

A look at African descendants and employment in Malta

There are around 258 million migrants in the world, with prospects of increasing due to economic prosperity, inequality, violence, conflict and climate change. In view of this, in December 2018, the United Nations adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration with objective six to '*facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work*'. Such an agreement seeks to create a common approach to international migration.

The phenomenon of migration brings with it social and cultural changes not just to the people already living in the country but also to the newcomers. To this end, Malta as one of the countries that adopted the Global Compact for Migration, sought to address these social and cultural changes. In fact the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality developed a Migrant Integration Strategy with the aim that migrants can have a better sense of belonging in a harmonised society. This can be achieved in various ways, but importantly with the opportunities given to migrants to make full use of their skills to develop their full potential.

To discover more on the situation of African descent in areas of the labour market, education, housing, social inclusion and, social life in general, the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) carried out an in-depth study entitled 'Being Black in the EU'. Migrants living in 12 EU Member States (MS) – including Malta - who were born in countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (first-generation respondents) and persons with at least one parent born in these countries (second-generation respondents) were surveyed. In Malta, first-generation respondents came from Somalia 73%, Eritrea 8%, South Sudan 5% and from other countries 15%.

This study found that people of African descent are regularly discriminated against in many areas of life because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion in the 12 EU MS under review.

One area in which discrimination is prominent is that of employment. In Malta 64% of respondents of African descent aged between 20 to 64 years identify themselves as unemployed – this can mean that respondents were taking part in training or were in education. Only 33% were employed, while the other 3% are inactive either due to domestic work, retirement age, illness, disability or participation in education and training.

The majority of the employed, 65%, work in elementary jobs, which involve manual work with physical effort. A rate which is the highest in the 12 MS studied. Another 28% work as skilled or administrative workers, with only 6% employed in professional or managerial work and 1% listed as other. This kind of work affects the salary, which in turn has an impact on the workers' quality of life, such as housing. In fact, 84% of the respondents live in overcrowded housing in Malta - the highest in the 12 MS studied.

1 in 10 respondents from all the 12 MS have a tertiary education but, due to difficulties faced when getting their qualifications recognised, they are bound to work in elementary jobs. Not having qualifications recognised is not the only issue respondents faced when looking for a job in Malta. 30% of men were discriminated against when searching for employment. Comparable statistical data for women is not available. Discrimination took place either because of the skin colour or because of physical appearance – which is usually the main reason, the accent, the way they speak, or the respondents' first and the last name. Moreover, respondents who have a tertiary level of education felt that they were discriminated more than those who do not have a high level of education. This can

occur because those with a higher level of education are more aware of what constitutes discrimination and have more knowledge of their rights.

Once employment was found, discrimination also continued while at work, where 23% of male respondents felt discriminated in Malta. Comparable statistical data for women is not available. Discrimination usually occurs because of the same reasons as above. Discriminatory processes occurred by giving them tasks below their qualifications because of ethnicity or background; they were denied a promotion, not allowed to take time off for important religious practices, dismissed or laid off because of respondent's ethnic or immigration background and not allowed to join a trade union.

In view of Malta's current flourishing labour market, migrants are evermore attracted to the country. In such a situation and in the context of the findings of this study, Maltese society should appreciate migrants' contribution and ensure higher awareness in treating them equally and fairly on the same footing with due dignity. NCPE deems that supporting diversity entails valuing and respecting all individuals and groups without prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination. It is imperative that with such a fast inward migration in our country, diversity is further fostered and promoted to safeguard equal opportunities for everyone at the workplace.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) works to safeguard equality on the grounds of race and ethnic origin at the workplace. NCPE not only investigates complaints of alleged discrimination, but training can be provided to companies on the rights and responsibilities related to equal treatment. Moreover, NCPE also gives training on Maltese equality legislation and the different grounds of discrimination to asylum-seekers.