



**STATEMENT OF THE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND THE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE EDUCATION FUND**

**SECOND SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT**

**“Recognizing and Addressing Systemic and Structural Racism: A Data-Driven and Evidence-Based Approach”**

**2 June 2023**

**Introduction**

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and The Leadership Conference Education Fund are pleased to participate in the Second Session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent and to submit this statement. The Leadership Conference is a coalition of more than 230 national organizations that has, since its inception in 1950, worked to ensure that persons in the United States are afforded civil and human rights protections under the U.S. Constitution and in accordance with international human rights norms. The Education Fund builds public will for laws and policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of every person in the United States.

While each of the five themes of the Second Session are significant, this statement focuses on theme four — “An Evidence-Based Approach to Recognizing and Addressing Systemic and Structural Racism: Data Collection for People of African Descent.” For decades, The Leadership Conference and other civil rights and advocacy organizations and researchers have advocated to preserve and expand the scope, frequency, and public accessibility of data collections across the federal government. Such data are necessary, though not sufficient, to advance equity and justice.

In order to tackle the most complex human rights crises facing people of African descent today, governments need complete, accurate, and disaggregated data to provide a full understanding of who is impacted and how situations are evolving. Recognizing this need, during the first session of the Permanent Forum in December 2022, members of the Permanent Forum affirmed the urgent need for member states to collect disaggregated data on people of African descent and to hold themselves accountable for the human rights situations, racial justice, and policy targets.

With input from stakeholders, the Permanent Forum should develop data equity principles to guide member states in efforts to address systemic and structural racism in an evidence-based approach. In this statement, we make the following recommendations regarding what these principles, at a minimum, should address:

**1. Member states should allow for self-identification.**

For data to properly reflect a nation’s population, it is essential that individuals have choices that allow them ample and clear opportunity to express their self-identity as accurately and completely as possible, including selecting one or more races and one or more ethnicities and/or tribal affiliations.

**2. Member states should collect disaggregated data.**

Aggregated data hide inequities and make it impossible to quantify and compare the experiences and outcomes of subgroups, particularly those that are historically and currently marginalized. Member states should collect disaggregated data when collecting data on people of African descent. Member states should collect and present information on subgroups, such as ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and age so that the resulting data accurately reflect reality for different subgroups of people, rather than masking these nuanced realities by just revealing large trends.

As discussed in The Education Fund’s 2022 report, “[Information Nation: The Need for Improved Federal Civil Rights Data Collection](#),” disaggregated data can be a matter of life and death. For example, without disaggregated data by gender and race, researchers would not know that Black women have a lower incidence of breast cancer, but a higher mortality rate.

**3. Member states should consider language and disability access in all data collections and study ways to improve response rates.**

Data collections only accurately reflect the world they are seeking to measure if people are able to understand and respond in a manner they understand — and if response rates are high enough to make results statistically valid. Member states must make data more accessible. They should have language and disability access plans to ensure data collection instruments are available in respondents’ preferred language and are accessible to people with a range of disabilities. The Education Fund provides additional recommendations about disability access in our 2022 “[Information Nation](#)” report.

In addition, member states need to create statistical estimates for missing data and perform equity assessments in order to assess current and future levels of equity.

**4. Member states should ensure big data and algorithms do not entrench inequity.**

Technology and automated systems can be enormously beneficial, but as the White House recognized in its 2022 [Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights](#), they too often “threaten the rights” of people. For example, algorithms can reproduce inequities in areas such as hiring and credit decisions. Algorithmic transparency is key to ensuring machine learning does not magnify existing inequities. Accordingly, members states must also carefully consider the use of algorithmic decision-making, artificial intelligence, and machine learning both in the public and private sectors.

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## **Conclusion**

In addition to expanding the scope, frequency, and accessibility of data collections across the federal government, the United States must develop a national plan of action to fully implement the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) (CERD). In addition, we urge the administration to take concrete steps to examine the need for the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution, as most other countries have done. Both steps would be consistent with and advance President Biden's overall goals and his Executive Order 13985 on "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities."

Thank you for the opportunity to share these views.