



HAW  
HAMBURG

Norms

Expectation

# Respecting one another

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EVERYDAY RACISM

# What is everyday racism?

Racism takes different shapes and forms. It isn't just blatant insults and physical attacks, and it isn't just an issue to do with Nazis and right-wing extremists. It occurs on a daily basis and is omnipresent.

One form it takes is everyday racism. In this case, violent terms are often used unconsciously. Actions that are intended to be nice or that appear neutral can be hurtful because they are implicitly linked with racist messages. Because racist modes of thought are often deeply rooted in society, they frequently go unnoticed.

In everyday life, racism is often subtle, indirect and imperceptible. But it is nevertheless very violent and a daily strain for those impacted.

This makes it all the more important to understand which stereotypes, exclusionary behaviours, and hurtful or insulting terms go unnoticed because they are considered normal and natural.

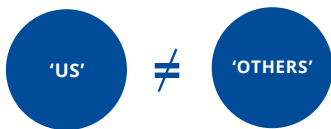
This brochure provides information about how everyday racism functions and what we can do to prevent it.

# How does racism work?

Racism operates through the categorisation of people as 'us' and 'others'.

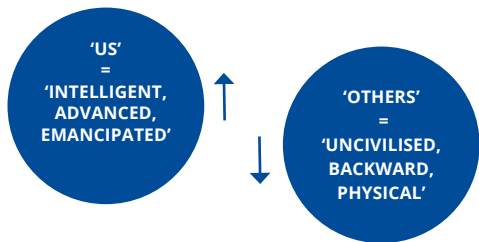
This categorisation is based on ideas about 'origin', 'culture' or 'ethnic identity'. The division therefore stems from so-called 'race constructions'. These are generalised, homogenising and derogatory ideas about groups that can guide everyday actions and speech.

Statements about 'foreigners' or 'Muslims' designate them as particular groups and distinguish them from 'us'.



This categorisation is not neutral. It inherently assigns value to 'the others' and to 'us', because these categories are linked to statements about who 'really belongs' or is 'really German'. Racism works by generating prejudices and negative ideas about the supposed 'others'.

For example, 'the others' supposedly don't speak German well enough, are more temperamental, or are simply lazy or undemocratic.



The way in which 'others' are assessed and perceived is often negative. This 'logic of devaluation' has a long tradition. Anti-Semitism and colonialism are two examples, though not the only ones, of this 'logic of devaluation'.

For example, during the colonial period Africans were described by the colonialists as backward and uncivilised – not least to justify exploitation and enslavement.

Ideas of race provide the foundation for such categorisations. These ideas are not based on actual characteristics, but are instead produced through ascription. Even though colonial racism and the racism of National Socialism are now criticised (justifiably), the images, practices and supposedly self-evident facts stemming from these racisms continue to operate. This is called everyday racism.

Even remarks intended as compliments can embody this racist tradition.

Everyday racism is frequently expressed in well-intentioned comments. For example, when Black people are complimented for their dancing, which is 'in their blood', and are thus reduced to their physicality with the supposed compliment.

What is problematic here is that individuals are ascribed supposed group characteristics based on their appearance or their origin, and a specific behaviour is then expected.



**‘Where  
are you  
from?’**

**‘You’re  
clearly not  
from here.’**

People who experience racism frequently hear the question ‘Where are you from?’ as the second sentence of a conversation. This can be problematic because the person being asked is (initially) viewed as non-German.

**‘But really,  
where are  
you from?’**

**‘I’m just  
interested.’**

Often, people actually expect the person to provide a particular answer to the question about where they are from ('I'm from Mexico.'). If the answer is not what they expect ('... from Wuppertal'), there are frequently further questions. The perpetual repetition of this question suggests to the person being asked that they always need to justify why they 'are here in Germany' and that they can't really be German. This forces them into an unpleasant position.

The expectation is that the person being asked the question will explain their (family) history to people they don't know directly upon meeting them. This story may be linked to traumatic experiences and/or may simply be private.

People whose language and/or physical features, such as skin colour or hair type, are typically viewed as non-German face this question especially often – for example, in job interviews, in educational institutions and when viewing an apartment that is up for rent. The fact that white Americans or white Swedish people rarely experience this type of discrimination in their job or apartment searches illustrates the potency of racist traditions.

Light skin colour = German

Dark skin colour = non-German

Smooth, blonde hair = German

Afro = non-German

Etc.

**A person's independent decision about when and how much they share about their personal history and experiences makes respectful interaction possible and creates space for unexpected conversations.**

# **Be different. Don't other anyone!**

## **‘Why am I asking/praising you in particular?’**

Ask yourself why you ask certain people and not others about their origins and family tree when you first meet them, or why you praise them for their German skills. Be self-critical and investigate whether unconscious stereotypes could be behind this. Change how you start conversations, and avoid asking questions that make people feel like they don't belong. You'll be surprised at what kinds of encounters are possible.

## **‘Well, there’s actually no such thing as “the immigrant”.’**

Emphasise the diversity of individuals in discussions about (groups of) people. Be careful about making or accepting general statements and think about whether prejudices could be behind them.

## **‘Okay! They’ve chosen this term themselves.’**

Many terms have derogatory undertones and have been used to oppress and exclude people. Educate yourself and use self-designations for (groups of) people instead – for example, ‘people of colour’.

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**Find more info in  
the brochure on  
self-designations.**

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RESPECTING-ONE-ANOTHER**

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