



GEMEINSAM

GESTALTEN

MITTENDRIN

Geflüchtete  
Jugendliche  
stärken.

[Topic sheet 4 / 2018](#)

## Dealing with Racism

**When working with young refugees, professionals in social work and education face a variety of tasks and challenges. Added to this, a lack of human resources makes work more difficult in many areas. How racism is confronted and dealt with is a particularly significant issue.**

The first person a young refugee can call upon for assistance is usually an adult such as a teacher or youth worker, who thus bears a great deal of responsibility on their shoulders. The adult and the refugee often lack further support in attempting to deal with a problem. Racism describes a social and societal system characterised by categorising and differentiating between people on the basis of their skin colour, religion or origins. Starting from the assumption that people are unequal, it treats them unequally according to existing power relations. The supposed "other" is degraded, thereby granting the person practicing racism and like-minded people a higher position.

It is a fact that young people who experience being a refugee in Germany experience discrimination in

different ways. In addition to being rejected, excluded and insulted, structural and institutional racism are an integral part of their reality. Because of their appearance, origins or language, they experience discrimination in various contexts on a daily basis. Discrimination on the labour market, on the housing market, and in refugees' access both to goods and services and to public authorities are particularly frequent. There are many forms of discrimination: for example, refugees receive limited benefits in health or social services, they have a difficult time accessing education, their freedom of movement is restricted and they are exposed to verbal insults and physical hostility. The consequences for those affected by racism are severe and put a strain on their well-being and especially on their own behaviour and actions.

In order to focus on the seriousness of this issue, the programme *Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten – Geflüchtete Jugendliche stärken* has talked to those affected as well as experts on the subject and compiled their experiences and views.

# Experiences with racism



Experiences of racism are often downplayed by young people with a history as refugees and by professionals working with those affected. Especially those affected are often unsure whether the disadvantages they are confronted with really stem from racial discrimination. Rejection and exclusion have consequences for young people's physical and mental health. Discrimination leads to resignation and a sense of having no prospects and this mixes with feelings of grief, anger and powerlessness.



## A dialogue with someone affected by racism

### Have you been confronted with racism in the past?

*I have experienced racism many times in the past. I was shunned a lot at school. People changed which side of the street they were walking on. I have been insulted several times on the streets and also twice when I was playing football, without the referee reacting. Now I experience less racism. Partly because I no longer pay attention to it and go my own way. The fact that many people in the area know me by now also helps.*

### How do you deal with racism?

*Dealing with racism is difficult. Sometimes I want to react, but most of the time I don't care anymore. Everyone has their own opinions and you can't react to every person who expresses themselves.*

### How do these experiences affect you?

*Sometimes I want to go to another country, but sometimes I think: not everyone can be good and there are nice people as well. So I go my way with the nice people.*

### Do you defend yourself?

*I don't really want any problems. I always try to be a friendly person, to be polite and laugh a lot. And if someone insults me anyway, I usually ignore it or make fun of it.*

### Would you like to say something more about racism?

*I always say to my friends: fight with clever words, not your fists, or else ignore these people. There is also a lot of racism between foreigners. It hurts me a lot when racism comes from foreigners.*

### Legal framework

- Article 1 of Germany's Basic Law states that the dignity of the human being is inviolable. Article 3 declares the equality of every human being – without exception.
- The General Equal Treatment Act (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz or AGG) protects against discrimination of any kind in the context of employment, the housing market and access to goods and services.
- According to Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, no child shall be discriminated against on the grounds of their skin colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status of the child, or his or her parent or guardian.
- Under § 130 of the Criminal Code, statements and racially motivated acts directed against a national, religious or ethnic group are considered hate crimes – a criminal offence.



**Emmanuel Sesay \***,  
17 years old,  
from Sierra Leone  
Student

\*Name changed

## Challenges in youth work



1. Networks linked up across the country would be able to take coordinated and structural action against racism in order to reach those affected, especially in rural areas. Such networks, however, are lacking.
2. Young people who have fled to Germany are often unaware that racism is against the law in this country. They lack the knowledge that there are laws to protect them from discrimination. In addition, many are afraid to lodge complaints due to their uncertain legal status.
3. Disadvantages due to racism are often downplayed both by those affected and by professionals in education and social work because they are uncertain or unaware of how to proceed in such situations.
4. Authorities and government agencies have not provided clear guidelines for action that could be used to orient professionals working with refugees.

*“In order to strengthen young people with a refugee background, it is necessary to educate them about their rights in Germany. For this reason, we had an empowerment workshop for young refugees as part of the project **Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten – Geflüchtete Jugendliche stärken**. In this workshop they also had the opportunity to discuss whatever was on their minds. Racism was a recurring theme during the workshop. It became clear that young people often experience discriminatory situations in everyday life. This makes it all the more necessary for the young people to understand that racism is not accepted in our society. Contact points for victims of racist violence must be public knowledge so that everyone knows who to turn to. It is important that we all take a clear stance in our professional, private and social environment and do not tolerate racism in any form.”*

Ruth Strauss  
Koordination Flüchtlingshilfe Trier  
(Trier Refugee Aid Coordination)

## Insights from the field



1. Participation in empowerment or anti-racism workshops helps young people to deal better with the aforementioned problems. Young people's self-confidence can be enormously strengthened through dialogue and the knowledge they can acquire through dialogue. This process also helps them understand the legal basis that protects them from racism and discrimination.
2. Training and further education, such as anti-racism workshops, can make people who work with young refugees aware of these issues. They learn how racism manifests itself, how serious the experience is for young people and how they can provide support. It is important for educational and social work professionals, administrative staff and public officials to know where they can turn to support young people. When it comes to experiences of racism, a high degree of understanding, empathy and recognition helps young people to better cope with these issues. In the event of such an experience, and if the young person agrees, the teacher or social worker can contact the police, victim counselling or documentation centres.
3. It is also helpful if support services, information materials and services at contact points are available in different languages.

*“Often it is not the bad intentions of individuals that prevents young refugees from enjoying their rights. Laws, regulations or the day-to-day practices of authorities often enough lead to exclusions and disadvantages. Racial discrimination has many faces – some of which are a part of our country's institutions and structures. In addition to strengthening children and young people, partisan intervention by educational professionals and other caregivers is needed. Above all, teachers, youth welfare offices, counselling centres, guardians and staff in youth recreation facilities bear the responsibility of supporting refugee children and adolescents.”*

Koray Yılmaz-Günay  
Executive committee of the Migrationsrat  
Berlin-Brandenburg  
(Berlin-Brandenburg Migration Council)



# Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten –

## Empowering Young Refugees

Young refugees have a right to participate. Yet, they can rarely exercise it. In response, the German Children and Youth Foundation and the Bertelsmann Foundation have jointly set up the program **Gemeinsam Mittendrin Gestalten – Geflüchtete Jugendliche stärken** (creating con-jointly right in the middle – empowering young refugees). The aim is to strengthen young people between the ages of 14 and 27 in order to develop their potential and to exercise their rights. Together with their municipal partners, youth workers at three locations will test methods for the promotion of empowerment and develop them further.

This topic sheet is part of a series in which experiences and findings arrived at in the course of providing young refugees with practical support are taken up and presented in an accessible way. All publications can be downloaded at [www.dkjs.de/themen/alle-programme/gemeinsam-mittendrin-gestalten](http://www.dkjs.de/themen/alle-programme/gemeinsam-mittendrin-gestalten)



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Find out more:

The **Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes** (Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency) provides advice, carries out research and provides information about discrimination and offers independent information for people experiencing disadvantage.

[www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de](http://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de)

**Das Bündnis für Demokratie und Toleranz – gegen Extremismus und Gewalt** (Alliance for Democracy and Tolerance - Against Extremism and Violence) aims to gather, combine, and network civil society's efforts to promote democracy and tolerance and fight against extremism and violence with the aim of helping these efforts achieve greater public resonance.

[www.buendnis-toleranz.de](http://www.buendnis-toleranz.de)

**Willkommen bei Freunden – Bündnisse für junge Flüchtlinge** helps districts, towns, and communities to welcome and look after refugee children and young people. The aim is to enable young people with a history as refugees to exercise their basic right to education and participation, to receive the support and assistance to which they are entitled, and to have the opportunity to become actively involved in the community. [www.willkommen-bei-freunden.de](http://www.willkommen-bei-freunden.de)

**VBRG e.V. – Der Verband der Beratungsstellen für Betroffene rechter, rassistischer und antisemitischer Gewalt** (Association of Counselling Centres for Victims of Right-Wing, Racist and Anti-Semitic Violence) is the federal association of independent counselling centres for victims of right-wing, racist and anti-Semitic violence in Germany. [www.verband-brg.de](http://www.verband-brg.de)

Since 1998, the **Bundesfachverband unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge (BumF)** (Federal Association for Unaccompanied Refugee Minors) has been committed to helping refugee children, young people and adolescents. As a non-profit association, it acts independently and stands side by side with young migrants so that they can grow up without fear, exclusion and discrimination and receive the same rights as all other young people. [www.b-umf.de](http://www.b-umf.de)

In cooperation with:

Epim  
European Programme  
for Integration  
and Migration

Never Alone  
Building our future with children  
and youth arriving in Europe