



Fact Sheet Briefing – Afrophobia in Bulgaria

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This fact sheet is based on the ENAR's Shadow Report questionnaire 2014/2015 answered by Elena Dyankova, Justice 21, including the results of qualitative and quantitative research.

Defining 'People of African Descent (PAD)/Black Europeans (BE) population' is no easy task and indeed various definitions and descriptions exist for the group. The UN Working Group on people of African descent proposed that: "People of African descent may be defined as descendants of the African victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (...) Africans and their descendants who, after their countries' independence, emigrated to or went to work in Europe, Canada and the Middle East."¹ The term 'Black Europeans' is used here to refer to Black people born or raised in Europe or with an EU citizenship. In some places the term 'Black people' is used to refer more broadly to all those individuals, groups and communities that define themselves as 'Black'. Accordingly, 'Black' does not necessarily refer to a skin colour so much as a sociologically constructed identity.

The African society in Bulgaria can be traced back to the 1960s, when the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Soviet Union supported the decolonisation process in Africa inviting young Africans e.g. to study in Bulgaria, or to attend military schools in order to train them for national liberation movements. In the 1990s the scholarship programmes ended and mass deportations of Africans were introduced. According to the latest Census in 2011 there were 429 people of African descent in Bulgaria, mainly coming from North Africa.

Key findings and examples

Hate speech, criminal justice system, policing

- In 2014, incidents of hate speech including those directed at PAD/BE increased from 5 to 20%, among these being one where the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) fined a TV host and the relevant TV station for creating a hostile environment and dehumanizing Black people, referring to them as "angry Black infidels"; an "uneducated black ungrateful mass of organisms" "culturally incompatible with the Bulgarians" and their presence in the country therefore "abnormal".²
- Due to being a visible minority, PAD/BE are often victims of violent attacks by criminal (Nazi) gangs.

¹UN Working Group on People of African Descent, Identification and Definition of People of African Descent and How Racial Discrimination Against them is Manifested in Various Regions, E/CN.4/2003/WG.20/WP.3

² BHC. 2015. News release: CPD on protection from discrimination: Albena Vuleva and Evrokom TV encourage hatred against refugees and Roma. Available at: <http://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/novini/press/single/press-vuleva-20150916/> (access: September 11, 2015.)

- There are continued reports that the Bulgarian police lack expertise and training regarding investigations in racist crimes. In the case of *Abdu v. Bulgaria*, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled in 2014 that Bulgaria had failed in its obligation to conduct an effective investigation into the racist nature of an attack in which two Bulgarian nationals physically attacked and threatened two Sudanese men as they left a shopping centre.
- It is reported that the police and law enforcement authorities use ethnic profiling in stop and search practices.

Employment

- PAD/BE in Bulgaria are mainly self-employed in small businesses primarily in the catering or trade industries.
- When working as employees, PAD/BE are usually hired as highly qualified IT specialists, chefs, translators, music and film industry workers. New sectors such as call centers make good use of the language competence of PAD/BE in English or French.
- Interviews with PAD/BE show that they earn lower salaries for equal work compared to their Bulgarian co-workers. Moreover interviewees stated that in many cases there are inconsistencies between the salary indicated in the contract and the amount the employees receive at the end of the month.³
- A sociological study conducted by the Open Society Institute⁴ in 2008 shows that for Bulgarians the least desired people for top management level positions are PAD/BE. Less than a third of the survey respondents would want a Black person on their company's management team. Although this data is from 2008, it is reported that these mindsets do not change so rapidly and these findings are still relevant.

Housing

- Despite the fact that discrimination in the private rental market is difficult to show, interviews with PAD/BE reveal that they are vulnerable to discrimination in housing. Prospective tenants are given excuses not to rent the property when owners discover the tenant is a black. This effect is further amplified for single black men.

Education

- Institutional manifestations of racism in schools continue. One case has resulted in a hearing by the Commission on Protection from Discrimination (CPD) of the mayor of a municipality near Pernik due to his removal of refugee children from school, among whom were several Somalis.

³Interview with Mehari Kehsae, Linda Awanis, Peter Chikoi and Andre Shu

⁴Open Society Institute, Pamporov A., 'Social distances for some ethnic groups and national minorities', vol. 11, 2008. Available at: http://politiki.bg/?cy=126&lang=1&a0i=223223&a0m=readInternal&a0p_id=421

Migration

- In 2014, the average time of detention of PAD seeking asylum is more than 6 months compared to the average time of 11 days⁵, notwithstanding that detention of asylum seekers should normally be avoided and be a measure of last resort.⁶
- Most African migrants are socially excluded with almost no access to the labour market as they are often undocumented. In addition, these migrants are not eligible for public health insurance meaning that they must meet medical expenses privately which most of the time they cannot afford.
- The reports of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention on Protection of National Minorities and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance strongly criticize the policy of the Bulgarian authorities towards migrants regarding the lack of integration policy and the hindering of the process of processing applications for status. Moreover, the reports point to the insufficient capacity of the CPD and the courts to effectively protect minorities from discrimination.

Recommendations

- The government must ensure that the enhanced access control mechanisms fully respect fundamental human rights.
- The State Agency for Refugees should be available for 24-hour registration and translation and interpretation services for the relevant border and migration authorities must be made available.
- Coordinated, coherent and ongoing professional training on racist crimes must be made available for all law enforcement and criminal justice personnel to ensure that racially motivated crimes are fully investigated and prosecuted as such.
- Adopt all provisions of Directive 2012/29/EC establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime into Bulgarian legislation.

⁵BHC, Annual report 2014, p.77,

http://www.bghelsinki.org/media/uploads/annual_reports/annual_bhc_report_2014_issn-2367-6930_bg.pdf, accessed on 15/09/2015

⁶ Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:32013L0033>, accessed 17/12/2015