



Racism and discrimination

As a democratic state, Switzerland defends the fundamental rights of all individuals. Thus articles 7 (human dignity) and 8 (legal equality) of the Federal Constitution explicitly state that no one shall suffer discrimination, particularly on the grounds of origin or race.

What is racism?

In a broader sense, racism constitutes an ideology, whereby people are classified according to physical or cultural criteria or according to their ethnic, national or religious origin, into groups (race) supposedly defined by the laws of nature. Racism does not judge and treat people as individuals but as members of said groups sharing unchangeable assumed attributes. In Switzerland, however, most instances of racism and discrimination are not based on ideology but are the expression of vague fears, aggressiveness, prejudice and lack of sympathy towards others. It therefore makes sense to differentiate racial discrimination from racism as an ideology. Racial discrimination is any practice, depriving people of their rights, involving unfair or intolerant treatment, humiliation, offence, threats or constituting a threat to life or physical condition on the basis of physiognomic attributes, ethnic background, cultural attributes (language, name) or religious affiliation.

How does racism manifest itself?

Racist attitudes manifest themselves in the form of hostility towards persons perceived as different. Among the various forms of racism, one should mention:

- Xenophobia, or hatred of foreigners, which condemns foreigners due to their appearance or behaviours considered as different;
- Anti-Semitism, which uses religion as a distinctive feature and makes Jewish people into scapegoats;
- Racism can take on different forms: discriminatory exclusion of certain persons as well as verbal or physical violence.

Racism violates the fundamental human rights principle of non-discrimination. It may take the form of verbal abuse or of segregation against certain persons and is sometimes committed by people belonging to extreme right-wing groups.

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