

# **#UNITED15**

## **Networking for an Antiracist Europe**



### **UNITED Annual Report 2015**

## **Introduction**

2015 was a difficult year for Europe. Two waves of horrific terrorist attacks in Paris left the whole continent in shock, and provided momentum for far-right politicians and their politics of hate, fear and division. Meanwhile, a record number of people died in their attempt to reach Europe, and with border crack-downs, police brutality and insufficient financial support, many refugees continued to see their human rights violated even once they had reached European shores.

Such a complex situation presents unprecedented challenges for the European antiracist movement. Across Europe there is a great need for organisations and individuals to challenge the ideas and warn about the dangers of the far-right, present a positive message about diversity and migration, and provide on-the-ground support for newly-arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Now more than ever before, activists require networks, systems and platforms to collaborate on common projects, exchange information, ideas and practices, and take a common stand against racism, fascism and hate of all kinds.

Ever since its foundation in 1992, UNITED for Intercultural Action has been doing exactly this. Through its extensive networking activities, UNITED facilitates common action between hundreds of organisations from all of Europe, helping to build long-lasting and productive relationships between different stakeholders in the antiracist movement right across the continent. With network organisations spread from Portugal to the east of Russia, from the northern reaches of Scandinavia to the south of Turkey, UNITED is the largest network of its kind in Europe.

UNITED categorises its networking activities in four main pillars: conferences, campaigns, information flow and advocacy. With two conferences, a study session, three Europe-wide campaigns, numerous delegations to international meetings and a continually operational secretariat in Amsterdam, 2015 was an active year on all fronts.

New challenges and ever-evolving technology and media call for innovative responses, and 2015 saw UNITED continue the ongoing process of updating its working methods, with particular focus on increasing and improving its use of social media. With more innovations planned for 2016, the network and secretariat will continue to build for a UNITED future.

## Conferences

One of the most important services that UNITED performs for the antiracist movement is bringing members of the network together for meetings where they can discuss burning issues, share knowledge, exchange best practices and meet their counterparts from other countries. 2015 was an especially active year for UNITED from this perspective, as in addition to the usual two conferences, the network also organised a study session at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg. The conferences and study session brought together participants representing organisations from every corner of Europe (as can be seen from the map below) [map].

The study session [\(Re\)Act for equal opportunities online and offline](#) was held at the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg from 6 to 13 April. The session brought together 35 young NGO representatives willing to discuss, experience and participate in sessions on how to deal with discrimination and racism online, using the positive approach of human rights and non-formal education. It aimed to motivate and enable them to step in when they witness situations where racism, discrimination and hate speech are spread online. They were further equipped with new tools and techniques for effective online and offline campaigning. The study session also linked with the lessons learned from the “No Hate Speech Movement” campaign of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, as well as a previous study session [“Step in! Be Active Against Racist Propaganda and Hate Speech Online”](#) organised by UNITED at the EYC in Strasbourg in 2012. As with UNITED conferences, the study session also gave participants the chance to work on plans for future UNITED campaigns, with workshops on the final day dedicated to brainstorming campaign ideas.

The study session was shortly followed by the UNITED spring conference. Entitled [Overcome all borders: UNITED against Intolerance](#), the conference took place at a venue near Malaga, Spain, from 4 to 9 May and focused on the intolerance migrants face in Europe with an emphasis on the scapegoating reaction to migration at Southern European borders. The aim of this conference was to create ideas, vision, and strategies to counter this intolerance and the lack of a strong and humane political vision. Participants tackled questions such as: What can you do against intolerance, racism, and xenophobia? How can you become active on a European level or in your own country? How can you get involved in UNITED’s Europe-wide campaigns? The conference gave participants the opportunity to learn about and discuss both practice and theory, with a range of methods including training, lectures, panel discussions and open space debates. As in the study session, the last day of the conference was dedicated to brainstorming, discussing and presenting ideas for future UNITED campaigns, thus ensuring that the broader network took a leading role in the planning of the campaigns. The conference was followed by a special training on Hate Crime by [OSCE-ODIHR](#). The training “OSCE training workshop on hate crimes for civil society representatives” discussed the concept of hate crime and provide strategies for NGOs to address and monitor hate crimes.

UNITED’s second annual conference of 2015 took place in Budapest from 14 to 19 October. [#YOUACT: YOUTH ACTivism shaping our Intercultural Europe!](#) focused on the role of antiracist youth work in shaping European societies. Considering the complex situation of migration and rising far-right sentiment in Europe, the conference aimed to explore new ways in which youth work and youth activism can be effective in countering xenophobic tendencies. As with the Malaga conference, a range of different methods were implemented, but there was an even greater focus on the practical side: the conference equipped participants with tools and best practices for using youth work to tackle right-wing extremism and discrimination, while participants were also instructed in strategies for funding their activities, with representatives of funding bodies Erasmus+, European Youth Foundation and the Open Society Foundation present to answer questions and give insider knowledge of the funding process. In addition to plans for future UNITED campaigns, the conference resulted in a number of ideas for collaborative transnational projects, which participants continued to work on after the conference finished, reinforcing the new working relationships that were forged during the conference and further strengthening the network.

In addition to the two conferences and study session, UNITED also hosted a governance meeting in Amsterdam in March. As well as the need to rotate participants and organisations involved, the focus on youth and strict age limitations for participants at conferences and study sessions limits the number of experienced experts that can be invited, which means that governance meetings are also necessary in addition to the other network meetings. The governance meeting brought together xx experienced and

dedicated UNITED network activists, who discussed plans for the future of the network. One of the most significant issues raised was the idea to outsource some of the UNITED secretariat's activities from the Netherlands to other countries in Europe in order to reduce costs for the secretariat. This idea was further explored and developed throughout the year, resulting in plans for a new UNITED office in Budapest, which is scheduled to open in February 2016.

## Campaigns

Another important pillar of UNITED's activities are the three annual campaigns, which bring together organisations and individuals from all over Europe to campaign on a shared theme. To support network organisations and encourage more to get involved in the campaigns, each year UNITED renews the campaign slogans and produces campaign materials, which over the years have included posters, postcards, stickers, information booklets, leaflets and online materials, such as online posters, social media covers and videos. Ideas for campaign slogans and image designs originate in conferences (and, when they happen, study sessions), where participants discuss the merits of former campaigns and put forward ideas for future campaigns. Working groups established at the conferences then continue to work on campaign ideas after the event is over using dedicated online groups. As well as linking the conferences with the campaigns, this method ensures that UNITED campaign slogans and campaign materials are relevant and effective across the whole of Europe.

The first campaign of the year was the annual [European Action Week Against Racism](#), which took place from 14 to 22 March. Taking place around the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 21 March, this campaign traditionally celebrates the diversity that enriches European societies. The slogan for the 2015 campaign was **Hand in Hand for Diversity**, which had been developed during a UNITED conference in Georgia in October 2014. UNITED produced a range of campaign materials featuring the slogan, including posters, postcards, stickers and fliers, which were distributed free of charge to UNITED network organisations.

After notification about the campaign was sent to over 10,000 subscribers to the UNITED E-News service, volunteers at the UNITED secretariat set about contacting network organisations to inform them about the campaign, take orders for free campaign materials, encourage them to organise campaign materials and collect details of activities that had already been planned. Once details of activities were finalised, they were uploaded to the UNITED website, where they were visualised in an interactive activity map. Overall, an estimated 400,000 people took part in over 1,750 activities in 49 European countries.

Once the campaign was over, volunteers started collecting reports from organisations that had organised campaign activities. From those reports that were collected, seven of the most interesting and original activities were selected as "best practices", with detailed reports to help other network organisations to implement similar activities in the future. Best practices selected from this campaign included a huge human chains activity for schoolchildren in Iceland, a tour-guide competition in Belgium and a languages festival in Moldova.

Alongside this campaign, volunteers at the UNITED secretariat coordinated a Cities campaign, which encouraged mayors and other city representatives to get involved in the campaign by posing with campaign material and giving a quote about their personal opposition to racism and discrimination. Overall there were 30 participants in the Cities campaign, including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Oslo Fabian Stang and Libe Rieber-Mohn, Lord Provost of Glasgow Sadie Docherty, and Deputy Mayor of Ghent Resul Tapmaz.

Another important annual campaign for the network is the [International Day Against Fascism and Antisemitism](#) on 9 November. This annual action day is held on the anniversary of the "Kristallnacht" pogrom of 9 November 1938, with organisations and individuals all over Europe taking the opportunity to commemorate the victims of fascism of the past and protest against contemporary forms of fascism, antisemitism and hate. The slogan for the 2015 campaign was **Didn't we say "Never Again?"**, the idea for which originated at the Malaga conference.

As part of continued efforts to cut down on paper usage, as well as to modernise and improve campaigns, UNITED did not produce any printed campaign materials for this campaign, instead focusing on online materials, including online posters, social media covers and infographics.

Another innovation was the use of Thunderclap to make a huge impact on the campaign day by allowing hundreds of UNITED supporters to display a campaign message on their social media profiles at the same time on 9 November. Overall 272 people took part in the Thunderclap campaign, giving it a

social reach of over 580,000 people. The campaign was successful in dramatically increasing traffic to the Day Against Fascism campaign website on the day of the campaign, with statistics showing a 400% increase in traffic compared to 2014.

As with the Week Against Racism campaign, UNITED used its E-News service to inform network organisations about the campaign, and volunteers at the UNITED secretariat phoned around to encourage organisations to participate and collect information about campaign activities. Overall, over 140 activities were organised in 42 countries around Europe to mark the day.

to mark the Day Against Fascism. Notable city representatives that got involved with this campaign included Mayor of Sarajevo Ivo Komsic, Lord Mayor of Dublin Críona Ní Dhálaigh, and Finnish MP and head of the Christian Democrats in the Finnish Parliament, Peter Östman. For the first time, UNITED gave city representatives a range of posters with different campaign slogans, allowing them to choose the slogan that best explained what Day Against Fascism is about for them.

The third UNITED campaign is the campaign against the inhumane immigration policies of the European Union that lead to a large number of deaths at the European borders, entitled the [Fatal Policies of Fortress Europe](#). This campaign is focused around International Refugee Day on 20 June, but in recent years UNITED has moved away from coordinating a campaign on this specific day, and the campaign has become an ongoing, year-round campaign. The most important part of the campaign for UNITED is the compilation of the UNITED List of Migrant Deaths, which attempts to list all the migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and stateless persons who have died trying to reach Europe. UNITED has been monitoring deaths due to European border policies since 1992, and the last published version of the List of Deaths features details of over 22,000 people. In 2015 UNITED published a new edition of the List of Deaths, along with a new campaign website featuring an interactive map of the List, on 20 June.

With the increased media attention on European asylum policy and deaths at the European borders, activists have also organised high-profile activities involving the List of Deaths. In April, the group Collectif pour une autre politique migratoire deployed a 100m-long print of the list at a protest at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, generating a large amount of attention in the international media.

Similar actions have taken place in cities including Brussels and Palermo. One group in Brussels also began organising regular “Cercle de Silence” events, where they invited passing members of the public to write out names from the list on long sheets of paper, using this innovative public engagement to raise awareness of the fatal consequences of European migration policy.

In Istanbul, long-time UNITED collaborator Banu Cennetoglu projected a Turkish translation of the list onto a screen on the roof of one of the city’s hotels. The entire list took 372 hours to be screened, and the action gained a lot of attention in the Turkish and international media.

## Information Flow

Closely related to the campaigns is the information service provided by UNITED to its network organisations and the overall European antiracist movement, with information flow forming another of the key pillars of UNITED's networking activities. This work is based around a database of over 10,000 organisations and activists which is constantly updated by volunteers at the UNITED secretariat. During UNITED campaigns, volunteers phone hundreds of NGO representatives, not only encouraging them to get involved in the campaign and collecting details about their campaign activities, but also ensuring that their address, telephone number and other essential contact information is kept up-to-date. A selection of entries from the database are then published in the UNITED Address Book Against Racism.\* As with campaign materials, in recent years UNITED has moved away from producing printed versions of the address book, instead publishing a regularly-updated online version; as well as reducing paper use, this ensures that data is kept up-to-date and allows users to quickly and conveniently search for the entry that they need.

The UNITED Address Book is unique; with details of over 5,000 organisations active in the antiracism, antidiscrimination, antifascism and migrant rights fields, it is a vital resource for organisations and individuals seeking partners in other European countries, facilitating international networking in countless ways. As well as helping activists and other stakeholders to form new partnerships, the Address Book has taken on other roles: the German refugee support organisation [Hilfe für Menschen in Abschiebehaft Büren](#) gives copies to its (asylum seeker) clients, so that they can easily find organisations to help them if they are unexpectedly deported or moved to another country or city.

Another facet of the UNITED information service is the Calendar of Internationalism. Also formerly published in paper form, this is now an online calendar that is regularly updated with a range of events, activities and meetings organised by the European antiracist community.

UNITED's information services also include bespoke services for partner organisations who need assistance with their networking activities. Examples from 2015 include working with the British antiracist organisation [Hope not hate](#) to help them find contributors for two special editions of their magazine: the September-October 2015 edition (focusing on the European refugee crisis) and the January-February 2016 edition ("State of Hate", focusing on the current status of far-right parties and movements around Europe.) This is a continuation of a long-running and fruitful partnership: through the years, a significant number of Hope not hate's European correspondents were originally recruited through UNITED conference and other UNITED networking activities.

In 2015, UNITED was also able to provide similar services to [RAA-Sachsen](#), a German organisation that focuses on providing counselling support to victims of hate crime. RAA-Sachsen set up a new network for European organisations to share knowledge and best practices for hate crime victim support, with UNITED as a key partner, alongside high profile organisations including Amnesty International. UNITED's extensive network and information service was instrumental in finding partners for the new network, and UNITED delegates played important roles in preparatory meetings. The outcome of the project was a publication "Hate Crime Victim Support in Europe: A Practical Guide".

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\* Only those organisations that have consented to their details being published are included in the Address Book, and UNITED does not publish personal information of any individuals

## Advocacy

The project with RAA Sachsen is a good example of where UNITED's information services interact with the fourth key pillar or UNITED's work: advocacy; through delegations to international events and forums, and nurturing productive relationships with other networks and intergovernmental organisations, UNITED ensures that the voice of the European antiracist movement is heard, and keeps the UNITED network growing.

One of the most significant platforms for the UNITED network is the Council of Europe's Advisory Council on Youth. UNITED has been represented on this Council for many years, and continued to be represented there in 2015 by Sergio Belfor. For his second mandate as a representative on the Advisory Council, Sergio was elected as chair of the Programming Committee, playing an influential role in the awarding of grants, as well as the setting of budget envelopes. Thanks to Sergio's presence on the Advisory Council - and his subsequent attendance at the meetings of the Joint Council - UNITED was able to advocate to ensure that projects focusing on diversity remained a thematic priority for the European Youth Foundation in the years 2016/17. UNITED's advocacy work also played a role in ensuring a 3% budget increase for projects focusing on young refugees.

Indeed, the subject of young refugees has been a key theme of Sergio's time as UNITED representative at the CoE, as he says himself:

*"In 2014 I was part of a process of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) where we had our first report on young refugees turning 18 "WHAT NEXT?" And it gave us an overview of problems young refugees face when they turn 18. The main message was that their situation changes drastically when they turn 18. We were working with some members of PACE and followed that with a PACE recommendation calling on member states to think about national plans of action — how to work with young refugees turning 18. And that passed through PACE, and then in November 2015 in the youth department, we organised a regional seminar in Budapest, involving refugees and asylum seekers themselves as well as refugee NGOs, to see how we could start implementing the recommendation. There, UNITED really had an impact, because we really put the refugee issue back in picture: had been working on status of young refugees turning 18 for two years."*

An important Council of Europe project which UNITED has played an instrumental role in is the CoE's "[No Hate Speech Movement](#)" (NHSM) campaign. UNITED has been involved in the campaign from the very beginning, and in a meeting in June 2015, a UNITED representative on the CoE Advisory Council on Youth was officially recognised as having provided the original inspiration for the campaign. UNITED was represented on the campaign's Follow-Up Group, while there was also a meeting of NHSM activists at the UNITED conference in Malaga. UNITED also played a key role in the evaluation of the first phase of the NHSM campaign, and gave a lot of recommendations of how to improve the campaign in 2016–17. Sergio Belfor took charge of the group that managed the evaluation, and UNITED representatives were part of the organising team of the NHSM evaluation conference on 27–30 May in Strasbourg. UNITED's influence in the NHSM campaign also ensures that the NHSM organises activities for UNITED campaigns, including the European Action Week Against Racism and International Day Against Fascism and Antisemitism.

UNITED's role in NHSM has also included work with wide-reaching political significance outside the confines of youth work. UNITED representatives were involved in giving feedback on a special recommendation of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on combating hate speech, which, after it was given to the NHSM follow-up group for comment, was passed by the committee of ministers, and is set to be launched on 21 March 2016. UNITED additionally made an impact on the high-level conference Tolerance Trumps Hate, hosted by the deputy prime minister of Belgium, who brought together ministers from around Europe to talk about the importance of combating hate speech. UNITED representative Sergio Belfor was asked to give one of the keynote speeches at the conference, in which he made clear that governments need to invest much more in combating hate in general. This was the meeting at which the decision was taken that the CoE should continue the NHSM campaign — and that it should focus not only online but offline.

Another intergovernmental association with which UNITED works is the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and especially its [Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights](#) (ODIHR). As well as bringing OSCE representatives to UNITED conferences (at the UNITED conference in Malaga, OSCE-ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department head Christina Finch gave a presentation on the OSCE-ODIHR hate crime reporting system, and the conference was followed by a special training on civil society responses to hate crime), UNITED plays a key role as a founding member of the OSCE's Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP). UNITED representative Ralph du Long serves as chair of the CSP working group on discrimination. In December 2014, UNITED was represented at the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Basel, where the CSP made its civil society recommendations, and UNITED was influential in the drafting of CSP's [Basel Declaration](#) resulting from this meeting, which concluded that "rising intolerance, discrimination and hate crimes pose a major risk for security and require a coordinated response from the OSCE." Over the course of 2015, UNITED continued to advocate in the CSP for more focus on tackling racism and xenophobia, and especially issues arising from the ongoing refugee crisis. This has proved ultimately successful, as the new chair of the OSCE for 2016, Germany, has committed to acting on the Basel Declaration, as well as making migration the main priority for the OSCE in 2016.

In 2015, UNITED was also able to increase its role in the [EU-Russia Civil Society Forum](#). UNITED became a member of the forum's steering committee at the end of 2014, meaning that its role and ability to influence policy was strengthened greatly. UNITED was represented at many key meetings over the course of 2015, most significantly the General Assembly in December, while there were also a number of meetings in Berlin, including a meeting in December focusing on grassroots refugee support groups, in which UNITED played a key role. UNITED has been successful in advocating for more focus on refugee issues and discrimination in the forum's work, with the theme of migration, refugees and re-emerging European borders becoming a key priority for the forum.

Another important international association for UNITED is UNESCO's [European Coalition of Cities Against Racism](#). UNITED was represented by delegates at the ECCAR General Congress in Karlsruhe in October. UNITED has an official partnership agreement with ECCAR to work together on the European Action Week Against Racism campaign, and UNITED delegations to ECCAR events play an important role in promoting and recruiting participants for the Cities campaigns that accompany the Action Week and Day Against Fascism campaigns.

UNITED also enjoys a strong relationship with the German [Interkultureller Rat in Deutschland](#) (*Intercultural Council in Germany*). The Interkultureller Rat organises the annual campaign "Die internationale Wochen gegen Rassismus" (International Weeks Against Racism), which coincides with UNITED's own campaign, the European Action Week Against Racism (see above). UNITED and the Interkultureller Rat work closely on these campaigns, and UNITED was also represented at several key events related to the Interkultureller Rat campaign in 2015, sending delegates to the launch of the Wochen gegen Rassismus campaign in Karlsruhe in March, as well as a day-long conference in Frankfurt in November entitled "Medien und die internationale Wochen gegen Rassismus" (Media and the International Weeks Against Racism). Such delegations help to maintain the strong links between the two organisations, and ensure that knowledge and expertise is shared between the two networks.

UNITED also played an important role in the [Football Against Racism Europe](#) (FARE) network. At the FARE Annual General Assembly, UNITED was represented by several network activists, including representatives from the Civil Society Platform, Foundation for Subjective Values (H) and Never Again (PL). The representative from Never Again was elected to the FARE board, with the support of a coalition of delegates with strong links to UNITED. This was especially significant, as this coalition was made up primarily of delegates from eastern Europe, where the concept of football clubs being antiracist actors is fairly new, and not as well-developed as it is in western Europe; this is an excellent example of the impact of UNITED's broad geographical reach, and particular strength in Central and Eastern Europe. The impact of such transnational organisations focusing on the issue of racism in football is evident in the recent actions of international governing body FIFA; prior to 2015, FIFA had never sanctioned any country for racism, but they have now sanctioned six countries.

These important activities, in addition to many more delegations to international events over the course of 2015, ensure that the voice of UNITED and the European antiracist movement is heard by different stakeholders in high-profile meetings across Europe.



## **An Antiracist Future**

As can be seen from this report, 2015 was an active year for the UNITED network, and with even more innovations and changes planned for the coming year, 2016 promises to be just as eventful. UNITED will once again organise two conferences, coordinate three Europe-wide campaigns and keep its information systems up-to-date, while UNITED representatives will continue to advocate for the European antiracist movement in a number of high-profile transnational organisations, forums and events.

The opening of a new branch office in Budapest is a particularly exciting development, which will bring many challenges, but also many opportunities for strengthening the network and expanding the range of UNITED's working capabilities. Volunteers at the UNITED secretariat are already busy coordinating the 2016 European Action Week Against Racism campaign, which we hope will be the biggest yet, while network activists around Europe are hard-at-work organising the upcoming UNITED conference in Torino. Meanwhile, the OSCE's focus on migration as its main priority in 2016 provides many exciting opportunities for the network, with UNITED ideally placed as a key member of the Civic Solidarity Platform.

There are certainly reasons to be positive about the future of UNITED, but with the political situation in Europe seemingly in a downward spiral, the challenges facing UNITED and the rest of the European antiracist movement are only going to grow. It seems certain that 2016 will bring more chaos and death at the European borders, more social and economic instability across the continent, and more far-right voices seeking to exploit the fears and insecurities of the European public. To overcome these challenges, new methods and tools will need to be developed, and more stakeholders will need to be engaged. But what seems more certain than ever is that, in order to face these huge challenges, the European antiracist movement will need to stay **UNITED**.

## Supported By

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- more than 550 organisations from all European countries
- many prominent individuals
- private supporters
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