

Distinguished participants,

I thank the Irish Government for organising today's event to launch Ireland's National Action Plan Against Racism.

We are gathered here, on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, to reiterate the urgent need to continue taking action in the fight against discrimination, racism, xenophobia and hatred at the European level.

This day is observed annually on March 21st, the day the police in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire and killed 69 black people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid "pass laws" in 1960.

Still to this day, racism continues to be a scourge on the whole of society. It is an aggression against EU values and open and democratic societies. The burden cannot be left on the shoulders of marginalised people themselves.

This is why in September 2020, the European Commission adopted an ambitious EU anti-racism action plan that sets out a series of measures in the course of 5 years.

The action plan consists of comprehensive, horizontal and intersectional measures to step up the fight against racism and discrimination in the EU.

The starting point is structural racism. Structural racism is the most dangerous type of racism, due to the silent mechanism in which it operates. It leads to people affected by racism feeling its impact on their access to jobs, healthcare, housing, financing or education, as well as cases of violence.

The cumulative effects of structural racism and inequalities and discriminatory practices weaken equality of opportunity and leads to poorer outcomes for people solely based on their racial or ethnic origin.

Structural racism can affect all areas of life and can be seen throughout a person's life cycle starting from a young age, in weakened educational paths, leading to weakened career paths, ethnic paygaps which again can undermine income levels and access to housing, lead to overall poorer mental and physical health due to the effects of racism and discrimination, and can even lead to lower life expectancy among other things.

This is why racism needs to be tackled at all levels of society and in a holistic way, in different policy areas. National action plans are a key policy tool to combat racism in Member States as they play an

important role in ensuring change on the ground. The Commission called on all Member States to adopt national anti-racism action plans by the end of 2022.

On behalf of the Commission and as the EU Anti-racism Coordinator, I would like to congratulate the government of Ireland for the successful adoption of the Irish National action plan against racism.

I am happy to see that the Irish national action plan against racism is informed by the EU anti-racism action plan, including targeted measures all the while taking into account the specific Irish context.

The Priority Actions under the five objectives of the Irish action plan include actions that cover a broad range of policy areas from supporting people who experience racism from racist incidents and crimes to addressing ethnic inequalities caused by structural or systemic racism in the areas of employment, education, health and housing, as well as ensuring representation of racialised people and groups in all areas of society ranging from politics to media. I am especially impressed by the commitments in the action plan to developing policies on equality data and the collection of reliable and comparable disaggregated data. We know that it is key in capturing both subjective experiences of discrimination and victimisation and structural aspects of racism and discrimination.

Disaggregating data helps in identifying the specificities of an established problem and uncovers trends and patterns leading to negative outcomes for racialised people.

Equality data is central in making the often seemingly hidden phenomenon of structural racism and discrimination into a more concrete issue that affects people's lives in access to equal opportunities.

Thank you once more for the commitment of the Irish Government to the fight against racism. We must continue our shared efforts in ensuring that every single person living in the EU, regardless of race or ethnicity, has the same opportunities and possibilities to create and live a life free of the obstacles of racism, discrimination and hatred.

To combat the structural problem that racism is, we need structural solutions. This is what the Commission is continually pushing for, from all angles. We therefore need to continue to build our concerted efforts to eradicate racism and discrimination and create a Union of Equality.

I thank you and look forward to our continued cooperation.