

RECOGNISING AND ACTING AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AT UNIL

The University: a place of respect

UNIL guarantees its members respect for fundamental human rights. It also wishes to promote a healthy, inclusive and non-discriminatory work and study climate, allowing each member of the university community to feel respected, to develop and to mobilise their skills to ensure the success of their studies, research and/or professional projects.

"We are a bit quick to think that racism does not exist here. But the reality is that everyone may be subjected to it, even at UNIL! Racism is an insidious phenomenon that locks people into reductive patterns, generating suffering and humiliation. It undermines the dignity of both the person who is subjected to it and the person who, sometimes even unknowingly, lends him or herself to its reassuring game. This is why a university such as ours must work to deconstruct these irrational patterns; we must equip each and every one of us with the intellectual tools necessary to eradicate them and to prevent them from emerging."

Nouria Hernandez, Rector of UNIL 2016-2021

[unil.ch/egalite/racisme](https://www.unil.ch/egalite/racisme)

What is racial discrimination?

Racial discrimination describes any act or practice by which people are unfairly disadvantaged, humiliated, threatened or see their life or physical integrity endangered on grounds of their physical appearance, ethnic origin, cultural characteristics and/or religious affiliation. It may be intentional, but it is also often not deliberate.

Regardless of whether there is an ideological motive, combating racism means first and foremost acknowledging that racial discrimination exists and is present at the structural, institutional and individual levels. It is also about recognising the suffering that such discrimination inflicts on its victims¹.

Racial discrimination is prohibited by Article 8 of the Federal Constitution.

Racists use ethnic origin, culture or religion as a pretext to justify socio-economic or educational inequalities, for example, by attributing a biological cause to them².

What is xenophobia?

Xenophobia is an attitude based on prejudice and stereotypes, which associates anything considered 'other' or foreign with negative feelings. Through a socio-psychological mechanism, hostility towards 'foreigners' leads to a feeling of superiority.

This term is also useful for describing a vague attitude that is not necessarily rooted in ideology but which represents a general rejection of everything 'foreign', a fear of 'over-foreignisation' and the desire for a discriminatory, restrictive immigration policy³.

¹ Guide juridique sur la discrimination raciale, Service for Combating Racism, February 2020.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

The **Equal Opportunities Office** supports actions to reduce racial discrimination at the structural, institutional and individual levels. It is available for supporting UNIL's departments, faculties and associations in developing measures and projects aimed at preventing discrimination and raising awareness of this issue within the university community. It can also offer its support to any person who feels he or she has been discriminated against.