



Fact Sheet Briefing – Afrophobia in Italy

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This fact sheet is based on ENAR's Shadow Report questionnaire 2014/2015 answered by Luciano Scagliotti and Claudio Tocchi from *Trepuntozero*, 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.

There are no official figures on the number of PAD/BE living in Italy. The National Office of Statistics (ISTAT), however, states that the number of Sub-Saharan citizens residing in Italy (2014) is around 350,000.

Key findings and examples

Legislative developments and political participation

- The Italian government has developed a National Action Plan 2015 to tackle racism, xenophobia and intolerance which contains a comprehensive strategy establishing policies, guidelines and (mainly non-legislative) measures aiming to prevent and combat discrimination on any ground and in any field of life. However this strategy is yet to be formally adopted.
- As in several other Member States, Third Country Nationals, of which a proportion will be PAD, are not able to participate in Italian elections at any level, resulting in an outright ban in political life for people of African descent.

Education

- A lack of disaggregated data makes it difficult to identify dropout rates for different ethnic groups but a Ministry of Education report identifies those at particular risk of dropping out are nationals of Eritrea, Guinea, and Somalia.²
- Several cases of racist bullying have been reported. For example in 2015, two students, one of African origin, had a heated argument and during the fight racist insults were directed at

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 Ministry of Education report from June 2013. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1MeyRST>

the student of African origin. In Campania a 14 year old student of Nigerian origin was attacked outside his school. He was hit with a helmet and a wrench pipe by two school mates of the same age. This was not the first time that the victim had been targeted and according to witnesses the victim was racially insulted. His injuries resulted in a stay in hospital and the attackers were charged with assault aggravated by racial hatred.

- The curriculum, and in particular the history curriculum, ignores Italy's involvement in the slave trade, its colonial past but also the positive contributions of people of African descent. This gap in the curriculum is reported to contribute to modern-day racism.

Hate speech

- In 2014-2015 several racist or derogatory remarks were made by people holding public positions. For example, the current President of the Italian Football Association (FIGC), Mr. Carlo Tavecchio publicly made the racist comment ("Here we get 'Opti Poba' [invented name to indicate African players], who previously ate bananas and then suddenly becomes a first-team player..."). Notwithstanding a six months ban sanction from UEFA, Mr Tavecchio was cleared of any wrongdoing by the FIGC. These types of remarks create an atmosphere that enables racist abuse to be perpetuated at all levels of society.
- Following a visit to Italy the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent stated that they were concerned about the difference between the official discourse and legal framework to counter racism, and experiences of racial discrimination, xenophobia and hate speech, which points to the lack of effectiveness of the measures undertaken so far. The Working Group observed how, in Italy, people's fears have been manipulated to promote a racist, anti-immigrant agenda, disseminating false information and inciting hatred against people of African descent and other migrants.³

Racist crimes

- Although there are no official figures on the number of PAD/BE victims of racially motivated crimes, there are several reports of racist crimes against this group. In August 2014, for example, a group of young Italians insulted and violently attacked a Ghanaian young man in Corato, near Bari. They also attacked a house hosting a small group of African asylum seekers. The police arrested six Italians and the prosecution is ongoing.
- Racist crimes that target black people have been linked to far right groups such as *Forza Nuova* or *Casa Pound* and political parties such as *Lega Nord* or *Fratelli d' Italia* that also organised aggressive and intimidating demonstrations against a small group of African asylum seekers in a suburb of Rome in September 2014. These events were followed by several demonstrations, including physical attacks and damage to buildings hosting asylum seekers in other neighbourhoods of Rome.

The National Equality Body (Unar) has established a small fund to provide legal assistance to victims of discrimination, including PAD/BE.

³ United Nations. 2015. Statement to the Media by the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the conclusion of its official visit to Italy, 1-5 June 2015. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16047&LangID=E#sthash.6zxn453Y.dpuf>.

Media

- When reporting on migration or asylum developments, journalists use images of black people – or veiled women. The images are used out of context, for example, images of black people are used when discussing Syria.
- The “Black Italian” is an archetype still struggling to be accepted. Journalists tend to focus, in narrating second generations, on the difficult background, the family's country of origin and the split between two cultures.

Health

- Regarding racism in health, it is reported that doctors often do not believe a Black patient’s testimony and make wrong assumptions based on prejudice.
- Linked to stereotypes and poor knowledge of certain diseases there can be differential treatment of Black patients. A combination of bias and ignorance leads to occasions where a sneeze from a Black person is enough to set off a panic.

In order to prevent communication problems due to language barriers in health care, several health services provide a cultural and linguistic mediator at the doctor’s disposal.

Recommendations

- In partnership with civil society organisations, and according to data protection principles, the national statistical office should collect equality data to annually monitor people of African descent/Black Europeans’ outcomes in key social indicators in employment, health, education and housing and develop policies in response to persistent racial inequalities. Such administrative data should be cross-referenced with data from the census, which should allow for self-identification in ethnic and racial categories developed in consultation with civil society organisations and other stakeholders, including statisticians.
- The National Action Plan Against Racism should be adopted as well as comprehensively implemented.
- Provisions against hate speech by elected officials should be reinforced. Political parties and their members should refrain from and sanction discourse that legitimates acts of racist crimes and use the instruments available to them such as suppressing public financing.
- The Italian government needs to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and experience of Black migrants within the labour market as well as strengthen rules and practices on labour inspections to combat exploitation of migrants and reinforce complaint mechanisms for fair and unbiased access to legal redress for regular and undocumented migrants.
- The curriculum needs to address Italy’s colonial history and links to slavery and raise awareness of black history and the positive contribution black people have made to Italy/Europe.
- Include educational programmes and mandatory modules on human rights law with sociological perspective on diversity, non-discrimination on all levels - starting from schools and universities and ending with special training programs for professionals in various fields.