

NEWS REPORT

Date:	31 December 2014
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Title:	Racial harassment of a black football player at the football pitch
Country:	Cyprus
<u>Context</u>	
Issue at stake:	The Equality Body criticizes the authorities for failing to prosecute racial discrimination in sports.
Ground of discrimination:	Race/ethnic origin
Source:	Self initiated investigation of the Anti-discrimination authority regarding a racist incident against a football player and the combating of racism in sports, File No. AKRAYT.4/2014, 19 December 2014.
Field:	Employment (harassment at the workplace); access to public services (state protection from racial harassment).
Legislative provisions:	Law on the Combating of Certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia through Criminal Law N. 134(I)/2011; Law on Combating racial and other forms of discrimination (Commissioner) 42(I)/2004; Law on Prevention and Suppression of Violence at sports venues N.48(I)/2008 .

Content

Case: During two different football matches between Cypriot football teams, on 30 November 2014 and on 14 December 2014, a black African football player (Mr P) was subjected to racist insults by fans of the opposite teams. Despite an extensive legislative framework prohibiting racism in sports, no arrests, prosecutions or other measures were taken against the perpetrators. Instead, the only person punished was Mr. P himself who during the first of the two matches was shown a yellow card by the referee as a warning prior to suspension from the game, for having verbally shown his discontent over the racist insults. The incidents did not trigger a police investigation nor did it lead to any condemning statements from sports officials or football actors.

Conclusions of the Equality Body: The Equality Body noted a series of similar incidents in other countries, regretting the fact that in Cyprus no measures whatsoever were taken other than to punish the victim himself, pointing out that the impunity created by the authorities' inaction following the first incident led to further racial harassment of the victim two weeks later.

The report referred to previous consultations it had on racism in football with the Cyprus Football Federation and the Permanent Committee of the Council of Europe for violence in sports and set out the initiatives of FARE, FIFA, ECRI and FRA in this field. It added that the spreading and reinforcing of racist tendencies or behaviours may not only create a hostile climate against groups with common collective identities but may also lead to serious forms of discrimination against them and to

extreme forms of violence. For this reason, the state has an increased duty to act in order to prevent manifestations of racism and protect its potential victims.

The Equality Body highlighted that although sanctions are important they are not sufficient as preventive work must also take place on many different levels, including in schools, through trainings of football professionals and a review of the regulatory framework to identify gaps, etc. In the case at hand, the Equality Body concluded that the incidents against Mr P. amounted to harassment in the workplace on the ground of race/ethnic origin and potentially to criminal offences. The report further concluded that the failure of the state to act and mobilize in order to protect Mr P and punish the perpetrators has created a climate of impunity and has led to the degrading of public discourse as to whether Mr P himself was responsible, which not only clouded the problem but has contributed to feeding and multiplying the phenomenon. The report called on the Police Unit for the Combating of Discrimination to activate the legislative framework on racial discrimination to prosecute the perpetrators and to coordinate the actions of the police so as to investigate possible offences committed against Mr P.

Internet link source and additional information: The report is available at www.ombudsman.gov.cy/Ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/presentationsArchive_gr/presentationsArchive_gr?OpenDocument