



Fact Sheet Briefing – Afrophobia in Lithuania

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This factsheet is based on ENAR's Shadow Report questionnaire 2014/2015, answered by Eglė Urbonaitė from the *Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights*, 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.

According to the latest official statistics by the Ministry of the Interior and Migration Department there were 456 residents with citizenship of an African country in 2015, most of them originating from North African countries. Although many migrants from sub-Saharan Africa originate from Nigeria, NGO representatives and members of the PAD/BE community stated in interviews that the total number of Black migrants is "very low".

Key findings and examples

Employment

- Given that there are significant barriers to employment for Black people in Lithuania, there is a high level of self-employment within this group.
- A considerable number of White Lithuanians are reluctant to work with Black people. In 2014, a Lithuanian Ethnic Research Institute poll found that 10.6% of respondents said they would not want to work with PAD/BE.²
- Black people are reluctant to report racist incidents that take place in the workplace for fear of losing their job or creating worse conditions following a complaint.

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 More information available online on www.ces.lt

Education

- Examples of Black teenagers being bullied at school have been reported. These incidents have not been officially classified as racist bullying but the parents of the children believe that the bullying was of a racist nature.
- The Institute for Ethnic Studies found that teachers did not challenge bullying in the classroom and at times were the perpetrators of racist bullying.
- There are reports that both students and lecturers at universities avoided contact with Black students after the Ebola virus broke out, which reveals the levels of ignorance and prejudice in Lithuania.

Media and migration

- The Red Cross in Lithuania claims that there has been an increase in racist remarks in the media since the outbreak of the so-called “refugee crisis”, with reports that Black people are described as criminals, illiterate and trying to abuse social security.

On 12 March 2014 the Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights published a viral video called “Experiment TRANSLATION”. The participants, who were not aware they were being filmed, were asked to translate a racist Facebook post targeting the main character of the video, a Black man who lives in Lithuania. The video was very successful, with 10 000 000 views worldwide. The Independent, Der Spiegel, Al Jazeera, Norwegian National Television, German television, many NGOs and institutions (such as the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) shared the video. The online comments on the video were divided: on the one side they were supportive and on the other extremely racist.

Hate speech

- Interviewees (as part of the ENAR Shadow Report research) of the African community mentioned that they are the victims of racist abuse and hate speech, both in-person and online.
- Statements of high-level politicians reflect xenophobic and racist attitudes in Lithuania. Egidijus Klumbys, former Member of Parliament for the “Order and Justice” party, stated: “I do not want Lithuanian national football and basketball teams to be constituted of niggers”; and Mr. Vytautas Vasilenko from the same political party claimed that “a team where Lithuanians do not play, only burnt boys, perhaps should not receive financial support”.

Housing

- According to a public opinion poll in 2014 conducted by the above-mentioned Institute for Ethnic Studies, 21.6% of respondents admitted they would not rent an apartment to PAD/BE and 16% stated that they would rather not have PAD/BE neighbours.
- The Red Cross has reported that landlords in Lithuania avoid renting places to PAD/BE and Asians, claiming that they would damage their home or leave without making final payments.

Racist crime and police violence

- Black people have reported being treated as perpetrators by the police, when they are in fact the victims or innocent bystanders to a crime.
- It must be noted that some Black people (based on interviews) also report good relations with the police in Lithuania.

Recommendations

- Facilitate the recognition of qualifications and work experience of Black migrants within the labour market.
- Address racist language used by public officials and develop a public discourse that presents the benefits of ethnically diverse communities.
- Improve relations between the police and Black people through awareness training, regular contact between police and communities and community policing approaches.
- Human rights organisations and NGOs, with the support of funding bodies, should monitor incidents of hate speech and reports of abuses perpetrated by public sector workers such as the police.