Antiracism in Colombia

The project "Latin American Anti-racism in a 'Post-racial' Age" (2017-18) conducted research on antiracist practices and discourses in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico.

In these countries, anti-racism confronts the ideology of *"mestizaje"*; that is, the idea that historical mixture between people of European, African and Native American ancestry produced mestizo nations in which racism was a minor problem that is steadily becoming less important.

More recently multiculturalism has given greater recognition to ethnic minorities, without always confronting the problems of racism and racial inequality.

What is racism?

It is an ideology and a practice that justifies and produces relationships of oppression and inequality between groups, based on the perception of physical differences (skin color, hair shape, body and face) and cultural differences. Inequalities can be in terms of access to privileges, benefits, valorization, power and security.

What is anti-racism?

Anti-racism refers to practices and discourses that confront, erode, change and/or eradicate the relations of inequality and oppression caused by racism. These actions are almost always linked to other struggles (for cultural recognition, human rights, gender equality, land rights, and greater social equality).

Racism in Colombia

Since the 1970s civil society organizations - and more recently the Colombian government - have recognized racism as a problem that operates in everyday interactions, institutions and in civil society.

In Colombia racism mostly affects Afro-Colombian and Indigenous people, while benefiting white and mestizo (mixed-race) people, although darker-skinned mestizos may also be victims of racism.

According to the 2005 census,

Afro-Colombians represent **10.6%** of the national population.

There are **120** different Indigenous peoples

Of whom **70%** live in resguardos or territorial reserves

while Indigenous peoples are **3.45%**

Fifty-six percent of the population identifies as *mestizo,*

while the remaining **30%** identifies as white.

◀ ▮▮ Everyday racism and stigmatization in Colombia

Racism, as a form of stigmatization that denigrates, humiliates, and undermines the dignity of people because of their perceived physical and/or cultural traits, manifests in daily aggressions, insults and jokes.

This type of racism is experienced in: »

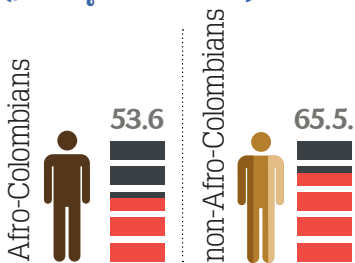|			
Public places (public transport, streets, hairdressing salons, shops, nightclubs).	Working spaces (social interactions between workers, supervisors and customers).	Educational contexts (humiliation, bullying, and belittling among students, inadequate attention from teachers).	Legal and health institutions (people being ignored, underestimated or insulted; receiving poor service).

Media (hdenigrating stereotypes in TV and radio programmes, magazines and advertising.).
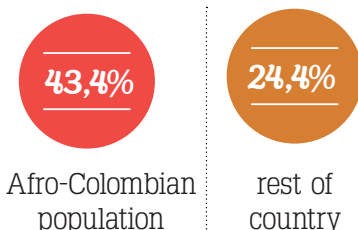

Structural racism in Colombia ▮▮➡

Structural racism refers to the historical inequalities that make it difficult for racialized people to access opportunities and/or resources (health, work, justice, land, food, capital, etc.).
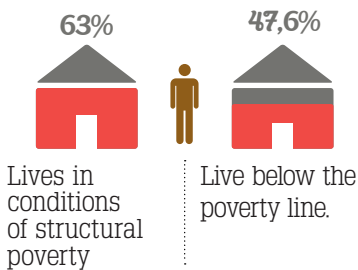
Standard of Living Index (scale from 0 to 100):

Afro-Colombians **53.6**

non-Afro-Colombians **65.5.**

The Index of Unsatisfied Basic Needs (NBI)

43,4% Afro-Colombian population

24,4% rest of country

In four departments (which are all at least **40%** Indigenous) extreme poverty rates are three or four times higher than the national average. In these departments the Index of Multidimensional Poverty exceeds **80%**, compared to **50%** for the nation as a whole.

Indigenous population

63%

Lives in conditions of structural poverty

47,6%

Live below the poverty line.

Afro-Colombian people earn less income...

...than non-Afro-Colombian people in the same occupations.

>> The Afro-Colombian and Indigenous populations have been disproportionately affected by Colombia's armed conflict.

1,44% Afro-Colombians   **1,27%** Indigenous people   **0,6%** Mestizos
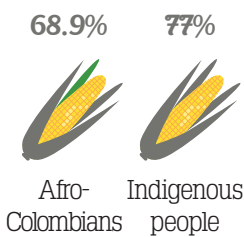
displaced

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34 Indigenous Peoples are at risk of disappearing

due to the armed conflict

Indigenous and Afro-Colombian women have been affected disproportionately by the armed conflict.

Infant mortality

Afro-Colombians **1.78**

Indigenous people **2.79**

Times greater than for the white-mestizo population.

Food insecurity

68.9% Afro-Colombians

77% Indigenous people

Without access to education

10% Afro-Colombians

30.1% Indigenous people

800 requests for Indigenous land titling have not been attended by the state. Mining concessions have been granted in 80% of the Indigenous territories.

What did we learn?

Our research gave us evidence that there are different anti-racist strategies in Colombia. Some actions are explicitly anti-racist or anti-discriminatory, while others do not mention racism in explicit manner.

Actions

⊙ Juridical

Laws and instruments to prevent racial discrimination

e.g., Law 1482, Sentences T-025/04, T-422, C-371, T-110, Decrees 4633, 4635

Legal support is provided for lawsuits against racial discrimination (e.g., in employment, land rights and education). Promotion of the autonomy of Indigenous justice systems.

⊙ Educational

Affirmative educational actions (admissions quotas and scholarships for Indigenous people and Afro-Colombians).

Implementation of the Programme of Afro-Colombian Studies.

Pedagogical tools and training strategies in ethno-education and Indigenous intercultural education.

Media

Complaints against media that reproduce racist stereotypes.

Production of new images and positive representations in the media.

Creation of alternative media denouncing racism.

Identity

Practices that strengthen the visibility and recognition of racial identity, and enhance self-esteem and a sense of empowerment.

Entrepreneurial

Creation of new ethno-racial market niches and Afro-Colombian or Indigenous owned companies. Strengthening inclusive work spaces and social mobility.

Territorial-Environmental

Titling and subsidies for the expansion of Indigenous reserves (*resguardos*) and territories of Afro-Colombian communities. Creation of autonomous funds for Indigenous reserves and Afro-Colombian communitarian councils.

Challenges for anti-racism in Colombia

The power of the ideology of mestizaje produces the following effects:

- Racism is minimized. The moral and psychological position of those who denounce racism is undermined, by accusing them of having an inferiority complex and being over-sensitive, or of exaggerating the problem.
- The fight against racism is considered as a distraction from class and gender struggles.
- It is assumed that Indigenous people suffer less racism than Afro-Colombian populations.
- White and mestizo people are reluctant to recognize the benefits that racism guarantees them.

These challenges restrict the impacts of affirmative actions, territorial restitution processes, and laws and decrees that guarantee the rights and reparations of Afro-Colombian and Indigenous populations.

Proposals and Pathways

- Integrate the anti-racist strategies of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples.
- Strengthen and expand affirmative actions with sustainable economic funding.
- Generate sustainable anti-racist media campaigns integrated with anti-sexist proposals.
- Make visible and mobilize the antiracist dimensions of territorial struggles.
- Support anti-racist pedagogies that consider gender differences for racialized girls and boys.
- Raise awareness among white and mestizo people about their role in the reproduction of racism.
- Promote the effective implementation of anti-racist laws and decrees.

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