

We won't let Europe go backwards!

ECCAR General Conference Heidelberg 2024 - Conclusions

We, the members of the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR), having gathered in Heidelberg from 23–25 September 2024 to mark the 20th anniversary of our coalition, reaffirm our collective dedication to ensuring that Europe's cities remain inclusive, resilient, and committed to fighting racism and all forms of discrimination.

The rights of those impacted by racism, antisemitism and other forms of discrimination—are under increasing threat. In a time of rising political extremism, anti-democratic movements, and growing societal polarisation, we stand firm in our commitment to safeguarding human rights and dignity for all. These movements fuel hateful narratives that incite discriminatory behaviour, spread hate, misinformation, assaults or even violence, jeopardising the safety of discriminated groups in our cities. We recognise that cities, as democratic institutions, rule-makers, employers, service providers, contractors and the first line of governance, have a pivotal role in ensuring human rights, inclusivity, and equity.

Commitment to the International Decade for People of African Descent

The International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024) has been a crucial global initiative with the primary objectives of promoting respect, protection, and the fulfilment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for people of African descent, as recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It aims to foster greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture, and contributions of people of African descent to developing societies. Additionally, it calls for adopting and strengthening national, regional, and international legal frameworks per the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination to ensure their full and effective implementation. In Europe, where most people of African descent reside in urban environments, cities are instrumental in implementing these global goals on the ground. As the Decade draws to a close, our work is far from over.

We commit to continuing the fight against anti-Black racism in all its forms by implementing local strategies based on the ECCAR 10 Points Plan of Action that support the equal participation of people of African descent in all aspects of public life, ensure their representation in political bodies and cultural narratives, and enhance their access to education, housing, healthcare and employment. Black history and contributions to European cities must be made visible and honoured. Our responsibility is to ensure that the legacy of the Decade strengthens our cities' policies and fosters a future where Black communities thrive in equality and dignity.

The Importance of Involving Those Affected by Racism

Engaging those directly impacted by racism in decision-making processes is essential to building cities that reflect the diverse realities of all residents. Cities must ensure that their direct voice shapes policies and solutions. Only by engaging those who live the daily realities of racism and discrimination can we design effective, inclusive strategies that address structural inequality. Citizen participation and empowerment must be cornerstones of urban governance, ensuring policies that respond to the lived experiences of those most affected by racism.



Addressing Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life

The rise of antisemitism in Europe, exacerbated by the terrorist attack carried out by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the war in the Middle East during the past year, presents an urgent challenge. Recent civil society reports have uncovered a troubling surge in antisemitic incidents, mirroring concerning trends across several European nations. Whether through hate crimes, online hate speech, or discrimination in schools and workplaces, the persistence of antisemitism demands decisive action from cities. We must address this issue head-on and work towards creating a more inclusive and tolerant society for all. Cities must lead the way in fostering Jewish life, ensuring safety and inclusion for Jewish communities, and educating citizens on Jewish people's historical and present-day contributions to our urban fabric. The EU's Strategy to Combat Antisemitism provides a crucial framework, and local governments must build on this foundation by taking concrete actions to create environments where Jewish culture and life are fully integrated and visible in public spaces.

Confronting Anti-Muslim Racism

Anti-Muslim racism undermines social cohesion in our cities. Municipal policies must not only counteract discrimination against Muslims and those perceived as such but also ensure the safety and security of Muslim communities. Civil society organisations have reported a skyrocketing increase in anti-Muslim racist incidents during 2023, and in particular, after October 7th. The number of reported anti-Muslim racist incidents in many European countries has seen a disturbing spike, far surpassing the previous year's figures. This alarming surge demands our attention and action. Cities need to take proactive measures to protect Muslim citizens from hate crimes and discrimination while also promoting their visibility and participation in urban life. Cities must also acknowledge how the increasing hate towards refugees resulting from the current immigration patterns impacts their local Muslim communities. Recognising Muslim communities as integral to the cultural and social fabric of the city is also critical. Cities can transform harmful narratives and promote mutual respect by ensuring safety, fostering inclusion, and creating environments where Muslim citizens feel seen, valued, and respected.

Challenging Antigypsyism

Antigypsyism, rooted in centuries of discrimination against Roma communities, continues to perpetuate poverty, exclusion, and violence. It manifests in structural inequalities that systematically deprive Roma people of access to fundamental rights, such as education, healthcare, and housing. Cities must commit to dismantling antigypsyism through targeted anti-discrimination measures. Only by confronting the deep-seated stereotypes and prejudices that sustain antigypsyism can we ensure that Roma communities can equally participate in urban life. As ECCAR, we will launch a new Working Group dedicated to combating racism against Sinti and Roma.

The Need for Equality Data Collection

Equality data is crucial for addressing discrimination and fostering inclusion. Collecting disaggregated data based on racial and ethnic origin is key to understanding the depth and scope of inequality. Cities cannot design effective policies or track progress without accurate and comprehensive data. Our new Equality Data Toolkit reflects ECCAR's commitment to supporting cities in this effort, which offers practical guidance for local authorities. We urge cities to prioritise data collection as a tool for informed policymaking and addressing racial and ethnic disparities in tangible and measurable ways.

The Importance of Local Action Plans against Racism

Local Action Plans against Racism are essential for addressing structural racism and ensuring long-term commitment to anti-racism efforts within cities. The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025 provides a critical framework that guides cities to develop strategies beyond temporary measures. With the ECCAR 10-Point Action Plan against Racism, to which all member cities commit upon joining the coalition, ECCAR cities are well-positioned to create and implement their comprehensive action plans. Local Action Plans enable cities to engage communities, monitor progress, and ensure accountability in fighting racism locally. By adopting and implementing Local Action Plans against racism, cities can strengthen their role in promoting inclusive, resilient environments where all residents, regardless of background, are empowered to thrive.

Addressing Structural and Institutional Racism

Structural and institutional racism is deeply ingrained in the very systems that govern cities, from education and housing to employment and law enforcement. These forms of racism often manifest in policies, practices, and social norms that, while appearing neutral, disproportionately disadvantage racialised groups. As local institutions, cities must critically examine their structures to identify and dismantle these embedded biases. Cities must address racism externally and discuss how it operates within their institutions. The ECCAR 10-Point Action Plan against Racism provides a strong foundation for cities to develop Local Action Plans that directly confront these systemic issues.

By collecting equality data, cities can better understand the lived realities of racialised communities and ensure that their policies promote equal opportunities for all. This self-examination is vital to creating inclusive, democratic urban spaces where all citizens can participate and thrive.

Building Cities for Us All

We commit to working collectively in cooperation with the various city networks and civil society organisations to ensure that all who call our cities home can live with dignity, security, and justice. The ECCAR General Conference 2024 demonstrated the openness of ECCAR as a Coalition that engages not just its member cities but actors from all levels. We are committed to maintaining and enhancing the regular and continuous cooperation established between all stakeholders. This declaration embodies the topics we discussed during the ECCAR General Conference in Heidelberg, our shared vision of a forward-looking, resilient Europe where cities defend everyone's rights and no one is left behind. Together, we build cities for us all.

