



Fact Sheet Briefing – Afrophobia in Ireland

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This fact sheet is based on ENAR's Shadow Report questionnaire 2014/2015 answered by Salome Mbugua, *Akidwa*, 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 latest figures of Central Statistical Office (CSO) from the 2011 census recorded 58,697 people of Black African ethnicity and 6,381 people of any other Black background resident in the Republic of Ireland out of a total population of 4,525,281, meaning that 1.42% of the population self-identified as Black people.

Key findings and examples

Political participation

- PAD/BE appear to be more active within their own social/political groups (e.g. churches) than in local politics. Research has shown that pre-migratory political involvement is a factor in determining whether Black people are politically engaged in their new host country. Furthermore, challenging experiences, such as discrimination or racist incidents can trigger civic activism and by extension, political participation.
- The issues debated in politics can have an impact on public interest and participation in politics. For example, it is reported that since the 2008 recession in Ireland, political debates are less likely to include discussions on progressive migration policies which are seen as a priority interest for black migrants.
- It is reported that in Ireland, representative bodies of PAD/BE tend to comprise mostly men and have the potential to provide an unbalanced male perspective.
- Voter registration processes, which require a stamp at the local Garda Siochanna Station (The Irish Police Force), may discourage many migrants, including people of African descent, which have experienced intimidation by the police.

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

Employment

- A briefing using census data (2011) revealed that people of African descent have the highest unemployment rate (36%), and were four times more likely to be unemployed than White Irish individuals.²
- Black migrant women, in particular, experience multidimensional racism as they may encounter barriers to employment such as: a lack of recognition for foreign qualifications as well as lack of extended family childcare support/access to affordable childcare.
- PAD/BE face discrimination and harassment within the workplace and are often racially abused, attacked and bullied by colleagues and clients alike.

Education

- The curriculum in Ireland does not take into account or reflect the diversity of students, of which there are 199 nationalities. A clear example of inadequate cultural sensitivity was displayed in 2014 when a school performed the musical *Hairspray* with White students in blackface to play the roles of the African American teenagers.
- In Ireland, racist bullying has been also perpetrated by teachers or adults within a school. For example, a young teenage boy was racially abused by a nun, who called him a monkey and suggested that he could climb trees.³

The Yellow Flag Programme continues to provide a practical series of 8 steps that brings issues of interculturalism, equality and diversity into the whole-school programme and allows schools to apply them to the day to day running of the school. www.yellowflag.ie

Healthcare

- PAD/BE experience discriminatory access to health care and in particular difficulties with registering on GP doctor's lists.
- Poor treatment of PAD/BE can take various forms, for example, an African man brought his 5 year old son with severe stomach pains to an out of hour's doctor service. They were made to wait for almost 2 hours, while the doctor went in and out of his office. There were no other patients in the clinic waiting area. After 2 hours the doctor called them to his office and asked where they were from. He then apologized saying "I thought you were Nigerians" and treated the boy.

Housing

- Landlords are reportedly refusing to rent accommodation to black people. Those that identified as African have been told falsely that properties were unavailable. Check-up calls

² Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity

Ethnic inequalities in labour market participation? Available at:

<http://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/medialibrary/briefingsupdated/Ethnic%20inequalities%20in%20labour%20market%20participation.pdf>

³ Michael, Lucy (2015), *Afrophobia in Ireland: racist violence and racial discrimination against people of African Descent and Black Europeans*. European Network against Racism Ireland. Available at:

http://enarireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/afrophobia_mediumRes.pdf

by migrant support organisations confirmed that the properties were still available to White Irish people.

Racist crimes, policing and police investigations

- Despite Ireland having adopted several international instruments to protect its people and ensure Ireland's application of human rights by all, there is no specific legal framework for hate crime. The incitement to hatred act of 1989 has been applied in determining hate crimes cases, however, the effectiveness of this legislation has been challenged. Due to unclear legal definitions, it is reported that people fail to be protected or receive legal justice. The University of Limerick have explored the shortcoming in the legislation and have called for a legal framework to address hate crime.⁴
- Visible minorities are reported to be at a higher risk of racially motivated crimes, with 42% targeting PAD/BE.⁵

Recommendations

- Develop and establish a legal framework to address hate crime in Ireland. Racist behaviour must be explicitly criminalised under Irish law as it currently lacks definition in criminal provisions except in relation to incitement to hatred and the racist motivation of an offence should be considered an aggravating factor in sentencing.
- Develop national anti-racism strategies that address the specific challenge of Afrophobia. The specific and comparative situation of people of African descent/Black Europeans in areas such as education, housing, health, employment, policing, and security and justice systems should be assessed, in line with international and European standards.
- Promote political participation through outreach campaigns in partnership with community organisations, citizenship information centre and other stakeholders.
- Improve diversity within the education curriculum and adopt anti-racism policies within schools that identify the steps that will be taken to address racist bullying.

⁴ In October 2014 the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, in association with the NGO Working Party on Hate Crime, commissioned the Hate and Hostility Research Group at the University of Limerick to investigate the case for the introduction of hate crime legislation in Ireland. This Report represents the preliminary findings of this research. It addresses the treatment of the hate element of crimes under existing law, the suitability of various options for legislative reform to the Irish criminal justice system and presents proposals for legislative reform. Available at: <https://ulir.ul.ie/handle/10344/4751>

⁵ Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI), ICI racist incident report March 2014-December 2014