



ANTI-RACISM WORK

INTRODUCTION FOR ORGANISATIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

This handbook was part of Moniheli's anti-racism project in 2021 supported by the Ministry of Justice. The project's aim was to strengthen the capacity of organisations in anti-racism actions and Nonviolent communication (NVC), and to address racism at a grassroots level. The project consisted of training organisations in anti-racism and NVC, after which they implemented workshops in different languages with families and youth within their communities.

The project ended with the production of this handbook, which aims to provide organisations around Finland with information about anti-racism as well as NVC strategies. This helps organisations to address racism issues within their everyday operations.

1.1. ABOUT MONIHELI

Moniheli is a network of more than 100 multicultural, immigrant, and other organisations supporting integration in Finland. Moniheli supports foreign-language actors in the field, their cooperation with society, and promotes equality in Finland. Moniheli also supports integration through different social projects focused on housing, education, health, digitalisation, and democracy education. More information

about Moniheli can be found on Moniheli's website: www.moniheli.fi.

1.2. WHY SHOULD WE STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF ORGANISATIONS IN ANTI-RACISM WORK?

1.2.1. The importance of the third sector in Finland

The third sector in Finland plays a vital role in the wellbeing of minorities, and often complements the work that public entities cannot always achieve at a grassroots level. They have the capacity to reach a wide range of vulnerable groups and offer them support, services, and the necessary information to facilitate their integration process in Finland. They also provide them with opportunities to take part in various recreational activities to help them cope with the issues that they might be experiencing (Soste, n.d.).

Organisations are also important for minorities, as many of them can provide information and activities in participants' mother tongues, which is sometimes not available through public services. Organisations are often the first point of reference for minorities, since many of their members speak the mother tongue of the participants. Participants often feel that they can be better understood

when talking with individuals who speak the same language. This is especially the case when participants don't speak Finnish well, or don't speak Finland's national languages at all.

1.2.2. Racism statistics in Finland

People of African descent experience racism in Finland on a daily basis. Four out of five people of an African background have experienced discrimination in Finland because of their skin colour. Discrimination and harassment of a racist nature occur in several structures of society, including public spaces, schools, workplaces, and during job seeking (Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, 2020).

Many individuals of a foreign background have stated that their first experiences of racism occurred during their childhood, sometimes even before and/or during early childhood and basic education. Data shows that 67% of respondents experienced discrimination in education. Moreover, the study highlights the fact that 61% of the respondents don't report discrimination to the local authorities. The main reason behind such a low reporting rate is the belief that reporting will not lead to changes (Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, 2020).

More than half of respondents also experienced ethnic profiling from security personnel, such as police officers or guards. 65 % of respondents

have also experienced discrimination for reasons other than race, such as on the basis of nationality, mother tongue, religion, and beliefs (Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, 2020).

The 2021 Finnish National Fundamental Rights Barometer surveyed the general Finnish population, people with disabilities, and linguistic minorities, particularly Russian, Arab, and Swedish-speaking individuals. The study revealed that respondents were most negative about a Roma or immigrant from Somalia living next door to them. It has also been reported that Arab-speaking individuals experienced most discrimination, harassment, or violence compared to other surveyed groups (Ministry of Justice, 2021).

According to a study from the European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights (2019) that included 12 European Union (EU) member states, the highest rates of violence motivated by racism were recorded in Finland. Moreover, the same study shows that Finland has the second highest perceived discrimination rates. The statistics confirm the reality as well as the concern that minorities in Finland already experience in terms of everyday racism (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019).

Therefore, the need to strengthen the capacity of organisations in anti-racism work is vital, given their access to a large number of not only minorities, but also native Finns. They have the power to

influence and make an impact at a grassroots level, which complements the officials' efforts.

1.3. THE EFFECTS OF RACISM ON THE WELLBEING OF INDIVIDUALS

Before introducing anti-racist guidelines for organisations, as well as NVC as a tool for anti-racist actions, it's important to mention the effects of racism on the wellbeing of individuals. Being aware of the mental health implications of racism and what can be done about it's essential when guiding victims of racism to the appropriate sources of help.

Many actors in organisations and volunteers themselves are subjected to racism. It's therefore important for them to be well-informed and to take care of themselves if they have experienced racism, so they can better support their communities. This section describes the link between racism and mental health, as well as when and how to seek medical help when needed.

1.3.1. Racism and mental health

Racism is discrimination against individuals on the basis of characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or origin. Discrimination can involve verbal abuse, name-calling, or exclusion based on race, ethnicity, or origin. It can lead to exclusion from communities and society at large. Discrimination against immigrants is common in Finland.

Discrimination is experienced by 40% of immigrant men and 37% of immigrant women in Finland (Kuusio et al., 2020).

Immigrants from the Middle East and Africa in particular experience discrimination in Finland. In a 2018 study, more than 63% of individuals with an African background had experienced racist harassment (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019). As a result, 30% of those who migrated from the Middle East and North Africa are mentally burdened (Kuusio et al., 2020). Mental strain is more common in immigrants than in the general population (Kuusio et al., 2020).

Racist discrimination has serious implications for mental health. For example, stress and depression worsen mental health. Depression can be described as long-lasting sadness and hopelessness.

One of the effects of racism is shame. Not looking like the majority of the population can cause shame. The feeling of shame is due to internalised racism. In internalised racism, a racialised person believes the messages that society communicates to marginalise people of different appearances and backgrounds. One way to fight this is to emphasise that the fault isn't in oneself or in one's own appearance, but in society (Tolonen, 2019).

Racialised individuals don't receive enough support for their own identity, and their needs aren't sufficiently understood in society. The feeling of lacking opportunities or inferiority is thus created by society.

Racism can be very traumatic. An American study found that racism causes similar symptoms to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Carter et al., 2017). PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can develop through an exceptionally shocking traumatic experience, such as war. The consequences of racism can therefore be similar to those of trauma. Its symptoms include shame, self-blame, anxiety, and depression (Carter et al., 2017).

The effects of mental health on immigrants have also been studied in Finland. In Finland, discrimination and racism can also cause exhaustion. Exhaustion is a long-lasting fatigue that doesn't improve with rest. In professional contexts, one can seek medical help if it interferes with one's ability to work. Exhaustion can be caused by discrimination or other mistreatment at work. You can go on sick leave due to exhaustion if it affects your ability to cope at work.

1.3.2. Seeking medical help when needed

You can book an appointment due to exhaustion with your doctor. You can go to a doctor at either at a health centre or an occupational health care provider.

Part-time or short-term employees are also entitled to occupational health care. If you live in Finland, you also have the right to public health care. Public health care includes, for example, health centres. Exhaustion and the the need for sick leave is assessed in discussions with a doctor. Sick leave is usually granted first for two weeks and then as needed.

Kela can also pay a sickness allowance if you're away from work for a longer period of time. Sickness allowance can also be obtained as an unemployed person or a student. Sickness allowance covers 70% of one's income. The employer can also apply for sickness allowance from Kela on the employee's behalf.

Therapy may also be needed to treat mental health. Therapy, which is partly financially supported by Kela, is a rehabilitation therapy. Rehabilitative psychotherapy must promote success or transition to work or study (Kela, n.d.a.). Therefore, it cannot be obtained without a job or a study place. Kela subsidises €57.60 for each visit (Kela, n.d.b.). Therapy can also be paid by the individual, but it can be quite expensive.

To enter therapy, you must be evaluated by a doctor. In addition, treatment must be for three months before starting therapy. It often means making appointments with a nurse or doctor (MentalHub, n.d.). This time can be seen as a trial period to try out what therapy and discussions would be like.

During this period, the psychiatrist writes a statement for Kela (MentalHub, n.d.).

Finding a therapist is your own responsibility. You can already start looking for a therapist during these three months. You can search for a therapist online using Kela's service provider search, which is only available in Finnish and Swedish. However, it doesn't show whether the therapist has available time slots. The therapist should be contacted by email or phone. You can search for an English speaking therapist both in Kela's service provider search and on other websites.

There is a shortage of therapists in Finland.

The therapist's purpose is to help you find the resources to cope with difficult experiences. Coping is important because racism is likely to continue in the future. It's important that the therapist understands experiences of racism and is interested in them. However, therapists in Finland often don't have training related to racism. There are only a few racialised therapists in Finland. Therefore, a therapist can often only provide support in relation to the individual's personality and not their background. It would also be good for the therapist to understand the strengths that a cultural background brings, which may differ from the Finnish culture, such as a sense of

community. However, the most important factor in therapy is the ability to trust the therapist.

Certain services are available to immigrants at reception centres. Asylum seekers are offered mental health services because they may be very traumatised. The asylum process is also burdensome, as it involves a great deal of uncertainty. Asylum seekers in reception centres are entitled to psychiatric health services, which also include informing asylum seekers about their right to psychiatric treatment. If the reception centre doesn't have the necessary services, asylum seekers can also be referred outside the centre for help. Identifying needs and treatment referrals are the responsibility of the workers (Castenada et al., 2018). If the workers don't have enough training or aren't willing to help, it's difficult to get support. Mental health is also supported by organisations.

1.4. WHO IS THIS HANDBOOK INTENDED FOR?

This handbook is intended for members of organisations and volunteers in Finland who work closely with minorities and/or Finns, and those who themselves experience racism. It's also for any individual curious to get acquainted with anti-racist work, and how to use NVC and depolarise tense situations. The handbook's aim is to strengthen the capacity of organisations in anti-racism concepts and tools in order to incorporate anti-racist thinking into their daily operations.

1.5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This handbook's working group is composed of:

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2. GLOSSARY

- **Anti-blackness:** A form of discrimination against black people.
- **Anti-racism:** An active action to reduce and combat racism in our own circles, society, and the wider world. It's important to understand that we don't live in a society free from discrimination. Anti-racism classifies our daily activities as either 1) increasing, 2) maintaining, or 3) reducing inequality. The starting point for anti-racism is the understanding that the problem of racism lies not only in individuals but in different practices and policies in society as well (Kendi, 2019).
- **Everyday racism:** Subtle and repetitive assumptions about a person based on a presumed personal background. This discrimination and harassment occur in public places, educational institutions, workplace, and during job seeking. Such discrimination also occurs in public services, such as social and health services.
- **Diaspora:** A group of people with roots in the same region, country, or continent. For example, the Uyghur diaspora, the Palestinian diaspora, or the African diaspora. The roots of the region of origin or the region itself aren't always clear, as in the Romanian diaspora (Fem-R, n.d.).
- **Exoticisation:** Emphasising differences. It often seems positive, but it's based on stereotypes and reinforces them. A typical example is praise for hair. A person who praises a racialised person emphasises the difference by comparing their hair to so-called ordinary Finnish hair. Exoticisation suggests that some people conform to the norms and other people deviate from them.
- **Inclusiveness:** Actively involving as many groups as possible, for example, in decision-making. Its purpose in the anti-racist context is to oppose the exclusion of minorities. It ensures that everyone can and wants to act as part of society. The contribution of all participants is genuinely appreciated.
- **Orientalism:** European attitudes towards the cultures of the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. In orientalism, these cultures are seen as unchanging, undeveloped, similar to each other, and incapable of defining themselves. Those cultures are seen as frightening and in need of development, which is used to justify to control through occupation.

It makes them the opposite of the “developed, rational, and superior” Western culture. Western countries often refer to the United States, Canada, and most of Europe (Said, 1978).

- **POC:** Abbreviation for the term “person of colour”. The abbreviation is mostly used in Finland among POC persons. In Finnish, it's sometimes translated to mean “värillinen”, but that word corresponds with the English term “coloured,” which is a degrading term because of its history.
- **Structural racism:** Racism based on legislation as well as the practices and rules of various institutions.
- **Representation:** It can refer to the presence of any group, for example, in decision-making. However, it's often used to promote a greater and thus more balanced presence of minorities. It's important to pay attention to representation, as minorities aren't always equally represented due to historical discrimination.
- **Racialisation:** Racialisation is a process in which a ruling group usually differentiates members of a minority from, for example, another ethnic background according to stereotypes. The purpose of racialisation is domination. It's an integral part of nationalism and imperialism.

- **Internalised racism:** Making society's unequal treatment part of one's own thinking. As a result, people of colour may see themselves in society according to racist definitions. Finnish society may consider a person with a racial or immigrant background to be worse than a person with a so-called completely Finnish background. Stereotypes are constantly repeated, so a racialised person may internalise them and behave accordingly.
- **Whiteness:** Whiteness here doesn't refer to skin colour, but to the superiority historically associated with it. Maintaining whiteness as a norm is used to marginalise non-white people. Supporting whiteness is a way to continue the oppression of non-white people. It forces racialised people to adapt to the standards of white people in power.
- **White feminism:** Promotes the rights of white women without recognising their privileges. A prerequisite is often that non-white women don't express themselves and draw attention to, for example, discrimination based on both ethnicity and gender. White feminism often involves commercialism and advocacy for the individual rather than for the community or societal change (Crenshaw, 2005).
- **White domination:** The idea that white people are better and more valuable than non-white groups of people.

- **Minority stress:** Constant mental strain in the form of stress and anxiety due to discrimination or fear of discrimination. Minority stress originates from the pressures of the surrounding society to be a certain way. When these requirements cannot be met, it can cause a sense of difference and inferiority.

3. ANTI-RACISM WORK: WHAT CAN ORGANISATIONS DO?

This chapter describes steps and guiding questions that organisations can reflect on to start anti-racist work within their organisations. This section also presents key information about the major institutions in Finland that provide counselling or support for victims of racism or discrimination, depending on the nature of the incident and the environment in which it occurred.

3.1. HOW CAN YOUR ORGANISATION BECOME ANTI-RACIST?

The goal of anti-racist work is to provide the capacity to identify and address racism. The aim is also to dismantle the practices and operating models that prevail in society because they maintain structural racism. Anti-racist work is also an active measure that aims to reduce and combating racism in one's own prejudices and circles, in society, and in the wider world. This is achieved by strengthening and developing equity and non-discrimination.

Anti-racism identifies our daily activities as either 1) increasing, 2) maintaining, or 3) reducing inequality and discriminatory practices. Therefore, an anti-racist action always seeks to reduce inequality. The starting point for anti-racism is the understanding that the problem of racism lies not only in individuals but in different practices and policies in society as well (Kendi, 2019).

To understand racism, it's necessary to

understand where it comes from. The structure and history of racism are too often overlooked in anti-racist work. In this case, attention is paid only to the manifestation of racism in the interaction between individuals and groups. However, it's important to address the structures that sustain racism and challenge them if we are to bring about change.

Racism is based on a historical system of oppression that is still perpetuated by power structures. These power structures have formed around the norm of whiteness prevailing in society. Studies have repeatedly highlighted the different ways in which racism occurs in everyday life as subtle and repetitive assumptions. This discrimination and harassment occur in public places, schools, workplaces, during job seeking, and in social and health services. Non-governmental organisations are no freer from racism than other social institutions and actors. They can contribute to perpetuating inequality and structural racism as well.

When starting anti-racist work in your own organisation, it's important to have an open and honest discussion. There must be an ability to ask difficult questions and take a critical look at one's own actions as well as those of the organisation.

Have you ever wondered how you or your organisation is privileged? How do

you benefit from white supremacy or other discriminatory structures in society? How do racism and discriminatory structures affect your organisation's activities? How does your organisation continue to maintain these harmful structures?

1. Identify and acknowledge racism

In eradicating racism, it's essential to acknowledge racism and its existence in society. Find out what structural and everyday racism is. What does racialisation mean? What exactly is anti-racism?

If you feel that you don't know how racism manifests itself in Finland, you should find out about it from the very beginning. Examine the history and the current situation of discrimination in the cases of the the Sámi people and the Roma people, for example.

It can seem difficult to find accurate information online. There are many organisations in Finland that operate on racialised terms and do anti-racist work. Feel free to contact them and ask them for training.

2. Anti-racist principles in an organisation's activities

An anti-racist organisation helps POC individuals gain more influence and promote their own voice in society. This is often done by changing the way an organisation operates internally,

challenging societal norms, and encouraging debate about racism. It's important to be able to talk about white privileges, power, and accountability.

- Do you have an outwardly visible, clear position against racism?
- Is anti-racism reflected in common rules and practices?
- Do you discuss or can you discuss racism together?
- Have you considered the manifestations of racism in your own organisation?
- Have you invested in building a space and an organisation in which racism is systematically addressed and there is open debate about different situations?

One of the most effective anti-racist ways within an organisation is to look at who is involved in decision-making. Do you have as many POCs as there are white people, and is power evenly distributed among everyone?

3. Every anti-racist act starts with yourself

Remember that discomfort is part of learning. Learn from your own mistakes and take active steps to consciously develop anti-racism.

- What different inequalities cause you discomfort?
- For example, do you dare to talk about racism or racist behaviour with those close to you?

“ *The beauty of anti-racism is that you don't have to pretend to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself.* ”
- Ijeoma Oluo

3.2. HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHEN THEY ARE CONFRONTED WITH RACISM?

In Finland, discrimination is prohibited under the Constitution, the Act on Equality between Women and Men, the Non-Discrimination Act, the Criminal Code, and several individual laws. Victim Support Finland provides support and advice to victims of discrimination. If you suspect that you've been discriminated against, you can contact Victim Support Finland's anti-discrimination counselling. Anti-discrimination counselling is available by telephone (Victim Support Finland, n.d.).

The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman focuses on discrimination on the basis of, for example, origin, citizenship, religion, and disability, so its activities are particularly relevant for racialised people. The Ombudsman also investigates individual cases depending on resources.

The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman can be contacted by form, email, or telephone.

You can also get free advice from the office. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman works to prevent discrimination, but can also, for example, take individual cases to court (Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, n.d.).

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in Finland. To implement the law, the Office of the Ombudsman for Equality has been established to promote equality between men and women. The services of the Equality Ombudsman can be used if discrimination based on race or ethnicity is also based on sex (Ombudsman for Equality, n.d.).

The Ombudsman for Equality offers free advice on gender discrimination, for example, through the free helpline. The duties of the Ombudsman include investigating cases of gender-based discrimination. The Ombudsman may, for example, carry out an inspection at the place where the discrimination occurred. The Ombudsman for Equality may require the party suspected of discrimination to make a plan to remedy the situation. The Ombudsman can also assist in litigation to obtain compensation, but only if the matter is significant (Ombudsman for Equality, n.d.).

The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Equality may also refer the matter to the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal. The Tribunal monitors compliance with the Act on Equality in private operations,

public administration, and business. It can order a party suspected of discrimination to change discriminatory treatment at the risk of a fine (Ombudsman for Equality, n.d.).

In the case of discrimination based on gender in employment, a trade union and a workplace shop steward are contacted. The workplace shop steward is the employee representative at the workplace (Ombudsman for Equality, n.d.).

If you experience discrimination at the workplace, you must first contact your supervisor. If the supervisor does nothing or is unable to help, contact an occupational safety and health representative or a workplace shop steward. If the matter isn't resolved at the workplace, you must contact your local occupational safety and health district or trade union (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, n.d.). Immigrants are given different help in different life situations. In cases of racism and discrimination, help and advice can be obtained from various immigrant organisations. These include Moniheli, the International English Speakers' Association of Finland (IESAF), MONIKA Multicultural Women's Association Finland, the Central Organisation of Russian Speakers in Finland (SVK ry), the Finland-Somalia Association, the Africans and African Europeans Association (AFAES ry), and other organisations. An indicative list can

be found at <https://www.infofinland.fi/en/living-in-finland/leisure/associations>.

Asylum seekers receive little help in the asylum process. An asylum seeker doesn't have the right to a legal assistant, such as a lawyer, during an asylum interview. Only minors are offered free assistance from the Legal Aid Office. The Legal Aid Office is a public office that provides assistance in legal cases to everyone in Finland. An asylum seeker can apply for assistance from the Legal Aid Office. The asylum seeker has to pay the assistant's fee themselves (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.). Legal aid assistants have been criticised for often not knowing enough about asylum matters.

The Finnish Refugee Advice Centre employs lawyers who specialise in asylum and permit matters. The Finnish Refugee Advice Centre can be contacted especially when attempting to appeal a decision. The Finnish Refugee Council also provides free advice. They can be contacted through a reception centre or by phone or email (Finnish Refugee Advice Centre, n.d.).

Everyone has the right to a lawyer in Finland. An immigrant can receive legal aid if their case is being heard in a Finnish court. If you have a monthly income of less than €600 after paying necessary bills, you can get help for free. Otherwise, part of the assistant's fee

must be paid by yourself (Oikeus.fi, n.d.).

The last resort is to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights, which deals with human rights violations. The case must first be handled in all relevant courts in Finland (Ministry of Justice, n.d.). The process is difficult, as it takes years. The trial requires a lawyer who is committed to the case. The European Court of Human Rights cannot overturn a decision of a Finnish court - it can only impose fines (Ministry of Justice, n.d.).

4. NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION IN ANTI-RACISM ACTIONS

Conversations about identity and racism can often become tense and lead to conflicts. This section presents NVC as a tool to manage such situations using the power of listening with empathy and expressing thoughts with clarity and honesty. This section also presents polarisation as a natural social phenomenon, which also occurs when race and identity are involved. However, conflicts often quickly arise and could intensify to a destructive level. It's thus important to be aware of this, and acquire the necessary skills to manage such situations and minimise their potential damage to individuals.

Disclaimer: This section doesn't suggest that NVC is a solution to racism, as racism is deeply rooted in our society at institutional, interpersonal, and internalised levels. NVC is presented as one of the efficient communication tools that can be used to improve human connection between individuals and ease tensions about race and identity, among other things.

4.1. THE EFFECTS OF POLARISATION

4.1.1. What is polarisation?

Polarisation is a process in which

different parties take sides in a given situation. Individuals gradually start adopting extreme positions that are opposite to each other, until they start resembling different poles. Tension is increased, individuals in different groups start seeing each other as a threat, and trust and respect decreases (Maiese et al., 2020). The dominating narratives are stereotypes and heavily distorted opinions about others (Pruitt & Olczak, 1995).

This leads us to the concept of Us vs. Them. As polarisation intensifies, individuals start creating distinct groups and divisions, in which they consider individuals who share similarities as 'Us', and others with differences as 'Them'. Similarities and differences can be, for example, identity, ethnicity, language, traditions, country of origin, etc.

It's important to note that polarisation and belonging to groups are a natural phenomenon. 'Us vs. Them' is present in different levels of society. However, when we understand the process of polarisation and its dynamics, it helps us alleviate and mitigate its negative consequences (Attias & Kangasoja, 2020).

- > **Step 1:** Us AND them
- > **Step 2:** We are like this and they are like that
- > **Step 3:** Us AGAINST them
- > **Step 4:** Us OR them!

Source: Attias, M., & Kangasoja, J. (2020). Me ja ne – Välineitä vastakkainasettelujen aikaan. Intokustanus.

4.1.2. The roles of polarisation

When polarisation occurs in a given situation, key parties naturally adopt five different roles during this process: the instigator, the accomplice, the silent middleman, the bridge builder and the scapegoat.

1. **The instigator** is the most visible role. They are characterised by self righteousness, and they convince other individuals to join their cause by pointing out group differences.
2. **The accomplice** is convinced by the instigator because they think the cause is legitimate.
3. **The silent middleman** is neutral. They either prefer not taking sides or don't care (e.g. the police).
4. **The bridge builder** wants to reconcile by focusing on the instigators. However, in doing so, polarisation only intensifies (Attias & Kangasoja, 2020).
5. **The scapegoat** is the last person who doesn't choose sides when the polarisation intensifies, after all other silent middlemen finally join a side. The scapegoat becomes

a target and is blamed for the conflict by all parties (Brandsma, 2017).

4.1.3. Four strategies to depolarise a tense situation

When you're confronted as a volunteer or a member of an organisation with a polarised situation that has potential to escalate into a conflict, you can diminish the intensity of the polarisation and manage it. In order to do so, it's important to understand the dynamics, stages, and roles of polarisation well in order to efficiently depolarise at the right moment.

There are four different ways to depolarise a tense situation and avoid further escalation:

- **Changing the target group:** Instead of focusing on the main parties, the instigators who add fuel to the polarised situation, it's important to focus on the neutral middle group instead. For instance, involving well respected members of the community can build a common ground between all opposite parties, which can enable them to find common interests.
- **Changing the subject:** For example, instead of focusing on identity differences, we can bring up common subjects of interest to all, such as the need to live together in harmony and security.

- **Changing the position:** Instead of taking a side and expressing opinions. It's important to change the position to the middle by adopting the role of a listener. Listening to people's grievances help decrease tension and ease conflicts.
- **Changing the tone:** Instead of sticking to extreme opinions and being rigid, show genuine interest and respect towards the other parties (Brandsma, 2017).

There are three main elements in polarisation:

- **Us vs. Them thinking:** A black and white thought construct. There is a focus on differences and divisions between groups.
- **Fuel:** Negative or positive statements (e.g. about identity).
- **Instincts:** Individuals are influenced and convinced by certain statements through their instincts, not by logic (Attias & Kangasoja, 2020).

is a process of communication that builds connection with ourselves and with others. Instead of being defensive, resistant, and, at times, violent, we focus on our observations, feelings, and needs. We give space for respect, active listening, and attentiveness, which brings out compassion (Roseberg, 2015).

Violent communication: Communication that involves threats, judgement, bullying, racial bias, discrimination, accusations, defensiveness, anger, criticism, and labelling people as 'bad/good' or 'right/wrong'.

The way that we use words and language when communicating with others plays an important role in building connection or distance and influencing our relationships. NVC is an approach that allows us to bring out compassion in discussions through both listening and speaking, even during critical and sensitive dialogues. It also enables us to become more conscious of our reactions and responses in a given situation. The key elements for successful NVC are empathy, honesty, and clarity (Roseberg, 2015).

4.2. NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION (NVC) AS A TOOL IN ANTI-RACISM ACTIONS

4.2.1. What is NVC?

Nonviolent communication (NVC), also known as compassionate communication,

“Empathy is a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing.”

- Dr Marshall Rosenberg

Process of NVC

Four components of NVC

1. Observations
2. Feelings
3. Needs
4. Requests

1. Observations: In a given situation, we observe the concrete actions that have been taken and have affected us without any judgment or evaluation. We accurately describe them, and simply express whether we liked or disliked them.

2. Feelings: We express how we feel about those actions, for example, sadness, anger, hurt, or joy. They are natural responses to a given situation. It's important to recognise, acknowledge, and express them to the other parties.

3. Needs: There are always needs behind everything we do. Expressing needs play an important role in conflicts, which can help soothe them and create a human connection between different people.

4. Requests: After accurately describing the concrete actions that have been taken, our feelings towards them, and our needs, we express a specific and clear request that we want from the other party (Roseberg, 2015).

Example: An employee to his supervisor: I've noticed that all my colleagues have received a bonus at the end of the year except me. I feel frustrated because I've been working long enough to be eligible for a bonus in accordance with the company's rules. Would you please mind sharing with me the reasons why I haven't received it?

NVC can be both expressed and received through the four steps. The following is a table that helps you differentiate between your perspective (my observations: I see, I hear...) and the perspective of the other person (your observations: what you see, what you hear...)

The process of NVC by Marshall B. Rosenberg (Rosenberg, n.d.)

Expressing with clarity and honesty		Listening with empathy	
My observations	What I see and hear that positively or negatively affects me	Your observations	What you see and hear that positively or negatively affects you
My feelings	How I feel (emotions and sensations)	Your feelings	How you feel (emotions and sensations)
My needs	What I need and value	Your needs	What you need and value
My requests	The actions I'm expecting to be taken that would improve my life	Your requests	The actions you're expecting to be taken that would improve your life

4.2.2. NVC: What to do and not to do to help victims of racism (Manning, 2020)

To do	Not to do
Listening to people's experiences with empathy	Forcing people to share their experiences
Helping victims with compassion (e.g. cleaning a messy place, taking an injured person to hospital, taking a colleague's shift after an emotionally draining racist act, etc.)	Being judgmental and questioning people's testimonial (e.g. How do you know this was racist?)
Taking action by stopping harm in a given situation within safety limits (e.g. expressing disagreement with a racist statement)	Staying neutral in a given situation when action could be taken, as simple as it could be (e.g. a person being verbally abused by another)
Offering empathy	Demanding empathy

4.2.3. NVC tool: guiding questions

The following are detailed guiding questions designed by Rachel Lamb, author and NVC coach, which help you to prepare for and anticipate any important discussion. The questions follow the NVC principles explained above.

1. What is my intention and overall objective with respect to this exchange?
2. Optimally, what would I like to achieve and have I clearly articulated my vision to the other person?
3. What would I like the other person's experience of the exchange to be? Am I proceeding in a manner in which this would be evident to them?
4. Am I willing to set aside my agenda so that I can be fully attentive and present to what the other person is expressing?
5. Am I willing to be influenced by what the other person expresses?
6. Am I as open to understanding the other person's perspective and experiences as I am in sharing my own?
7. Am I taking anything personally? If so, what am I doing about it?
8. To what degree, if any, is this conversation charged with emotions that are unrelated to what is being discussed? (for example, unresolved issues from the past)
9. If there are in fact unresolved issues, am I willing to take responsibility for them and bring them out into the open for resolution?
10. If I sense that the conversation is moving away from a mutually productive outcome, how will I address it?
11. We often label conversations in which differences of opinion are expressed or in which exchanges have resulted in disconnection as 'difficult conversations'. Does seeing a conversation as 'difficult' affect how we approach the conversation? Is there more to the story than our labelling it as 'difficult'? What other terminology might we reference and include as we approach such conversations? (Lamb, n.d.)

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