is coordinating the work.

Greater knowledge about Sweden's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and slavery

- The Living History Forum will improve knowledge about Sweden's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and slavery. The remit includes developing and disseminating educational materials primarily designed for primary school, secondary school, and municipal adult education, as well as for students at folk high schools.

Produce, develop and disseminate knowledge-enhancing support to combat racism in the healthcare system

- The National Board of Health and Welfare will produce, develop and disseminate knowledge-enhancing support to combat the occurrence of racism and promote equal rights and opportunities for everyone in the healthcare system and contribute towards equal care. The knowledge-enhancing support will be disseminated among professionals in the healthcare sector to provide support in their treatment of patients and relatives. The knowledge-enhancing support will be tailored to target groups and designed so that it can be assimilated and engrained into the everyday work of healthcare professionals.

Initiatives to enhance knowledge on different forms of racism

- The Living History Forum will intensify its work on implementing knowledge-enhancing initiatives on different forms of racism, including Afrophobia, in 2022–2024. The remit includes producing or developing supporting materials on different forms of racism and conducting further training initiatives.

Develop and disseminate methodology support in efforts to combat racism

- In 2022–2024, the Living History Forum will develop and disseminate methodology materials on efforts to combat racism to quality-assure how the public sector treats the general public. The agency will also offer opportunities to exchange knowledge and experience for these target groups to provide long-term and effective support in the effort to combat racism and similar forms of hostility in the public sector.

Discrimination on multiple grounds

- The Equality Ombudsman will, based on reports of discrimination, deepen knowledge concerning discrimination on multiple grounds and illuminate issues relating to intersectionality; that is, how different power structures and grounds for discrimination affect and sometimes aggravate each other.

Work-related stress among certain vulnerable groups

- The Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise will collect and compile insights concerning the relationship between the vulnerability of certain groups and work-related stress. A particular focus area will be work environment-related knowledge and the potential implications of vulnerability – due to ethnicity, skin colour and religion or other belief – for the individual’s health. The compilation of insights will be disseminated so that it can serve to support employers, safety representatives and other elected representatives in workplaces.

Continued funding for a national research programme on racism

- The Swedish Research Council, in consultation with the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte), will continue to earmark funding for a national research programme on racism, consisting of SEK 20 million annually.

The subjection of children and youths to Afrophobia

The report by the Ombudsman for Children “Om barns och ungas utsatthet för rasism” (*Report on the subjection of children and youths to racism*) (2021) shows that children’s experiences of racism form part of their daily lives already from an early age, especially at school and online. It is also shown that racism is widespread and is manifested in many ways. For example, children are rendered invisible or have to endure verbal harassment, intimidation and violence in different environments, from other children and adults alike. Under Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children must have their rights respected and there must be no discrimination against any child. The report describes how some children feel that they do not have access to the same rights as other children, while others are not aware of their rights.

A study on children’s experiences of subjection to racism from Save the Children (2021) shows that children feel that adults do not listen, understand or take their experiences of racism sufficiently seriously.

In dialogues with civil society, it has also been pointed out that Afro-Swedish children are a visible minority and are therefore at risk being subjected to racism already at nursery school. In one dialogue with organisations representing children and youths, it was highlighted that children and youths often do not know where to turn when they have been subjected to racism, to have their rights respected.

Through schools, children and youths are educated in fundamental democratic values and human rights. A revision of the curriculum, which will start to apply in the autumn of 2022, illuminates the concept of racism and sets out that racism must be prevented and countered with knowledge and active initiatives. It is important that tools are available to combat

Afrophobia and other forms of racism throughout schooling and that the initiatives carried out optimally meet the needs of teachers and pupils. Central to these efforts are both the Living History Forum and the work of the National Agency for Education.

Greater knowledge of racism and rights among children

- The Ombudsman for Children will implement awareness-raising initiatives on racism based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to bolster the ability of children and youths to exercise their own rights. The remit includes enhancing the Mina Rättigheter (My Rights) website.

Support and information materials on talking to children about racism

- The Family Law and Parental Support Authority will review, collect and compile knowledge into support and information materials on how adults can talk to children and youths about racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime. The compilation of insights will be disseminated so that it can be used in practice and can serve as support primarily for guardians, but also for the staff of government agencies, municipalities and regions.

Greater knowledge on where pupils and guardians can turn to when someone has been discriminated against or subjected to victimisation

- The Equality Ombudsman will, in cooperation with the Child and School Student Representative (BEO) at the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, implement specific information initiatives on where children, school students and guardians can turn to when someone has been discriminated against or subjected to victimisation at school.

Initiatives to bolster democracy to combat racism in schools

- In 2022 and 2023, the National Agency for Education, together with the Living History Forum, will develop a tool for systematic work on initiatives to bolster democracy in the school system and beyond, to combat different forms of racism, including Afrophobia.

Strategic area Strengthening preventive measures online – needs and actions

According to the Ombudsman for Children, the internet is one of the most common arenas in which children are subjected to or experience racism. According to the report “Utsatt på internet” (*Online victimisation*) (Swedish Media Council, 2020), research shows that certain groups are at greater risk of falling victim to online bullying than others, such as youths with a different ethnicity than the majority of people where they live.

The Swedish Media Council and civil society organisations have contributed knowledge and educational materials to raise awareness of how online texts, images and symbols can entrench racist ideas. Further mapping processes and analyses need to be performed to devise tools and initiatives to prevent Afrophobia and other forms of racism with better precision.

Surveying violent extremism and racism in digital environments

- The Swedish Defence Research Agency will survey the prevalence of different forms of racism in digital environments. The remit includes measuring the prevalence of racism and analysing how it manifests itself in different digital environments connected to Sweden. In particular, the agency will examine the prevalence of Afrophobia and other forms of racism.
- As of 2022, the Swedish Defence Research Agency will conduct a permanent survey and analysis of violent extremism and racism in digital environments.

Methods to combat racism online

- The Swedish Media Council has been commissioned to compile methods for combating racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime online among children and youths. The task entails to identify methods capable of combating the occurrence of such expressions online, for instance based on the different roles that children and youths may have in online bullying situations. It also includes disseminating methods that have proven to work.

Strategic area A more active legal system – needs and actions

In dialogues with civil society, it has been expressed that there is a need for heightened knowledge about racism and Afrophobia in the legal system, and that the police need to improve their procedures when they receive reports of Afrophobic hate crimes. The report “Slumpvis utvald” (*Randomly selected*) (2017), produced by Stockholm University on behalf of Civil Rights Defenders, describes how Afro-Swedes and other groups feel it has occurred they have been stopped by the police on account of ethnicity. Similar experiences are described in the report “Being Black in the EU” by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (EU-Midis II, 2018), which looks at aspects such as the experiences of people of African descent in 12 EU Member States, including Sweden.

According to the statistics from the National Council for Crime Prevention, 574 offences were reported to the police and identified as Afrophobic hate crimes in 2020, equalling 28 per cent of the reported offences with xenophobic and racist motives. The most common crime scene is a public area and that the perpetrator is unknown to the victim.

Compared to hate crimes with other motives, this type of hate crime is more prevalent in workplaces. In some cases, the perpetrator was a customer or client of the victim. It could for example be a case of harassing taxi drivers or insulting store staff. Another example of a hate crime is Afrophobic graffiti.

There is a need for initiatives to lay down conditions to further efforts to combat Afrophobic hate crimes. In recent years, the Swedish Police Authority and the Swedish Prosecution Authority have raised the level of ambition with regard to hate crimes and other crimes that threaten democracy. An objective formulated by the Swedish Police Authority in an interim report is that all hate crimes shall be investigated by a special resource with in-depth knowledge in the field, and that it should feel meaningful for citizens to report crimes and contact the police irrespective of the outcome in the individual case (Swedish Police Authority, 2022).

The existing prohibition against discrimination is, for some public-sector operations, limited to how employees treat the general public. The inquiry on certain issues in the Discrimination Act has, in its final report “Ett utökat skydd mot diskriminering” (*Extended protection against discrimination*) (SOU 2021:94) proposed aspects such as an extended ban for certain public-sector operations, such as law enforcement agencies. The inquiry proposes that the provision be amended to also include the exercise of public authority in relation to individuals and decisions. The proposals have been referred for consultation.

In-depth study on hate crimes against Afro-Swedes

- The National Council for Crime Prevention is conducting an in-depth study on Afrophobic hate crimes. The study will describe Afrophobic hate crimes and the settings and contexts in which they occur in order to improve knowledge and enable preventive efforts against Afrophobia.

Advanced and improved efforts to combat hate crime

- In 2022 and 2023, the Swedish Police Authority will continue to advance and improve efforts to combat hate crimes and other crimes that threaten democracy. The Swedish Police Authority will for example implement knowledge-boosting initiatives at the agency and present the results of the work conducted to improve investigative capacity and clearing of such crimes. Within the remit, the Swedish Police Authority will cooperate with other agencies and organisations.

Strategic area Civil society: greater support and more in-depth dialogue – needs and measures

Since 2008, The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society has allocated funds to support activities that combat or prevent racism or similar forms of intolerance.

Organisations representing Afro-Swedes have expressed needs to harness the knowledge of Afrophobia that exists within civil society and have, at the same time, reminded that access to resources is essential to civil society’s prospects of having any effect.

In the work on the National plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crime and the action programme to combat Afrophobia, special dialogues have been organised with organisations representing Afro-Swedes and other organisations combating Afrophobia.

Support for civil society’s work to combat different forms of racism

- The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society will allocate more than SEK 14 million in 2022 to operations that combat or prevent racism or similar forms of intolerance.

Dialogue with civil society

- The Government intends to continue the dialogue with organisations that represent Afro-Swedes and other organisations combating Afrophobia through ongoing meetings on the topic of Afrophobia and the work within the framework of the action programme.