



Fact Sheet Briefing – Afrophobia in Finland

March 2016

This fact sheet is based on ENAR's Shadow Report questionnaire 2014/2015, answered by Enrique Tessieri from *Migrant Tales*, including both 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 latest figures by Statistics Finland (2013) show that there were a total of around 22,800 people living in Finland whose country of birth is an African country and roughly 8,300 with "African background", or their children (excluding Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt). The total number of Africans and "people with African background" was thus about 31,000. The biggest African and Muslim group in Finland is the Somalis with around 10,000 people.²

Key findings and examples

Political climate, migration and legislative developments

- Since 2012 several legislative amendments to migration policy has effectively tightened family reunification requirements and there are plans to tighten even further such requirements by the government. Somalis – Finland's largest African community – have been some of the most affected communities by one of the provisions stipulating that submissions of applications are no longer possible through a sponsor or a migrant living in Finland but exclusively and personally at the Finnish Embassy in the country the applicant resides. Since there is no Finnish Embassy or consulates in Somalia this makes family reunification often a costlier process as Somalis must travel to Nairobi or Addis Ababa.
- The political climate regarding immigration policy is worsening. The Eurosceptic and anti-immigration Finns Party (PS) became the second largest party in parliamentary elections in April 2015 after featuring campaign promises like tightening immigration policy as an answer to deal with the Somali/Muslim "problem" in Finland.

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 Figure based on those who are not naturalized Finns.

Policing and criminal justice system

- According to the latest OSCE Hate Crime Report, 954 hate crimes were reported to the Finnish police in 2014.³ Based on the country of birth, 14% of the victims were of African origin; however, this figure may underestimate the problem as the majority of racist crimes were between Finish nationals information on their ethnic background is not available.⁴
- PAD/BE have currently about 3.5 times higher risk of being victims of assault crimes than the majority population; 25% of all assaults against PAD/BE can be described as racist acts.
- It is reported that some judges of the Helsinki Courts of Appeal have made racist and sexist jokes against PAD/BE and other minorities.

An EU funded international project of the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), the Police Service Northern Ireland and the Ministry of Interior Finland aims to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Gypsyism and other forms of intolerance by promoting good relations between people from different backgrounds.

See: http://www.intermin.fi/en/development_projects/good_relations

Employment

- The unemployment rate of PAD/BE is many times higher than the national average owing to a highly racialized employment sector. The unemployment rate oscillates from as high as 68.56% for Somalis to as low as 14.11% for Kenyans.
- PAD/BE with foreign sounding names are less likely to be invited for an interview than those with Finnish sounding names or other ethnicities such as Russians despite having the same education and work experience.

The introduction of anonymous job applications by the City of Helsinki contribute to improved recruitment processes where employers focus on the job seeker's skills and prevent them from being distracted by the job applicants' ethnic or national background.

- Discrimination in the employment sector leads to a high number of PAD/BE engaged in minor/non-qualified employment such as the cleaning business notwithstanding their qualifications.
- Employers knowing that PAD/BE rarely complain, have reportedly paid PAD/BE less for the same job than white Finns.
- In 2014 the European Commission referred Finland to the Court of Justice of the EU as its equality body has not been entrusted with specific tasks related to racial equality in the field of employment. A Non-discrimination Ombudsman does exist, however, it has no jurisdiction over the investigation of discrimination cases at the workplace or enforce a sentence and awareness of this institution needs to be raised amongst ethnic minority communities.

³ OSCE hate crime data for Finland. Available at: <http://hatecrime.osce.org/finland>

⁴ Martti Lathi, researcher at the University of Helsinki - Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy

Housing

- Due to their often difficult socio-economic situation, minorities such as the Somalis are exceptionally dependent on the social housing sector owing to its affordability and reliability –some 70% of Somalis in Helsinki live in council housing⁵
- Rising rental costs is one factor attributed to the increasing numbers of homeless migrants, including Somalis and other PAD/BE.
- Discrimination in the private rental market is difficult to reveal, however it is reported that in particular Somalis are victims of discrimination. Very rarely the person who is renting the apartment will tell the prospective tenant the real reason why he won't rent the apartment. Some excuses include that the property has already been rented or that they have postponed plans to rent the property.

Health

- An *Open Society Foundation* study showed that people of Somali origin were most satisfied with their quality of life compared to other migrant groups in Finland; however, Somali women tend to have poorer health compared with Somali men. Somali female youths showed greater obesity than their Finnish peers; this might be traced back to the education level since better education leads to better health conditions.⁶
- The Helsinki department of social service and health care of ethnic profiling has been accused of ethnic profiling in health sector. According to a report published in 2014 in *Helsingin Sanomat*, the Helsinki Department of Social Services has been known to instruct health care employees to check if “foreign-looking” persons have a residence permit.⁷

Education

- It is reported that non-white Finns are likely to be underestimated when giving vocational guidance in school, which can prevent them from higher education levels.
- Racist bullying takes place at some schools in Finland. It is reported that a mother moved her family to another city because her son suffered intensely from racist bullying.⁸

GLOPS and Maailmankansalaisena Suomessa – two projects by the Finnish National Board of Education (OPH) that teach pupils the importance of cultural diversity in a globalized world where diversity is a positive matter.

⁵This figure is from 2003, see M. Lankinen, *Sosiaalisenvuokra-asumisenasemakaupunkikentässä* (Social rental housing status of the city field), City of Helsinki, Helsinki, 2006. See also Dhalmann and Vilka, “Housing policy and the ethnic mix in Helsinki”.

⁶Open Society Foundation. 2013. *Somalis in Helsinki*. Available at: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/somalis-helsinki-20131121.pdf> accessed on 11/01/2016

⁷Tessieri, Enrique. 2014. ‘Finland’s ombudsman for minorities says Helsinki social services and health care employees practice ethnic profiling’. *Migrant Tales*, 9 January. Available at: <http://www.migranttales.net/finlands-ombudsman-for-minorities-says-helsinki-social-services-and-health-care-employees-practice-ethnic-profiling/>, accessed on 11/01/2016

⁸Tessieri, Enrique. 2013. ‘Sara speaks out against the racist harassment her son endured at a school in Mikkeli, Finland’. *Migrant Tales*, 28 April. Available at: <http://www.migranttales.net/sara-speaks-out-against-the-racist-bullying-her-son-endured-at-a-school-in-mikkeli/>

Recommendations

- Establish an equality body responsible for dealing with discrimination cases within employment.
- Greater promotion of cultural diversity at schools is needed to better reflect the diversity of Finland in the 21st century.
- A plan needs to be developed and implemented to increase the ethnic diversity of the workforce in the public sector in particular within the non-discrimination Ombudsman's office and the police service.
- Finish Law should integrate a direct provision for hate crimes to ensure that hate crimes are adequately recognized and punished as such.
- Government agencies and NGOs must improve their monitoring of discrimination in all areas and especially in employment.