

Report on the discrimination experienced by people of african descent

DISCRIMINATION AFFECTS THE LIVES OF PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT WIDELY

This is a summary of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman's report on the discrimination experienced by people of African descent. The full survey in Finnish and other related materials can be accessed online at www.syrjinta.fi

INTRODUCTION

In Finland, afrophobic¹ racist discrimination is a widespread social phenomenon that affects the lives and well-being of people of African descent at all levels and sectors of society. The term afrophobia describes the specificities of racism that targets people of African descent. In the contacts to the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman's office which concern ethnic origin, African descent is not highlighted. Consequently, the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman's primary objective for the report was to study underreporting and its underlying causes on a deeper level. In addition, racist discrimination and its diverse impacts on the lives of persons of African descent in Finland were studied.

The report pays particular attention to the reasons behind underreporting, development needs in tackling discrimination as well as racism and structural discrimination encountered in education and in employment. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman considers it important to collect information on everyday experiences of discrimination and the underlying causes of underreporting in order to advance equality for people of African descent.

¹ **Afrophobia** is a special form of racism motivated specifically by the victims' African background, and it is targeted at people, groups and communities of African descent. The ultimate purpose of Afrophobia is dehumanisation, and it is linked to the historical injustices experienced by black people, such as colonialism and the negative stereotypes associated with black people through the process of racialisation. Afrophobia can take various forms ranging from violence to discrimination, including racist hate speech. It may manifest as racist discrimination between individuals and groups, which in turn emerges as prejudices, illustrations, beliefs and fears as well as structural afrophobic racism and discrimination.

- Majority of the respondents face discrimination on a monthly, weekly or even daily basis.
- First experiences of racism happen before school age in early childhood education or on the first grades of basic education.
- Racist discrimination and harassment are primarily encountered in public urban spaces, in education and in employment or when applying for a job. They also take place in public services, such as social and health care services.

I don't feel like I have the same... opportunities as others here. I have to explain myself and my existence all the time. It's exhausting.

I suppose I have simply accepted it. I have never reported any of the discrimination I have experienced.

tem for discrimination in general. Addressing the situation requires action from authorities that supervise discrimination, such as the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and the Regional State Administrative Agencies.

RACISM OCCURS AT ALL LEVELS OF EDUCATION, STARTING FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

- A clear majority of respondents have experienced discrimination in education.
- Racism occurs and is encountered at all levels of education, and it is expressed by both the teaching staff and other students.
- Experiences of discrimination include verbal harassment and violations of physical integrity. In addition, non-verbal acts such as exclusion from a group are also common.
- At school, racialisation and stereotyping based on students' skin colour, ethnicity and/or religion affect guidance counselling and assessment, for example.

As much as two-thirds of respondents that have gone through the Finnish education system reported having experienced discrimination or harassment based on skin colour in education. Racism occurs and is encountered in all areas of education covered by the report. According to respondents, it is not only expressed by other students and teaching staff, but also by other staff members, like social workers and school nurses. It is particularly worrisome that almost one third of the respondents have experienced discrimination already before school age in early childhood education and care. The greatest amount

of discrimination has been experienced in interactions with other students when teachers have not been present, for example during recess.

According to the respondents, racism manifests in various ways in schools, for example as degrading and disrespectful language, belittling and bullying, and it is expressed by both teachers and other students. It is alarming that nearly one third (31%) have also experienced physical violence at school. In addition to verbal harassment and violence, non-verbal acts, such as exclusion from the group, were mentioned.

According to the report, racialised¹ guidance takes place in at least two educational structures: guidance counselling and in the Finnish as a Second Language and Literature (S2) syllabus.

¹ **Racialisation:** a sociological process where people are divided into groups based on their superficial or assumed characteristics. A historical process in which groups are associated with defining characteristics, assumptions and social hierarchies related to, for example, customs, language, history, religion, abilities, morality, personality and intelligence. The definition is largely based on prejudices, beliefs, jokes, fears and stereotypes. The process of racialisation leads to racist and discriminatory activities: members of certain groups are treated unequally either consciously or unconsciously based on imaginary social hierarchies which are also used to justify discriminatory action. Definitions and meanings associated with racialised groups are seen as inherent and unchangeable. In addition to Afro-Finns, racialised groups in Finland include, among others, the Roma, the Sami and Russians.

Teachers never intervened in the racism that continued throughout basic education. Instead, they always belittled my experiences. In lower secondary school, I was diagnosed with severe depression which was partially caused by racism and the fact that it was never intervened in.

Over the course of my career, I have been denied certain benefits, such as permanent paid employment, even though I have worked for the same company for more than 3 years. The worst part is the silence of good colleagues who do not react to the injustice they witness.

The respondents reported having been discriminated against at work and when seeking employment by employers, other employees and customers. 60% of the respondents who have worked or applied for a job have experienced discrimination. The respondents have experienced discrimination by employers, colleagues and customers in both the private and public sectors. The respondents have experienced discrimination, especially in recruitment and at the workplace. They also feel that, regardless of their educational background and work performance, career advancement may be slower and more dif-

ficult. Discrimination is also visible in salaries and other benefits pertaining to employment.

Discrimination occurs both in recruitment and in the terms and conditions of employment. In addition, prejudice and racism have a negative impact on the supervision of work and the working environment. Discrimination by supervisors manifests, in particular, as questioning the employee's competence and as passive attitudes towards harassment at the workplace or even as participation in violations based on skin colour. Supervisors' attitudes have a significant impact on the working environment.

Discrimination by colleagues and customers, such as patients, may manifest as crude racist harassment. Colleagues' participation in discrimination was distinctly highlighted. Examples of colleagues' behaviour were questioning one's competence and disappointment in the lack of support which emerged as colleagues' tacit acceptance of racist insults or different treatment.

Employers' actions to eliminate harassment are inadequate, and many respondents felt that they are left without support, especially when faced with customers' insults.

Harassment against women often involves sexualised racism.



