DANGER OF WORDS
DEFINITIONS of concepts most used in anti-racist work

Introduction:
"I am not a racist, because I have nothing against black people, if they assimilate and follow our rules. In fact, some of my friends are black..." Maybe you have been confronted with this opinion, or a similar one. Perhaps you have tried to explain that what you mean by tolerance does not mean that everything is permitted. Maybe you have experienced confusion when speaking with someone from another part of Europe about 'left' and 'right'. In this information leaflet we want to start a discussion about certain terms we use often in our daily work. The 'definitions' in this leaflet are ideas. They are not the unique and only expression of an unchangeable truth. Language is constantly changing and so are terms and concepts. In time, they may change and come to mean something else. In international cooperation, but in fact even in cooperation with our next-door neighbours, we must be aware that what we say may mean something else to another person. We should be aware of the 'danger of words'.
# Table of contents

- People of Colour ................................................................. 3
- Empowerment ..................................................................... 3
- Microaggression ................................................................. 3
- Prejudice ............................................................................. 3
- Discrimination ................................................................. 4
- Racism ............................................................................... 4
- Reversed Racism ............................................................... 4
- Institutional Racism ......................................................... 4
- Colonialism ....................................................................... 5
- Minority .............................................................................. 5
- Migrant .............................................................................. 5
- Refugee .............................................................................. 5
- Equality ............................................................................. 5
- Tolerance ............................................................................ 6
- Intolerance .......................................................................... 6
- Hate Speech ........................................................................ 6
- Hate Crime .......................................................................... 6
- Sexism .............................................................................. 6
- Intersectionality ............................................................ 7
- Homophobia ...................................................................... 7
- Xenophobia ....................................................................... 7
- Interculturalism ............................................................... 7
- Multiculturalism ............................................................. 7
- Crossculturalism ............................................................. 7
- Transculturalism ........................................................... 8
- Coexistence ....................................................................... 8
- Integration ......................................................................... 8
- Assimilation ...................................................................... 8
- Social Exclusion ............................................................. 8
- Nation ............................................................................... 8
- Nationalism ...................................................................... 9
- Patriotism ......................................................................... 9
- Democracy ...................................................................... 9
- Human Rights .................................................................. 9
- Antisemitism ..................................................................... 9
- Fascism ........................................................................... 10
- Nazism ............................................................................ 10
- Antigypsyism ................................................................... 10
- Asylum-Seeker ................................................................. 11
People of Colour

The term "person of colour" (plural: people of colour, persons of colour; sometimes abbreviated POC) is used to describe any person who is not white. It encompasses all non-white people, emphasizing common experiences of systemic racism. The term is widely used with other collective categories of people such as "communities of colour", "men of colour" (MOC), and "women of colour" (WOC).

Empowerment

The term empowerment refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. It is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights. Empowerment as action refers both to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence, and to recognize and use their resources.

In social work, empowerment forms a practical approach of resource-oriented intervention. In the field of citizenship education and democratic education, empowerment is seen as a tool to increase the responsibility of the citizen. Empowerment is a key concept in the discourse on promoting civic engagement.

Microaggression

Microaggressions have been defined as brief and common daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental communications, whether intentional or unintentional, that transmit hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to a target person because they belong to a stigmatized group. Although these communications typically appear harmless to observers, they are considered a form of covert racism or everyday discrimination. Microaggressions differ from "macroaggressions", which are more extreme forms of racism (such as lynchings or beatings) due to their ambiguity, size and commonality. Microaggressions are experienced by most stigmatized individuals and occur on a regular basis. These can be particularly stressful for people on the receiving end as they are easily denied by those committing them. They are also difficult to detect by members of the dominant culture, as they are often unaware that they are causing harm. Microaggressions are described as including statements that repeat or affirm negative stereotypes about the minority group or subtly demean its members. Such comments also position the dominant culture as normal and the minority one as aberrant or pathological, express disapproval of or discomfort with the minority group, assume that all minority group members are the same, minimize the existence of discrimination against the minority group, seek to deny the perpetrator's own bias, or minimize real conflict between the minority group and the dominant culture.

Prejudice
If you form an opinion about a person, without knowing them, on the basis of assumed characteristics of the group you think they belong to, then you are prejudiced. Prejudices are complex ideas that are preformed and presumed without being proven right. When someone is prejudiced, they will be inclined to see only those things that confirm their ideas and thus strengthen their prejudice, and the stereotypes they believe in. A stereotype is generalised judgement about categories of people. The mind of human beings cannot work completely without prejudice. By becoming aware of the prejudices we have, we can overcome them.

◆ Discrimination

Discrimination consists of acts, practices, or policies that impose a relative disadvantage on people based on their membership in a salient social group. For example, judging someone or acting towards that person in a negative way, based on certain characteristics such as skin colour, sex, sexuality or nationality, social class, ethnic origin etc.

◆ Racism

Racism is the belief that some people are superior/inferior because they belong to a particular race. Racists define a race as a group of people with common ancestry. They distinguish different races from one another by physical characteristics, such as skin colour and hair texture. In fact, there are no clear differences, and especially no significant differences that matter. Recent research shows that race is an imagined entity. "Race" has no biological basis. The word "racism" is also used to describe abusive or aggressive behaviour towards members of a so-called "inferior race." Racism takes different forms in different countries, according to history, culture and social factors. A relatively new form of racism sometimes called "ethnic or cultural differentiation" states that all races or cultures are equal and unique, and they should not mix together to keep their originality. There is no scientific evidence of the existence of different races. Biology has determined only one race: the human race.

◆ Reversed Racism

Racism against the racial majority (either a member or group of that majority or the majority in general), as a result of favourable treatment given to the minority. In the so-called western societies mostly means racism against white people. But assumptions and stereotypes about white people are examples of racial prejudice, not racism. Racial prejudice refers to a set of discriminatory or derogatory attitudes based on assumptions deriving from perceptions about race and/or skin colour. Thus, racial prejudice can indeed be directed at white people (e.g., white people can’t dance) but is not considered racism because of the systemic relationship of power. When backed with power, prejudice results in acts of discrimination and oppression against groups or individuals.

There is little to no empirical evidence to support the idea of reverse racism on a societal level.

◆ Institutional Racism

Institutional racism (also known as systemic racism or structural racism) is a form of racism expressed in the practice of social and political institutions. Institutional racism is also racism by individuals or informal social groups, governed by behavioral norms that support racist thinking and foment active racism. It is reflected in disparities regarding wealth, income, criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, political power and education, among other factors. For example "racial profiling" , which is the act of suspecting or targeting a person of a certain race on the basis of observed or assumed characteristics or behavior of a racial or ethnic group, rather than on individual qualities.
One form of institutional racism in the Show business is whitewashing. Whitewashing refers to white actors and actresses playing People of Colour in movies. By downplaying the roles that such figures have had in cultural events, the practice is as a form of censorship of the history and culture of PoC.

◆ Colonialism

Colonialism is the policy of a foreign polity seeking to extend or retain its authority over other people or territories, generally with the aim of opening trade opportunities. The colonizing country seeks to economically exploit the other country or land mass and "modernize" it, especially in economics, culture, religion, and health. This modernization-process often included enforcement of western culture and religion while suppressing the native way of living.

It is also described as a relationship of domination of an indigenous majority by a minority of foreign invaders where the latter rule in pursuit of its interests.

Neocolonialism is the practice of using capitalism, globalization and cultural imperialism to influence a developing country instead of direct military control (imperialism) or indirect political control (hegemony).

◆ Minority

In some way, we all are part of a specific minority. A minority group is a group of people resident within an area in which it constitutes at least less than the biggest grouping within the population and whose members share common characteristics of either an ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender-identity or other nature that distinguish them from the rest of the population. Sometimes we consider a group a minority, not because of the percentage of people it contains in an area, but because of the position they are in. A minority often has a lower social and/or economic position and less power than the majority. Sometimes a minority sees itself as a separate nation.

◆ Migrant

Migrant is a broad term used to describe a person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from their habitual place of residence, regardless of the person’s legal status; whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; what the causes for the movement are; or what the length of the stay is. Even after obtaining the citizenship of the country where one lives, they might be perceived as a 'person with migration background' by the majority population, even though technically they are not migrants anymore.

◆ Refugee

A refugee is a person who flees in the face of danger or a life-threatening situation. Refugees are sometimes defined as those asylum-seekers that are awarded a refugee status and sometimes as anyone who needs refuge from danger. The choice between those definitions is a political one, not a linguistic one. Sometimes economic refugees are also recognised. They are people who flee from economic uncertainty, exploitation, hunger and misery. The Geneva Convention definition is detailed and somewhat restrictive. It includes those persons that are persecuted because of their supposed race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The African definition of refugee includes those seeking refuge from natural disasters and famine too. The recent Dublin agreements limit the Geneva Convention definition to refer only to political persecution of individuals by the state.

◆ Equality
Equality is the state of being treated fairly. It means that no person counts more than another, whatever their parents are, whatever their social position is. Within a specific society or isolated group everyone has the same civil rights, freedom of speech, property rights and equal access to social goods and social services. Equality will only be a reality when people have the same access to housing, social security, education, civil rights and citizenship.

◆ Tolerance

Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, forms of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is being yourself without imposing your views on others. Tolerance is not giving in or giving up. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal and fundamental freedoms of others. The practice of tolerance doesn't mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's conviction. Tolerance is not always a positive concept. More traditional meanings of the word tolerance do not include respect or acceptance.

◆ Intolerance

Intolerance is a lack of respect for practices or beliefs of others. This is shown when someone is not willing to let other people act in a different way or hold different opinions. Intolerance can mean that people are not treated fairly because of their religious beliefs, their sexuality, or even their clothes and hairstyle. Intolerance does not accept difference. It lies at the basis of racism, antisemitism, xenophobia and discrimination in general. It can often lead to violence.

◆ Hate Speech

Hate Speech is a term for public discourse intended to degrade, intimidate, or incite violence or prejudice against a person or group of people based on their race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language, moral or political views, socioeconomic class, occupation or appearance (such as height, weight, and hair colour), mental capacity and any other similar distinction. The term covers written as well as oral and visual communication including in the mass media as well as some other forms of behaviours in a public setting, e.g. on the Internet.

◆ Hate Crime

A hate crime (also known as a bias-motivated crime or bias crime) is a prejudice-motivated crime which occurs when a perpetrator targets a victim because of his or her membership (or perceived membership) in a certain social group or race. To be considered a hate crime, the offence must meet two criteria: first, the act must constitute an offence under criminal law; second, the act must be motivated by bias.

Bias motivations are preconceived negative opinions, stereotypical assumptions, intolerance or hatred directed to a particular group that shares a common characteristic, such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, gender or any other fundamental characteristic. People with disabilities may also be victims of hate crimes.

◆ Sexism

Sexism is discrimination based on a person's sex. Physiologically speaking, men and women are built differently, but to unfairly disfavour one over the other is discrimination. Instead of speaking of sexes, activists often refer to 'gender'. Sex is a biological term, gender a sociological or political term.
◆ Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept often used in critical theories to describe the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. The concept is largely used in critical theories, especially Feminist theory, when discussing systematic oppression. While the theory began as an exploration of the oppression of women of colour within society, today the analysis is potentially applied to all social categories (including social identities usually seen as dominant when considered independently).

Intersectionality can be applied to nearly all fields ranging from politics, economics, education to healthcare and employment.

◆ Homophobia

The irrational fear and hatred towards homosexuals is called homophobia. Homosexuals are sometimes seen as psychologically ill, as perverts and a threat to traditional values. A lot of homophobia comes from religious beliefs. In general, homophobic people see another person's (homo)sexuality first and his/her humanity only later. Homosexuals have been persecuted for centuries and are still persecuted in many countries. As the word 'homosexual' is often seen as defining a 'disease', therefore many prefer to use the word gay, or lesbian or LGBTQIA* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, asexual, or other).

◆ Xenophobia

Taken literally, "xenophobia" means a fear of strangers. It is a specific form of racism, targeting mostly people with migrant background. The word is used to describe hostility towards people who come from other countries or other ethnic groups, as well as a lack of respect for their traditions and culture.

◆ Interculturalism

Interculturalism is the belief that we become richer people by knowing and experiencing other cultures. Different people should be able to live together, although they have different cultural backgrounds. Interculturalism is about accepting and respecting differences. People who believe in interculturalism believe they can learn and profit from meeting other cultures.

◆ Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism means the existence or the promotion of the existence of different cultures alongside each other, usually in one country. Many people use this concept when they speak of an anti-racist future. But multiculturalism can also mean the mutual isolation of cultures. Some racists believe in a kind of multiculturalism that is close to the 'apartheid'-system that existed in South Africa, where different cultures were separated in a cruel and unjust way.

◆ Crossculturalism

Cross-cultural deals with the comparison of different cultures. In cross-cultural communication, differences are understood and acknowledged, and can bring about individual change, but not collective transformations. In cross-cultural societies, one culture is often considered “the norm” and all other cultures are compared or contrasted to the dominant culture.
Transculturalism

Transculturalism aligns itself with human equality above and beyond superficial differences. It helps us negotiate our global realities because societies are no longer homogeneous and therefore we must think as a human family and a good place to start is by seeing everyone as if they were you. Instead of depending on the learned stereotypes we hold of the other, transculturalism wants us to be mindful and engage common sense, rationality and empathy in dealing with other people. Listening and considering opinions of others is one of the skills for transcultural literacy. To be transculturally competent means acknowledging and embracing shared humans value whilst at the same time respecting our differences because diversity enriches humankind.

Practicing transculturalism means fully embracing the First Article of Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Coexistence

Coexistence describes societies in which diversity is embraced for its positive potential, equality is actively pursued, interdependence between different groups is recognized, and the use of weapons to address conflicts is increasingly obsolete. Coexistence is evidenced in relationships across differences that are built on mutual trust, respect, and recognition, and is widely understood as related to social inclusion and integration. The term coexistence has a particular focus on inter-group relations. Other language that seeks to describe a similar vision includes social cohesion, social inclusion, and social integration. Coexistence work also covers the range of initiatives necessary to ensure that communities and societies can live more equitably and peacefully together.

Integration

Integration is a process of unifying individuals and activities into a new system. It means that minority groups and the majority group develop a new way of living, which includes elements of the values and ideas of both groups. Integration also means that everyone finds a place in society. There are no fundamental divisions between groups.

Assimilation

Assimilation is the suppression of differences. Sometimes individuals choose to assimilate of their own free will, but this process is mostly forced upon groups against their wishes. Assimilation forces one group to give up its culture in favour of another. Usually the minority takes over the culture of the majority.

Social Exclusion

Social Exclusion is the opposite of social integration. It is usually seen as a result of discrimination on the basis of cultural background, ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation, etc. It usually results in poverty, animosity between groups and exclusion from essential social provisions such as education, health care and community activities. This exclusion is mostly but not always based on laws but also often on attitude: making standards too high to reach for certain groups, reinforcing a dress code a group can't comply with, etc. One example of a socially excluded group is homeless people.

Nation
A nation is a group of people who have the desire to see themselves as one coherent group. They recognize a common ancestry, a common history and often a common territory. Nations are not organic, biological or natural entities. They exist because of the will of people. The idea of the existence of nations as the essential building blocks of our world is relatively new, it has come up during the 19th century. States that wanted to unify the people in their country propagated the idea of one nation, with one history, one language and one territory. Therefore they're "imagined" and maintained by the free will of the people.

◆ Nationalism

Nationalism is a political ideology that puts interests of one "nation" or national group above the interests of others and above all other relationships, be they to family, friends, gender or humanity. It is often linked with a territorial claim. Nationalism makes a difference between people as a result of a border, which often had nothing to do with the people living in the region but with the king or other authority putting a line on a map. This political idea proclaims citizens of one nation to be superior to others and usually leads to suspicion of other nations. An extreme form of this is chauvinism. Originally, the notion of nationalism was not so negative, as it also dealt with the development of citizen's rights and the emancipation of sometimes oppressed minorities. However, when the concept becomes linked to heritage, identity and 'blood' it becomes a dangerous idea.

◆ Patriotism

Patriotism means being proud to be a member of one's own nation, or loving one's nation. Patriotism stems from emotional attitude to one's culture and society. Friendship with other countries and nationalities is still possible in this way of thinking, and it can respect their rights and interests. Although it is different from (political) nationalism, patriotism can easily become the motor for an intolerant nationalism.

◆ Democracy

Democracy is a word from ancient Greek, which means "government by the people". Nowadays the term democracy usually refers to the concept of a state, which includes more than just voting for representatives in an election. Democracy, in this case, also means being able to participate in society with the same rights as other people. Cornerstones of democracy are freedom of speech, inclusiveness and equality, membership, consent, voting, right to life and minority rights. This view of democracy includes listening to opinions of the minority even if the majority has a different opinion. This ideal includes being able to deal with diversity and eventually to come to a compromise for the good of everybody.

◆ Human Rights

Human rights are rights that every human being, with no exception, should enjoy. These rights are based on the ideas of philosophers of the "Enlightenment" of the 18th century. Human Rights include social rights (which are rights that need positive interference by the government, such as work, housing, food, etc.) and political rights (which essentially guarantee non-interference of the government, such as the freedom of thought and expression, protection against detention and torture, etc.). All countries in Europe, except a few very small or new ones, have signed the European Declaration of Human Rights or the UN Declaration of Human Rights. There is discussion on the inclusion of rights such as the right to live without environmental pollution.

◆ Antisemitism
Antisemitism is prejudice against Jewish people. Anti-Semites wrongly believe that Jews are fundamentally different from other people. Antisemitism can be reflected in various manifestations: The longest lasting form of Antisemitism is the economic Antisemitism, which premise is that Jews perform harmful economic activities or that economic activities become harmful when they are performed by Jews. Cultural Antisemitism is defined that Jews would try to corrupt the existing culture with a crude, “Jewish” culture. Religious Antisemitism is based on the thought that Jews practice the “wrong religion”. Racial Antisemitism is prejudice against Jews as a racial/ethnic group, rather than Judaism as a religion. Political Antisemitism is defined that Jews seek national and/ or world power. This goes hand-in-hand with existing conspiracy ideologies, in which Jews plan a so-called New World Order alleging a Zionist plot. The denial of the Holocaust is also an Antisemitic conspiracy ideology. A new concept of antisemitism, which has been scholarly advanced in the 1990s, is the opposition to the creation of a Jewish homeland in the State of Israel.

Antisemitism leads to discrimination against individuals as well as the persecution of Jews as a group. The most horrific manifestation of antisemitism came with Hitler's rise to power and the Nazi ideology of racial purity. Millions of Jewish people, deported from all countries controlled by Germany, died in concentration camps during the Holocaust. However, antisemitism did not start nor end with the Holocaust. It is deeply rooted in European culture and still manifests itself today.

◆ Fascism

Fascism is a violent reactionary right-wing political movement, which manifests itself ultimately in an openly military and ultranationalist dictatorship. Fascism destroys democratic liberties and discriminates members of specific (ethnic) minorities and people with different views. Fascists believe in the just leadership of a strong man, instead of parliamentary democracy. Fascism builds on a strong nationalism that often turns racist. The most brutal form of fascism was the national-socialist dictatorship in Germany 1933-1945, but this is by far not the only fascist dictatorship in history. The word 'fascism' was coined by the Italian dictatorship of Mussolini. We often speak of Fascism with a capital 'f' when we speak of this specific ideology in this specific historical context and about 'fascism' when we speak about the generic 'family of ideologies'. Those who believe in this ideology nowadays are called 'neo-fascists'.

◆ Nazism

Nazism is the ideology and policy of the German fascism that manifested itself most prominently from 1933-1945, and which was characterized by racism, antisemitism, totalitarianism, social demagogy, aggression, violence and superiority claims over other nations. The word Nazism is short for national-socialism, which was a political movement in Germany led by NSDAP (The German national socialistic workers party). The NSDAP was founded in 1919 and in 1933 took absolute power in Germany. It was pronounced a criminal organization at the Nuremberg trial after World War II. The Nazi regime was responsible for the deaths of millions of civilians, part of whom were gassed in concentration camps, because of their (presumed) difference. Especially persecuted groups were Jews, Roma, homosexuals and communists/socialists. Some groups identify themselves with the ideals of Nazism even today. They are called neo-Nazis. The appearance of today’s neo-Nazis can vary a lot: There are recently founded movements, like the Generation Identity, who portray themselves as a new youth subculture while hiding their racist and nationalist values they base their movement upon. But there are also still the “Classical” neo-Nazis, who openly support the neo-Nazi ideology, around.

◆ Antigypsyism
Anti-gypsyism is a very specific form of racism, an ideology of racial superiority, a form of dehumanization and of institutionalized racism. It is fueled by historical discrimination and the struggle to maintain power relations that permit advantages to majority groups. It is based, on the one hand, on imagined fears, negative stereotypes, and myths and, on the other, on denial or erasure from the public conscience of a long history of discrimination against Romani people. It ignores not only events where Romani people were killed with bestiality, but also any non-stereotypical characteristics in the life of Romani people. Prejudices against them clearly go beyond racist stereotyping which associates them with negative traits and behaviours. Dehumanisation is its central point. Romani people are viewed as less than human; they are perceived as not morally entitled to human rights equal to those of the rest of the population.

◆ Asylum-Seeker

Asylum-seeker - An asylum-seeker is a person who seeks protection in a country and wants to receive the status of refugee. In many countries, asylum-seekers are kept in detention (prison). Some are turned back at the border. Only a small percentage of asylum-seekers are granted the permission to stay.

◆ Illegal

Most people in our working fields don't use the term illegal any more, but refer to a person without the right papers as 'sans-papiers' (which literally means "without papers"). Someone can be labelled illegal because they come into the country without permission or does not have a residence permit while living in the country, or because the government decides to change its rules and suddenly the right to stay is withdrawn. The international law considers people who cross borders without proper papers “irregular” not illegal.

◆ Left - Right

The political terms of 'left' and 'right' originally refer to the seating positions in the General Assembly of the first French republic. They have come to mean different things over time and probably will change meaning again as years go by. In general, 'left' usually means: progressive, believing in the possibility of change, in favour of equality and the protection of the weaker (solidarity). 'Right' usually means conservative, believing in stability and continuity, in favour of the victory of the best and the leadership of an elite. It is important to understand that this term has become especially complicated in Central and Eastern Europe, where 'socialism' has begun to refer to conservative groups and 'centre' often refers to groups that would in the West be called 'right'.

◆ Rightwing extremism

Right-wing extremist ideology has its roots in nationalism and racism. It is governed by the idea that ethnic affiliation to a nation or race is of the utmost importance for an individual. All other interests and values, including civil and human rights, are subordinate to it. Right-wing extremists propagate a political system in which the state and the people unites as an alleged natural order to form a unity ("ideology of the ethnic community"). Actually, this results in an anti-pluralistic system, leaving no room for democratic decision-making procedures and accepts violence as a legitimate way of achieving political goals.