

OHCHR Consultation on **Sports, ageing and racial discrimination: implications on the right to health**

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Despite some progress, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance persist in the world of sport, including by restricting opportunities for older racialized persons to participate in sport and physical activity, which are important determinants of physical and mental health throughout the life course. While evidence points to lower participation rates among racialized communities with associated implications for healthy ageing, the situation of older racialized persons remains largely invisible in international and European policy responses. Existing EU anti-racism, sport and healthy ageing initiatives, including the European Week of Sport, could be opportunities to address the intersection of ageing and racial discrimination and its impact on the enjoyment of the right to health by older racialized persons.

I. Introduction: Racism in Sports

In his 2025 [report](#) to the Human Rights Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted that persistence of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in sport, and their deep-rooted colonial legacies. Multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are often overlooked, while affected individuals continue to experience significant psychological harm, exclusion and limited access to effective remedies. The report further emphasized that achieving a sporting environment free from racism requires addressing the systemic, institutional and structural barriers faced by racialized individuals and communities. It called for coordinated and sustained action by States, sports organizations, civil society and the private sector, in line with international human rights obligations and responsibilities, to tackle the root causes of racial discrimination and promote equality and inclusion in sport. Additionally, in her 2026 [report](#) on racism in sport, the [Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism](#) analyzed how structural inequalities, discriminatory regulations, racist incidents, underrepresentation in sports governance, conflict and socioeconomic exclusion affect participation in sport and the experiences of marginalized racial and ethnic groups.

Human Rights Council Resolutions [54/25](#) and [60/24](#) urge States, in partnership with national, regional and international sports federations and organizations, including grass-roots organizations, to develop and finance awareness-raising campaigns for preventing and combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in sport. In the EU, racism in sport continues to be a pressing general concern, despite broad recognition and international efforts to address the issue.¹

II. Ageing, Racism and Sports: An overlooked issue

Regular physical activity is one of the most effective ways to promote healthy ageing and extend life expectancy.² Sports participation generally declines with age due to physical limitations, health conditions, social isolation, financial barriers and reduced access to facilities.

The global population is rapidly aging, and in 2050 one in six people is expected to be over 65 years old.³ Ageism is defined as stereotypes, prejudice and/or discriminatory actions or practices against older persons that are based on their chronological age or on a perception that the person is “old.”⁴ Ageism has serious effects on older persons’ health and shortens their life expectancy.⁵ Age and race combined often create intersecting forms of discrimination. This combination can cause an increased risk of dehumanization of older persons from marginalized racial and ethnic groups, who are more likely to enter old age in poorer health and at greater risk of vulnerability due to historical inequalities and widespread racial discrimination and exclusion.⁶

Studies indicate that social connection, health improvement and mental wellbeing are key motivations for participation, while cost, accessibility and discrimination remain important obstacles.⁷ Racialized older persons in Europe face significant disparities in sports participation, often experiencing lower engagement rates than their white counterparts due to socio-economic, health, and cultural barriers.⁸ While overall sports participation decreases with age for all groups, older people of African descent and other racialized older persons are more likely to face restrictions, with studies showing lower

¹ Among others, through the [Durban Declaration and Program of Action](#) (paragraph 2018); [Durban Review Conference](#) (paragraph 128); the [European Sports Charter](#) (CM/Rec(2021)5); [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), Goal 3.

² [Does Physical Activity Increase Life Expectancy? A Review of the Literature](#), (2012).

³ [Human rights of older women: the intersection between ageing and gender](#), (A/76/157).

⁴ [Intersection between older persons’ right to social protection and their right to work](#), (A/HRC/60/24), para. 28.

⁵ [Report on ageism and age discrimination](#), (A/HRC/48/53), paras. 21 and 59.

⁶ A/HRC/48/53, Op. Cit., para 56.

⁷ [Barriers, Motivations, and Preferences for Physical Activity Among Female African American Older Adults](#), (2016); [Interventions to improve physical activity among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups: an umbrella review](#), (2018); [Barriers and facilitators of physical activity among adults and older adults from Black and Minority Ethnic groups in the UK: A systematic review of qualitative studies](#) (2019); [Perceived Constraints to Pickleball Participation Among Black Older Adults](#), (2023); [The Role of Pain in Understanding Racial/Ethnic Differences in the Frequency of Physical Activity Among Older Adults](#), (2013); [Reasons why older adults play sport: A systematic review](#); (2020).

⁸ [Inclusion of the Marginalized: The Case of Sport Participation](#), (2022); [Trends \(2003–2020\) in later-life sports participation among five ethnic groups in the Netherlands](#), (2025); [Ethnicity | Sport England](#), (2025); [Ethnic differences in sports participation in England - Research Explorer The University of Manchester](#), (2013).

involvement in organized sport and higher barriers; though some specific, often city-based or community-led initiatives in the UK show niche participation in areas like the gym. The latest [Active Lives Adult Survey](#) in England shows that mixed-race and white adults continue to have the highest activity levels, while South Asian, Black and those with other ethnic origins are the least likely to be active. These findings suggest a need for targeted measures to better understand and address the barriers facing racialized older persons in sport.

Focusing on racism, ageing, and sport helps advance a more comprehensive understanding of discrimination by recognizing how racism, ageism and age-based discrimination intersect across the life course. It also addresses a significant evidence gap by examining the experiences of racialized older persons in sport, providing a basis for more inclusive policies and targeted interventions.

Addressing intersecting forms of discrimination affecting racialized older persons in sport is therefore essential to ensuring that sport remains a space of dignity, inclusion, and equal participation for everyone regardless of their age and racial or ethnic origin.

III. Ageing, Racism and Sports: Initiatives by the European Union

2026 marks the 11th edition of the [European Week of Sport \(EWOS\)](#). The European Commission (EC) is celebrating over a decade of motivating millions to move more, live healthier, and embrace inclusion. The focus this year is on swapping from sedentary life in front of screens to movement, step, dance, or game. The EC is inviting people to put down their phones and get moving.

Its core principle is that sport is *for everyone – regardless of age, background* placing strong emphasis on inclusion, social cohesion and diversity.

The EWOS has multiple initiatives addressing racial discrimination and racialized communities as well as some initiatives focused on older people. However, no EWOS initiative explicitly addresses racism affecting racialized older persons in sport. Additionally anti-racism efforts concentrate on professional sport and youth participation while elderly populations are largely absent from those arenas.

The [EU Anti-racism Strategy 2026-2030](#) recognizes the importance of sport for mobilising society against racism and promoting respect, inclusion, and equality. It highlights the need to fight against hate speech in sport under the framework of the [EU Work Plan for Sport](#) (2024-2027) and commits to support member states' measures for inclusive sport. One of the guiding objectives of the EU Work Plan for Sport is to “increase participation in sport and health-enhancing physical activity at all ages and improve accessibility for

vulnerable groups, in order to promote an active and environmentally friendly lifestyle, social cohesion and active citizenship”.⁹

IV. The main objective of this consultation is to:

- Deepen the understanding of the experiences of racialized older persons in sport in the EU.
- Explore the systemic barriers and challenges in sport that hinder racialized older persons from participating in sports in the EU.
- Discuss the relevance of intergenerational experiences in sport.
- Explore and recommend how EU anti-racism, sport and healthy ageing initiatives, including the next 2027 European Week of Sport, can address the intersection of ageing, ageism and racial discrimination and its impact on the enjoyment of the right to health by older racialized persons.

The findings of this consultation will inform the 2027 High Commissioner for Human Rights report on sport and racism pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 60/24. The findings may also feed into future deliberations of the Inter-governmental Working Group elaborating a Legally Binding Instrument on Older Persons, as relevant.

⁹ [Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the European Union Work Plan for Sport \(1 July 2024 – 31 December 2027\)](#), p. 6.