

Submission to the “Race, Borders, and Digital Technologies: Call for input” for the 2020 thematic report to the GA issued by

Ms. E. Tendayi Achiume, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance

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Discriminatory Impacts Arising from Use of Digital Technologies in the Context of Border Enforcement and Administration

The impact of race, ethnicity, national origin, and religion on the ability to access privacy, technological benefits, and meaningful consent to the usage of technology.

Literacy, as part of the full development of human personality is a fundamental human right according to Article 26 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights [1], in which the right to education is stated to be directed to the full development of human personality (26.2), and that technical education shall be made generally available to all (26.1). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [2], adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1996 underlines the importance of this human right, and they agree that education shall enable all person to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups (13.1). Literacy according to the UNESCO can be defined as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with diverse contexts [3].

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families [4], adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1990 reaffirms the importance of the principles contained in the Convention against Discrimination in Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and explicitly confirms this right to education in the case of migrants (Art.43, 45) [5].

According to the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2006) [6] migrants are excluded from opportunities to access and acquire literacy and are the most socially excluded groups from education and literacy programs. Migrant women and illiterate young parents are specially concerned (UNESCO, UIE, 2005). Their exclusion can be explained by the lack of access to education, by illiteracy or by not being able to benefit from literacy programs.

Scientific evidence shows that migrants [7], [8], and ethnic minorities [9], [10] have low level of health literacy, which makes them more vulnerable, especially now during the pandemic. They are at an increased risk as they might not be able to understand the preventive measures due to language barriers or their level of health literacy. Based on this evidence it can be pre-assumed that their level of digital literacy is also low.

Digital literacy can be defined as the digital skills and competences required to participate in an information society and knowledge economy, and according to the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (2011) it comprises a set of basic skills which include the use of digital media, information processing and retrieval, with one being able to use technology to its fullest effect to meet information needs (Federation of Library Associations). Migrants lack most of these skills and as a result, their cultural and human rights might be violated. Ensuring that they have access to and use of information and communication technologies through digital inclusion is essential.

As migrants and refugees in general do not have high level of literacy and might lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, they cannot be expected to make informed decisions in the context of border enforcement and administration technologies. Therefore race, ethnicity, national origin has an impact on the ability to access technological benefits and meaningful consent to the usage of technology.

As the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals among others aim to facilitate responsible migration, to implement well-managed migration policies and above all to reduce inequalities within and among countries, a United Nations guidance with policy considerations for decision-makers including language support and literacy initiatives to improve refugee's and migrant's digital literacy in alignment with the World Health Organization's technical guidance [11] on health promotion for improved refugee and migrant should be considered.

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