Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR’s Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the Knowledge and Information Management Unit.

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**RUS105096.FE**

Russia: The treatment of people of mixed race and of people of African descent by society and the authorities; state protection provided to people of mixed race and to people of African descent who have been victims of violence and discrimination (2013-February 2015)

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Information on the treatment of people of mixed race in Russia was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1. Treatment of People of Mixed Race and of People of African Descent by Society and the Authorities

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, the Coordinator of the Task Force Against Racism of MPC Social Services, a non-religious independent charity affiliated with the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy (MPC) (MPC n.d.a) [1], states that “there is little distinction made between those of a non-Slavic race or ethnicity and those of mixed race” (ibid. 24 Feb. 2015). Similarly, a representative of the Civic Assistance Committee, an NGO that helps refugees and forced migrants in Russia (Civic Assistance Committee n.d), states in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate that attackers do not differentiate between skin colour shades in people whose skin is dark (ibid. 1 Mar. 2015). She adds that if a person does not look like a typical Slav and speaks aloud in a language other than Russian, they may be attacked (ibid.).

Sources state that people considered to be “black” by Russians, which includes people from Central Asia and the Caucasus, may be subjected to violence in the country (MPC 24 Feb. 2015; Atlanta Blackstar 8 Jan. 2014). In an article on the situation of people who are Afro-Russian in Russia, *Arise Magazine*, a magazine that reports on African cultural and political influences across the world (*Arise Magazine* n.d), states that an “underlying racism exists throughout the country” and that “lately” Russia has seen a resurgence in far-right extremism (ibid. [2012]). In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, the Director of the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, an NGO that works to fight extremism and xenophobia in Russia (SOVA Center n.d), states that society and the authority’s attitude toward Africans is “not [very] kind” (ibid. 28 Feb. 2015). Similarly, the representative of the Civic Assistance Committee states that

people with [a] visibly different appe[a]rance from the ma[j]ority of [the] Slavic population, like dark skin or Asian appearance are subject to a much higher risk of violence or intimidation driven by hate (Civic Assistance Committee 1 Mar. 2015).

*Arise Magazine* states that, in Russia, Afro-Russians are subject to “racism, prejudice and ignorance, and [that they] struggle to be recognized as full[-]fledged citizens” (*Arise Magazine* [2012]). According to the magazine, Afro-Russians “struggle to be accepted as natives in their own land” (ibid.). That same source points out however, “[that] many” Afro-Russians live problem-free in Russia, noting that there are between 40,000 and 70,000 people who are partially or completely of African origin in the country (ibid.).
The Task Force Coordinator states that “Africans in Moscow face considerable racism and discrimination, both at the hands of general society and the authorities” (MPC 24 Feb. 2015). According to her, discrimination towards non-Slavic or non-white people in Moscow is “widespread” and “generally accepted” (ibid.). For example, she states that it is “extremely” difficult for such a person to rent an apartment, since “the majority” of advertisements state that the apartment is only available to people of Slavic appearance (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources state that xenophobic sentiment exists among the population (The Jamestown Foundation 5 Mar. 2014; MRG 2014, 175). According to Arise Magazine, Russia has “one of the highest [...] hate crime[...] rates in the world” (Arise Magazine [2012]). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), Moscow and St. Petersburg are predominantly sites of “racist violence”; however, attacks also occur in other cities and regions across the country (MRG 2014, 175). MRG also states that “[s]ome” attacks have been perpetrated by mobs (ibid.). Similarly, The Jamestown Foundation states that between 2006 and 2013, rallies have turned into riots in many of the country’s cities (The Jamestown Foundation 5 Mar. 2014).

In a report on Russia, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) states that, though there are relatively few Black people in the Russian Federation, numerous incidents of hate crime against immigrants and visitors of African origin are reported and Black people are said to live in fear of violence (Council of Europe 15 Oct. 2013, para. 81).

According to the representative of the Civic Assistance Committee, people who the organization helps out are “often” victims of verbal abuse, such that they refrain from going outside at certain times, on certain dates and to certain places (Civic Assistance Committee 1 Mar. 2015).

The Director of the SOVA Centre states that people of African descent are attacked “more frequently”; he states that their appearance increases their risk of being attacked (SOVA Center 28 Feb. 2015). The Task Force Coordinator adds that Africans from Moscow “are subject to regular harassment and violence on the streets” (MPC 24 Feb. 2015).

2. State Protection Provided to People of Mixed Race and to People of African Descent Who Are Victims of Violence and Discrimination

The Director of the SOVA Centre states that Russia has “rather good” hate crime legislation; it contains provisions concerning race and skin colour (SOVA Center 28 Feb. 2015).

Under Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code, the following shall be punished:

- Actions aimed at the incitement of hatred or enmity, as well as abasement of dignity of a person or a group of persons on the basis of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, as well as affiliation to any social group, if these acts have been committed in public or with the use of mass media (Russia 1996).

However, the Director of the SOVA Centre states that there are problems with the implementation of the hate-crime legislation (SOVA Center 28 Feb. 2015). Similarly, MRG states that anti-discrimination and anti-extremism legislation is applied “infrequently” (MRG 2014, 176). Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013, published by the United States Department of State, also states that the government does not apply the anti-discrimination provisions “universally” (US 27 Feb. 2014, 43). Without providing further details, the MRG states however that the authorities have taken measures to strengthen some legislative provisions to fight the racist violence (MRG 2014, 176). According to the representative of the Civic Assistance Committee, “[i]n practice, [the] Russian legal system has substituted the anti-discrimination legislation with antiextremist legislation,” and it is aimed not at protecting the individual, but at protecting the state itself; there are therefore “very slim chances” that measures will be taken to prevent “routine” hate crime attacks or to investigate them (Civic Assistance Committee 1 Mar. 2015).

An article published by ASSIST News Service, a news website that gives access to stories that are of interest to Christians worldwide (ASSIST n.d), states that, according to the MPC’s Task Force Against Racism, “persons of colour cannot count on protection from […] police” (ASSIST 12 July 2012). According to the Coordinator of that Task Force, the application of measures to protect victims of violence or discrimination based on race “seems entirely dependent” on the police officer who is in charge of the case (MPC 24 Feb. 2015). That same source explains that “some” police officers are helpful and responsive; however, MPC clients who are of African origin report that “frequently” police officers are inactive when they witness attacks, or they show a lack of interest when approached afterwards (ibid.). The representative of the Civic Assistance
Committee also states that investigations into racist violence rarely go past the stage of searching for the perpetrator (Civic Assistance Committee 1 Mar. 2015).

The Coordinator states that the Task Force has never heard of legal action being taken against a perpetrator after a police report has been submitted by an African victim in Moscow (MPC 24 Feb. 2015). However, MRG states that according to the SOVA Centre, which did not provide details about the victims or regions in which the crimes were committed, 72 people were convicted of racist violent crimes in 2012, compared with 59 in 2013; in addition, 133 people were found guilty of "xenophobic propaganda" in 2013 (MRG 2014, 176). The SOVA Centre states that it was alarmed by the fact that 20 percent of the convictions for racist attacks led to suspended sentences, and that this "[a]d[de]s[s] to a climate of impunity" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Director of the SOVA Centre states that the treatment of Africans by the police depends not on the colour of their skin but on their documents (SOVA Center 28 Feb. 2015). According to the Task Force Coordinator, in Moscow, Africans are "frequently" stopped by the police and, if their papers are not in order, they are asked to pay a bribe (MPC 24 Feb. 2015). The Coordinator adds that Africans are also targeted in police raids, regardless of whether their papers are in order (ibid.). She states that they are "frequently" asked to have a valid visa before being able to file a complaint to the police, even though this is not a legal requirement (ibid.). Similarly, ECRI states that "[n]umerous cases have been documented on police extorting bribes from persons belonging to vulnerable groups," including "people of African origin" (Council of Europe 15 Oct. 2013, para. 189). The ECRI report also states that "migrants, North Caucasians [...] and people of African origin [...] face disproportionate [...] identity checks, arrests, [...] and harassment" (ibid., 8).

In Moscow, according to the Task Force Coordinator, Africans are "often" asked to pay fees or bribes for state services, which are supposed to be free, such as post-natal hospital care (MPC 24 Feb. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Director of the SOVA Centre states that discrimination is prohibited by many laws, including the Labour Code, but that, in practice, these measures do not work because there are no clear procedures or traditions concerning their application (SOVA Center 28 Feb. 2015). He states that there is "almost zero" prosecution for discrimination based on race or ethnic origin (ibid.). Similarly, the representative of the Civic Assistance Committee states that "[d]iscrimination is very hard to [...] prove[] in the Russian legal system" and that there have been "almost no" criminal cases opened (Civic Assistance Committee 1 Mar. 2015).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy (MPC) is a multidenominational church that has served the English-speaking community of Moscow since 1962 (MPC n.d.a). The MPC Social Services website explains that "[t]he Task Force was established by members of MPC in 2001 in response to pervasive racism and xenophobia, which affects the lives of foreigners living in Russia every day" (MPC n.d.b). The organization’s aim is to record and report on racially motivated attacks and harassment against people of colour in the Moscow region (ibid.).

References


Civic Assistance Committee. 1 Mar. 2015. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate by a representative.


<http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42046&cHash=3cd257ec9ed3d803b869ca62e3f1d7d3#.VO-VFnF-3k> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2015]


Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy (MPC). 24 February 2015. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate by the Coordinator of the Task Force Against Racism.


SOVA Center for Information and Analysis. 28 February 2015. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate by the Director.


**Other sources consulted**

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact the following people and organizations were unsuccessful: Fund Metis; Memorial Human Rights Center; Moscow Helsinki Group; Rights in Russia.

**Internet sites, including:** Afro-Europe; Afropean; Amnesty International; eci.net; Factiva; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; Interfax; International Crisis Group; Inter Press Service; The Moscow Times; Pravda; RT; Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty; Radio Svoboda; Russia Beyond the Headlines; TASS Russia News Agency; United Nations – Refworld.