

Introduction:

Akina Dada WA Africa-AkiDwA (Swahili for sisterhood) is a national network of migrant women living in Ireland. Established in 2001, AkiDwA's mission is to promote equality and justice for migrant women, with a vision for a just society where there is equal opportunity and access to resources in all aspects of society: social, cultural, economic, civic and political. The organisation promotes the equality of migrant women in Irish society, free of gender and racial stereotyping and applies a holistic approach to integration, promoting a migrant and gender-specific approach to public services, as well as encouraging migrant women's access to mainstream services and initiatives.

For AkiDwA and for the purpose of this submission the term **Migrant Women** includes not only recent immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees but also spouses/migrant workers, students, trafficked and undocumented women. It also includes those who have acquired Irish citizenship but who still consider themselves to be outside the mainstream society in terms of their linguistic, racial or cultural backgrounds, and who therefore still define themselves as Migrants. AkiDwA recognises that Migrant women in Ireland are not a homogenous group. They come from diverse backgrounds, family status, religious and cultural identities and in most cases immigration and individual status of different category determines their ability to cope and adapt in the Irish society.

Migrant women and Racism

In April 2016, there were 535,475 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland with 50.1% of them being women, a first time female majority¹. Racism, and its impact on the lives of migrants in Ireland is a matter of critical concern. Women in particular faces multiple challenges and experience racism and discrimination differently based on their gender. As prime carers of their children sometime they struggle with racism affecting them and their families in particular women with children racism and discrimination have not spared them whether at school compound or at their resident. Women have also reported to AkiDwA on their experience of racism and discrimination while trying to access services and support and at public and social places which include verbal abuse in the public transport, in addition to sexual harassment

Migrant women are largely excluded from national planning processes in Ireland and while they are making huge efforts their organisations and groups tend to be marginalized and grossly under-funded

To create a more equal and socially-inclusive Ireland, racism must be addressed both at the individual and institutional level. Attempting to address racism only at the level of the individual, as is the most common response, fails to recognise the structural nature of this phenomenon.

Access to services/ Health

Unequal treatment in accessing public services has a direct bearing on the lived experiences and social status of any individual or groups. While most frontline and service providers are aim to deliver services without prejudice, direct experiences of racism are a reality for many migrant women . This according to many of AkiDwA members take many different forms, such as the manner and tone used by officials, prejudiced behaviour and being denied services.

In 2016 AkiDwA undertook two major research one on access to health for migrant women and the second one of access to employment. The research on migrant women health found that there are gendered barriers as well as barriers to migrants women when accessing healthcare services, and that migrant women as a group have specific needs within the healthcare system which are currently not being met, this fact was reiterated by focus group findings which was held with migrant women as part of the research. According to the research findings women born outside Ireland make up to 39% of maternal death. Many migrant women struggle to access information about medical services in Ireland; as a result many do not know where or how to receive medical treatment or access to Irish health system (The Irish health system is somehow different from what majority of the migrant women would have been used in their countries of origin causing confusion of General practitioner access and Hospital). This generally creates a lower uptake of services among migrant women, and they are more likely to either treat themselves and their families with over the counter medicine. As a result, migrant women are not seeking or receiving adequate treatment when necessary. Within the healthcare system itself, there is a lack of culturally competent services and health service providers are not aware of culturally sensitive issues. Many of the women feel there is lack of understanding of their cultural background and country of origin from the healthcare providers, resulting in misunderstandings, negative perceptions and stereotypes, which then in turn hinder equality and integration. There are further health issues facing refugee women and those in Direct Provision centres. As many as 80% of refugee women suffer from mental health issues as a result of fleeing from strife and the strenuous asylum process. Furthermore, while AkiDwA continues to lead the work on Female Genital Mutilation, updated statistics on prevalence of FGM in Ireland shows that there is an increase. According to AkiDwA 2017 statistic on FGM there are 5795 women living in Ireland who have undergone FGM (2016) compared to 3780 (2013). According to EIGE 2015 report on Estimation of girls at risk of FGM in the European Union, up to 11% of 14577 girls aged 0-18 originating from FGM risk countries (born in country of origin or Ireland) are likely to be at risk of female Genital mutilationⁱⁱ.

Migrant women access to employment: AkiDwA research on migrant women and access to employment indicated that while migrant women have higher levels of education than the general Irish population, they are generally living at the margin of society, struggling with unemployment, and those who find work are working in unregulated jobs such as home care. In 2016, 42% of complaints taken to the Workplace Relations Commission under the Equality Acts were because of racial discrimination. Migrant women have been hindered from accessing employment because of racism. Non-Irish nationals are three times more likely to experience discrimination while looking for work, while Black people are seven times more likely. Moreover, in the workplace non-Irish nationals are twice as likely to experience discrimination as Irish nationals

Young migrant women of AkiDwA also have expressed concern and struggle with isolation, lack of opportunities and daily discrimination which they face. Majority continue to suffer with their identity

Civic engagement and decision making:

Migrant women are rarely consulted on issues that pertain to them, decision and policies are developed without their input, they are largely excluded from national planning processes. Migrant women are underrepresented in leadership positions while they are overrepresented in low-pay and precarious work.

Many African women have been reluctance to report racist incidents to Gardaí, as they experience feelings of intimidation at Garda stations where they are asked of their immigration status and are treated with suspicion.

Comment [CF1]:

Recommendations:

Legal protection: acts of racism and unlawful racial discrimination, including incitement of racial hatred and racist attacks are serious violations of human rights and should be combated by all lawful mean. Need for Ireland to have legislation on racist crimes, to show that it would be sufficient to prosecute effectively and adequately racist type violence. Come up with a legislation framework. This process should clearly define racism as a crime and ensure that the racially-aggravated dimensions of crimes committed are considered in sentencing.

Education and awareness raising: Encourage the introduction of human rights education, including promoting anti-racism in the school curriculum and in institutions of higher education. Equality statement and anti-racism awareness is important at all levels of the society

Support: Women's human rights and necessary protections, with regard to racism and discrimination, must be ensured through gender mainstreaming of existing legislation and polices and consideration of gender provided within new legislation. Equality of participation and outcomes must be measured quantifiably within government services and include gender breakdowns. The government should commit itself to responding to the specific needs of migrant women by providing culturally appropriate services and support in relation, for example, to Female genital mutilation, Sexual abuse, Domestic violence (including the creation of refuges for ethnic minority and migrant women), forced marriages.

Political: The State needs to promote voter and broader political participation through supporting information and outreach campaigns in partnership with community organisations, citizenship information centre and other stakeholders

Improve reporting: Establish a 'national racist reporting and monitoring' system that is independent of the Gardaí, and that enables reporting of racist incidents other than those currently defined as crimes. It is particularly important that this system is widely advertised, and data analysed and disseminated on a regular basis.

Education: Need to have a reflection of diversity within the education curriculum. all schools should adopt anti-racism policies that identify the steps that will be taken to address racist bullying. Access to

third level education for children of families seeking asylum and living in accommodation centre's and recognition of qualification. Universal Periodic Review www.ohchr.org

Housing: More protection and support for PAD/BE in social housing experiencing racism, develop better means of determining racist incidents within residential areas **Invisible Visible Migrant** www.enar-eu.org

Employment: A proactive policy should be adopted so as to increase the awareness of the Employment Equality and Equal Status Acts. The equality legislation should provide for class action as well as individual redress www.ihrec.ie

Media: Reporting and use of images: Avoid perpetuating prejudices and spreading biased information Universal Periodic Review www.ohchr.org

Consolidated framework relating to immigration and asylum issues in place in Ireland , the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill 2010 need to enter into force

Government to provide information and disaggregated data on PAD/BE detained for immigration reasons and in particular for deportation

Government provide protection and support for PAD/BE and in particular women that are victim of gender specific harm, from armed conflict zone or trafficked women

Develop structure that can capture comprehensive information and desegregated data on PAD/BE in all areas of life.

Monitoring: Establish an Independent monitoring of public bodies to assess their role in exacerbating negative racial and ethnic profiling.

Research: Good policy can only be informed by good research. There is still a gap concerning the Irish government's response to both racism and recording of incidences.

Policies and practices: Develop racial equality policy and practice not only in theory but also in action, including mainstreaming the fight against racism in policies, and acting in partnership with civil society

ⁱ CSO 2016

ⁱⁱ Towards a National Action Plan to combat FGM, Akidwa 2016