



Fact Sheet Briefing – Afrophobia in Cyprus

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This fact sheet is based on ENAR's Shadow Report questionnaire 2014/2015, answered by Nathalie Alkiviadou from *Aequitas*, including qualitative and quantitative data.

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 presence in Cyprus is fairly recent, dating back no more than two decades when people of African descent came to Cyprus to seek asylum or to study. It is reported that there are a handful of families who are the descendants of African victims of the slave trade.² It is very difficult to identify the total number of Black people living in Cyprus, however the data from the latest population Census (2011) and the Civil Registry and Migration Department estimates that around 900-1500 PAD/BE live in Cyprus.

Racism and discrimination of Black people is a significant problem in Cyprus, with the majority White population and the political and media elite linking negative attributes such as laziness and criminality to Black people. As a visible minority, PAD/BE are victims of discrimination in all fields of life, ranging from employment to health care, to the criminal justice system and hate speech and violence. Even though this group faces considerable difficulties, there is no government action plan or strategy for combating racial discrimination or improving the experience of integration for Black people.

Key findings and examples

Employment

- People of African descent and Black Europeans in Cyprus live on the margins of society, carrying out low-skilled labour irrespective of their professional and/or educational background.

¹ UN 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 The information is provided with reservation as it was gained from an interview with a member of this community and a descendant of a victim of the slave trade without being an expert on the topic.

- Women of African descent are predominately employed in the field of domestic work and fall victim to racial and gender discrimination as they are restricted to work in the lowest echelons of employment whilst being at risk of exploitation when their residence status or work status is irregular.
- Employers are aware of the ethnic profiling conducted by police and so as not to attract police attention, they prefer to employ other ethnic groups over PAD/BE. This results in higher unemployment rates for Black people and being limited to certain jobs such as car washing and domestic work.

Health

- According to a survey carried out in 2011, Black people were most likely to be denied access to health care in comparison to respondents from other regions and irrespective of their legal status.³
- PAD/BE are subjected to unfair and discriminatory treatment in health care settings with staff showing less attention and having less patience with Black women. According to a report of the Ombudsperson, this is an ongoing problem within the area of health care for different ethnic groups but experienced more acutely by Black people.

Housing

- In 2014, a focus group revealed that the majority of PAD/BE experience racism when looking for rented accommodation. There are reports that landlords ask for a higher rents or refuse to rent the properties.

Media

- Research conducted by the Cyprus Technological University (2014), in which 140 reports, interviews, press articles and 162 news programmes on television were assessed, concluded that on a number of occasions, racist language and rhetoric were used and that the reporting was biased. The report found that Black people are often depicted as criminals and involved in prostitution.⁴

Education

- Racist bullying takes place in some Cypriot schools, however, the Observatory for School Violence does not provide statistics on the ethnicity of victims of bullying/racial violence/racial bullying at public schools. It has been reported that children of African descent often feel isolation if there are no other children of African descent in their class.
- PAD/BE children face barriers like all other migrant children in particular due to language obstacles.

³ Ombudsperson report on racism on the part of doctors and health professionals in public hospitals Αρ. Φακ.: ΑΚΡ 60/2009, ΑΚΡ 110/2009, ΑΚΡ 32/2011 Λευκωσία, 21 Σεπτεμβρίου 2012

⁴ Technological University of Cyprus: 'Research into the approach of European Media into Issues related to Third Country Nationals and Migration' (June 2014).

In 2014, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute issued a code of conduct against racism and a guide for managing and reporting racist incidents. The former was implemented on a pilot basis in five primary and two secondary schools, indicating positive results in terms of the level of awareness on racism and discrimination matters by all members of the school community.

Policing, criminal justice and hate crimes

- Immigration enforcement agents and police officers reportedly use ethnic profiling and are perpetrators of racially motivated violence. International agencies have issued damning statements in response to clear evidence of police violence.
- Racist speech is directed at PAD/BE by individuals and public figures such as the Omonia Nicosia's French-born Benin footballer Mickael Pote.
- The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has noted that the criminal justice system is not effectively responding to racist offences generally,⁵ with few being recorded in 2014.
- The Ombudsperson has repeatedly noted that the police records do not reflect the true extent of racially motivated crime in Cyprus; and that victims of such violence often refrain from going to the police due to fear of the police system and/or because they are undocumented migrants.
- The Office for Combating Discrimination is reported to be understaffed and overloaded with other mandates which results in limited capacity and resources to monitor racist crime.
- Neither the Attorney General's Office nor the courts collect data on cases with racial elements.

In 2015, the Ombudsperson's office and the Cyprus Football Association partnered to conduct activities to prevent and combat racism in football - initiated partly due to the racist speech directed at a Black footballer in 2014.

Recommendations

- Cyprus should take steps to address the specific needs of PAD/BE through relevant strategies and policies. This also applies to the adoption of an intersectional analysis of PAD/BE women/elderly/disabled persons/religious groups/LGBTI.
- In partnership with civil society organisations, and according to data protection principles, equality data must be collected annually to monitor the outcomes of people of African descent/Black Europeans in key social indicators in employment, health, education and housing and develop policies in response to persistent racial inequalities.
- Deliver training to law enforcement agents regarding unconscious bias and establish clear and independent oversight mechanisms to monitor the use of racially discriminatory practices such as ethnic profiling.
- Monitor and publish information on the ethnicity of the victims of racially motivated crimes.
- Develop equality and diversity training for staff in health care settings to improve relations between the staff and clients/patients.

⁵ ECRI Report on Cyprus (fourth Monitoring Cycle) CRI (2011) 20 (31 May 2011). Available at: <https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/cyprus/CYP-CbC-IV-2011-020-ENG.pdf>