



Input for the EU Anti-Racism Strategy: Addressing Discrimination Based on Work and Descent in Europe

Introduction

Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD) is a deeply rooted, yet often overlooked, form of structural inequality. According to the draft *UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent*, discrimination based on work and descent is “any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on inherited status such as caste, including present or ancestral occupation, family, community or social origin, name, birth place, place of residence, dialect and accent that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life. This type of discrimination is typically associated with the notion of purity and pollution and practices of untouchability, and is deeply rooted in societies and cultures where this discrimination is practiced”.

This discrimination is grounded in inherited social status, ancestral occupation, caste-like hierarchies, and social origin, resulting in systemic exclusion and marginalization. In Europe, Roma communities are the largest and most visible group affected by DWD, but diaspora communities such as Dalits and Haratines are also present and face similar patterns of exclusion and injustice.

Discrimination based on work and descent (DWD) is a deeply entrenched and often overlooked form of structural inequality that persists in Europe today. Globally, DWD affects more than 260 million people, with Roma, Dalits, and Haratines among the most affected communities^{[1][2]}. In Europe, Roma represent the largest and most visible group subjected to such discrimination, but diaspora communities of Dalits from South Asia and Haratines from North and West Africa also experience exclusion rooted in inherited status, ancestral occupation, and caste-like hierarchies^{[1][3][2]}. These forms of discrimination are not relics of the past; they are perpetuated by contemporary social, economic, and political systems, and they intersect with other axes of identity such as gender, migration status, and socioeconomic background^{[4][1][5]}.

Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) include various groups globally who face systematic marginalization due to their inherited social status, often linked to stigmatized ancestral occupations. This includes groups like the Roma in Europe; Dalits in South Asia; Burakumin in Far East Asia;

Osu, Mboros and Haratins in Africa; Quilombola in Brazil; or Palenque in Colombia, among others. Unfortunately, in addition to discrimination tied to their occupation status, these communities share common experiences of being socially segregated — which includes being labelled “unclean” or “polluted”, and experiencing forced endogamy — often resulting in atrocities, even murder, for marrying outside their community.

Discrimination based on work and descent involves exclusion and segregation based on inherited status — such as caste, occupation, family, community, or social origin — that impairs human rights and freedoms deeply embedded in societies where this form of discrimination is practised. While the concept of descent may influence other exclusionary systems, the unique feature differentiating CDWD from others is the core concept of work. This system of discrimination forces the community to pursue a particular form of work associated with their social identity. This identity is based on their lineage and descent.

Historically, CDWD communities are socially and structurally forced to do such work that is rejected by other communities — deemed as dirty or “indecent” — often imposed through force or other socio-cultural factors. In their respective contexts, these communities are predominantly involved in occupations such as cleaning, washing, leather tanning, undertaking, removing animal carcasses, manual scavenging, butchering, waste picking, etc.

The Situation of Roma, Dalit, and Haratine Communities in Europe

For **Roma people**—numbering between 10 and 12 million across Europe—antigypsyism is a specific and persistent form of racism that manifests in widespread stereotypes, segregation, and violence^[1]. Roma children are disproportionately placed in segregated or substandard schools, which limits their educational attainment and perpetuates cycles of poverty and exclusion^{[1][5]}. Access to decent housing, healthcare, and employment remains limited, and Roma are routinely denied equal treatment in both public and private spheres. The result is a pattern of intergenerational disadvantage that is difficult to break without targeted, systemic intervention^{[1][5]}.

Dalit and Haratine diaspora communities, while smaller and less visible than the Roma in Europe, face similar patterns of discrimination. Dalits, who have migrated from South Asia to countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands, often encounter caste-based exclusion in employment, education, and social life, compounded by racial and ethnic prejudice^{[6][7][11][8]}. Haratines, who originate from North and West Africa, are traditionally marginalized as descendants of slaves or serfs. In Europe, they remain largely invisible in policy frameworks and experience limited mobility, social stigma, and exclusion from mainstream opportunities^{[11][5]}.

A common thread among these communities is the intersectional nature of their exclusion. Discrimination is compounded for women and girls, who face additional barriers such as violence, exclusion from education, and limited access to healthcare and justice^{[4][1][5]}. Migrant status, age, and socioeconomic deprivation further intensify vulnerability. Despite these challenges, many of these communities remain unrecognized in national and EU anti-racism frameworks, leading to a lack of targeted policy responses and perpetuating their marginalization^{[1][5][9]}.

One of the most significant barriers to progress is the persistence of social stigma, often rooted in notions of “purity” and “pollution,” which leads to social ostracism and the denial of basic rights^{[1][3][2]}. Segregation in education and housing is widespread, reinforcing social exclusion and intergenerational poverty^{[1][5]}. Economic marginalization is also pervasive, with members of these communities often relegated to low-wage, insecure, or stigmatized sectors, and facing vulnerability to forced labor and exploitation^{[1][2]}. Political underrepresentation is another critical challenge, as affected communities encounter barriers to meaningful participation in decision-making and public life^{[1][3][5]}. The lack of disaggregated data on DWD communities further impedes evidence-based policymaking and the development of targeted interventions^{[1][2]}.

Women and girls from these communities experience compounded exclusion, facing heightened risks of violence, trafficking, and barriers to justice and services^{[4][1][5]}. Their voices are often absent from policy discussions, and their specific needs are rarely addressed in mainstream gender equality or anti-racism initiatives^{[4][1]}.

Despite these challenges, there are promising developments. The Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD) has emerged as a unique solidarity platform, uniting Roma, Dalits, Haratines, and other DWD-affected communities^[4]. GFoD fosters cross-community advocacy, mutual learning, and collective action, empowering marginalized groups to participate in international human rights processes and EU policy dialogues^[4]. This approach is crucial for overcoming historical isolation and building a unified movement for justice and equality. By facilitating dialogue, sharing resources, and supporting capacity building, GFoD lowers the barriers to international advocacy and makes participation more accessible for communities that have traditionally been excluded^[4].

Policy Recommendations for the EU Anti-Racism Strategy

To address these issues, the EU Anti-Racism Strategy must explicitly recognize communities discriminated on work and descent—including Roma, Dalits, and Haratines—in all relevant policies and action plans^{[1][3][5]}. There is a need for systematic collection and disaggregation of data on these communities to inform evidence-based policies and monitor progress^{[1][2]}. Education systems must prioritize

desegregation, anti-bias training for educators, and whole-school approaches to ensure equal access and quality for Roma and other marginalized children^{[1][5]}. Cross-community capacity building should be supported through investment in platforms like GFoD, strengthening advocacy, leadership, and participation of DWD communities in policy development and monitoring^{[4][1]}.

An intersectional approach is essential, integrating gender, migration, and socioeconomic factors into all anti-racism measures, with special attention to the needs of women and girls^{[4][1][5]}. Social inclusion measures must address housing, employment, health, and social protection, in collaboration with national governments and civil society^{[1][5]}. Public campaigns should be launched to combat stereotypes, promote positive narratives, and foster social cohesion^{[1][5]}. EU funding mechanisms must prioritize projects that empower DWD communities, including education, employment, legal aid, and cultural initiatives^{[1][5]}. Strengthened legal frameworks are needed at the national level to address caste and descent-based discrimination, hate crimes, and hate speech^{[1][3][5]}. Finally, meaningful participation of DWD communities in policy design, implementation, and monitoring must be guaranteed at all levels^{[1][3][5]}.

In conclusion, discrimination based on work and descent is a persistent and under-addressed challenge in Europe. By explicitly including Roma, Dalit, Haratine, and other DWD communities in its anti-racism strategy, the EU can demonstrate a genuine commitment to leaving no one behind. This requires intersectional, data-driven, and community-led approaches that address both structural barriers and the lived realities of those most affected. The EU has both the responsibility and the opportunity to lead by example, ensuring dignity, equality, and justice for all.

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