



MPC Social Services

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Task Force against Racial Violence and Harassment

Mid-Year Report 2016

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Purpose

Since 2001, Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy's Task Force against Racial Violence and Harassment has interviewed people of color about the racially motivated attacks and harassment they experience in Russia, while seeking to support and assist victims and potential victims. Twice each year, the Task Force reports on these surveys and on the experiences of people of color in Russia. Though non-white people get noticed in the streets of Moscow, the violence that they suffer is all too invisible. By documenting these incidents, we hope that we can inspire a dialogue about diversity, cultural acceptance, and public safety.

Executive Summary

This report contains two main components. The first part describes a survey that we conduct to understand how often migrants experience racially motivated harassment and attacks. The second part describes incident reports in narrative form to help readers understand African migrants' experience of racism in Moscow.

The Task Force works mainly with the African community. However, it documents all cases of physical attacks or harassment reported to it and determines their motive on a case-by-case basis. The Task Force defines *attack* as a physical assault regardless of whether or not it causes serious lasting injury to the victim. Racially motivated *harassment* takes many forms, including verbal assault and intimidation.

Among the 42 people of color surveyed between January and June 2016, roughly half were harassed and more than a quarter were attacked in the first half of 2016. In most cases, these incidents appeared to be motivated by race.

Table 1: 2016 Surveys (42 respondents)

	Count	Percent	No Response
Attacked	7	17%	0
Harassed	20	48%	2
Harassed by Police	12	29%	2

Survey Report

This report includes a description of our sampling strategy and presents information on our respondents and their perspectives. We also ask questions on perceptions of racism in Russia and the frequency of incidents.

Survey Methodology

Table 2 reports on the characteristics of the sample. In each survey, we ask respondents to report on incidents that occurred in 2016. Surveys are conducted in French, Russian, or English. Respondents are not required to answer questions and they can stop the survey at any time; nevertheless, rates of non-response are low on most question items.

It is quite difficult to maintain contact with the African people living in Moscow. Many migrants live on the outskirts of the city, and are often forced to move between different housing situations. Many people are understandably reluctant to talk about difficult experiences, so it is often necessary to build trust with someone before they will report harassment or an attack. For these reasons, we do not believe that these results are representative of the wider population in Russia or even the whole of Moscow. Still, the results give a sense of at least one population of African migrants and refugees living in Russia.

To find respondents, we rely primarily upon the convenience of people who are a part of the extended MPC community, many of whom come to our medical advice center or attend Russian classes that we offer. In this survey period, we also had a sample of university students. There is selection bias in our sampling. However, in past years when we had wider samples, we found even higher rates of victimization. It is not clear if our respondents are better off or worse off than the wider population.

We usually find that women are relatively less likely to be attacked than men, though some women that we serve are victims of other kinds of domestic abuse and sex trafficking violence. We do not report on these risks here.

Though not reported in the tables, we also ask questions about whether racism in Russia is getting better or worse. 58% of those who answered this question said that racism is getting better, 29% that it is the same, and 12% that racism is getting worse. A similar question asks how bad racism is in Moscow (not bad at all, not so bad, or very bad). Of responders to this question, 31% said racism is not bad at all, 46% said racism is not so bad, and 23% said it is very bad. Some common explanations, offered by those surveyed, are that racism among Russians is getting better, but racism from other immigrants (e.g. from Central Asia) is getting worse. They also reported that Russians often stare and sometimes laugh at them, but it is not usually any worse than that. This can help explain the variation in responses: some

Gender	Women	16
	Men	26
Age	21 to 30	22
	31 to 40	11
	41 to 50	10
Country	Cameroon	6
	Congo-Brazzaville	5
	Côte d'Ivoire	3
	Democratic Republic of Congo	9
	Ghana	8
	Guinea	2
	Nigeria	5
	South Sudan	1
	Uganda	1
USA	2	
Years in Moscow	Less than 1	20
	1 to 5	11
	6 to 10	5
	11 to 15	1
	16+	4

experience the constant attention as hostile, while others do not. Still other respondents reported that while racism from everyday people is not a pressing problem, targeting by the police is.

Relative to 2015, respondents reported less racially motivated harassment and violence in the first half of 2016 than in previous years. For example, in 2015, 67% reported harassment and 54% physical violence, whereas 48% reported harassment and 17% reported violence in this survey period in 2016. This continues a positive trend observed in previous reports. Nevertheless, some of these accounts are emotionally scarring incidents; a lower frequency of racial violence and harassment does not diminish the gravity of these experiences. African immigrants and refugees remain a vulnerable population, and while decreasing accounts of violence and harassment is a sign of improvement, people of color remain targets of other forms of mistreatment, for example, institutional.

Institutional harassment often takes the form of targeting by the police. In the first half of 2016, 29% of responders reported being stopped by the police, 50% of whom paid a bribe in order to leave. Many report the same story: police stop you, ask for your documents, and if you do not have documents, then they take your money. One man said the police typically take half of whatever you have, though there are also reports of police taking everything, from money to mobile phones. It seems that if a person has no money then the police usually let them go, though they will sometimes detain them at the police station. Some survey responders said that fear of being stopped by the police is a much bigger problem than that of racial violence or harassment from the wider population.

A key factor in institutional harassment is a lack of documents. Without a passport and Russian visa, African immigrants are constantly wary of police, feel unable to seek help or report crimes to law enforcement, and struggle to receive medical care. Refugees waiting for official status might live in such a state for years. Narrative reports of these and other encounters with racism in Moscow shed further light on the difficulties of life in Moscow for people of color.

Narrative Reports

Please note that all names are changed in the report for the safety of the victims, but all other information including country of origin, age, attack details, etc. are unchanged. The number of attacks is counted by incident, not by the number of people attacked in a given incident.

The Task Force recorded 7 incident reports. These reports include qualitative descriptions of what happened and the apparent cause.

- 3 physical attacks
- 1 non-violent crime
- 2 cases of police harassment or robbery
- 1 case of discrimination in health care

The Task Force also recorded one incident of a random act of kindness from a Russian woman to an African woman.

On a weekday in August, Sophia, an African woman of confidentially provided age and nationality, was selling items in an underpass at a metro station. A Central Asian man approached her offering her work. He told her his wife was ill, so he needed someone to clean the house. He suggested she come see the house immediately, so Sophia went to his

home, not far from the metro station. There, he said she could start right away, so she cleaned the house. After she cleaned the house, he approached her with a knife and forced himself on her. Afterwards she left and did not report the incident to the police because she does not have documents and therefore fears interaction with the police. Sophia believes this attack was related to racism, as, paraphrasing her words, people know that Africans are often undocumented and therefore cannot turn to officials for help.

At around 20:00 on a weekday evening, Frank, a 43-year-old man from the DRC, was riding the train. The man sitting next to him began attacking him without a word, hitting him around the head with his fists. Frank stood and walked away. No other passengers on the train intervened, but everyone moved away from the attacker, leaving him [the attacker] to sit alone. As Frank was the only African and only person on the train to be attacked, he believes skin color was a deciding factor.

One spring day, Vincent, a young man from Guinea, was in a metro station, waiting for the train. A drunk man approached him and asked for a cigarette. Vincent said he doesn't smoke. The drunk man started reaching into Vincent's pockets, and a fight broke out between the two. Before long, police intervened and stopped the fight. No one was jailed or seriously injured. Vincent blames alcohol, racism, and ignorance for this unprovoked attack.

On an evening in June, Jessica, a 28-year-old woman from Nigeria, was walking on the street outside the city center. A middle-aged Russian man approached her and asked her to change his 5000 ruble note for smaller notes. She changed his money, and then went into a shop. When she tried to pay for food with the 5000 note the Russian man gave her, the shop keeper yelled at her and told her that the note was fake.

During the daytime, Caroline, a 27-year-old woman from Nigeria, was leaving a metro station when two police officers stopped her. They asked for her documents and when she had none, they took her to the police station. She insisted to them that she had a baby at home so they had to let her go. The police decided not to detain her and let her leave because of her baby.

Around 17:00 one afternoon in February, Charlotte, a 30-year-old woman from Cote d'Ivoire, was exiting the metro when she was stopped by two police officers. Charlotte does not speak Russian, but she does have documents (a passport and a valid Russian visa). The officers took her to what she described as a "dark place" where no one could see them and then frisked her pockets. They stole 8000 rubles and her mobile phone. Charlotte did feel targeted because of her skin color.

Around 19:00 on a winter evening, Donald, a middle-aged man from Nigeria, collapsed in his home. He had long complained of pain and health problems, but was unable to visit MPC's medical advice center due to conflicts with his work schedule. On this evening, his health reached a breaking point. After he collapsed, his friends called an ambulance. The ambulance took him and one friend to the hospital. Despite Donald's dire condition, the hospital refused to admit him because neither he nor his friend had documents. They found an acquaintance who had a visa and passport and called this person to the hospital, after which, because the hospital had someone's legal documentation (though it was not Donald's), they admitted Donald to the hospital, nearly 8 hours after his arrival. Donald's condition was deteriorating. Over the next two weeks, Donald's friends spent "a lot of

money” on medical care for him, but, after two weeks, Donald passed away. His friend reported this story to MPC’s Task Force against Racism.

On an afternoon in May, Leah, a 43-year-old Congolese woman, tried to buy medicine in a pharmacy. She was dismayed to learn that she hadn’t enough money. An elderly Russian woman saw the situation and bought the medicine for her. Leah says this is why she thinks that racism in Moscow is getting better.

Conclusion

Our findings from 2016 reflect the ongoing struggles of this racial minority in Moscow, as well as the unprovoked and unpunished character of the abuse directed against them. While the incident reports give us insight into the nature and consequences of attacks, harassment, and institutional discrimination through the eyes of those targeted, the survey results help us to gain a broader picture of the experiences faced by the African diaspora community. Reports of attacks and harassment continued a pattern of decline, though remain troublingly high. The most common forms are persistent staring, frequent police stops, and a general state of vulnerability which exposes them to crimes of any sort. Another common theme is that these aggressions are primarily from other immigrants. Moscow’s largest immigrant population is from Central Asia; it could be that, with Russia’s economic downturn, this population is suffering more and lashing out at those whom they recognize as vulnerable: Africans, particularly undocumented and poor Africans. This vulnerability exposes them to anything from petty crime (e.g. tricking someone with fake money, or refusing to pay wages, as reported by one woman) to grave and traumatic attacks on one’s person.

In the first half of 2016 we surveyed people from the MPC medical advice center, university students, and people on the street. Though responses are varied, it is surprising how many people report zero encounters with racism. Typically, these people have not lived in Russia for long periods of time, so it may be a matter of time before they confront racism. Nevertheless, it is both a positive and confusing finding – confusing because of the variation in responses. 31% of responders to this question said that racism is not a problem at all, while 23% said that racism is very bad. In future, we would like to better understand what causes these diverging perspectives, including risk factors that make certain people of color experience racism more than others. We would like to continue monitoring all of these dynamics, but to get honest answers it takes time to create a relationship of trust. This is especially true with newer members of the community and those who have never been to the MPC center before.

In 2016 we saw more cases of institutional racism, particularly police harassment, discrimination in hospitals, and discrimination in hiring. This shows that racism is not limited to an extremist minority in Russian society.

We will continue to strive to help victims of attacks, and where possible to reduce the risk of violence against those most often targeted through training and advice. Our experience so far suggests that not all victims wish to share the full stories of the attacks they have faced, even if they are willing to report through the survey that such attacks took place. However, we continue to place a high importance on providing an opportunity to share these stories, to give a voice to those targeted. We hope that this will in turn create a greater awareness of the experiences of Africans in Moscow, as one step towards reducing the level of racially motivated violence and harassment in the city.

If you have any questions regarding the information in this report, or would like to learn more about the work that we do to document racially motivated violence and harassment, please contact Barbara Rogers, MPC Task Force against Racial Violence and Harassment, at brogers@mpess.org.

Task Force Activities in 2016

The Task Force against Racism held several community events this year to provide support, fellowship, and advice to the African community in Moscow.

On February 3, the Task Force organized a workshop on drawing comics as a method of cross-cultural communication. Over 20 guests, including African immigrants and refugees as well as teachers and leaders of various Russian human rights NGOs, participated in the event. The workshop was led by Finnish artist/activist Sanna Hukkanen from World Comics Finland (www.worldcomics.fi). Participants learned how to create four-panel comics focusing on the theme “My Life in Moscow.” Numerous participants, both African and Russian, highlighted their experiences with racism, xenophobia, or overcoming stereotypes. These comics will be used in future anti-racism education projects. Ms. Hukkanen described the workshop in further detail at www.comics-with-attitude.blogspot.com.

On March 16, during European Action Week against Racism from March 12 to 21, the Task Force Against Racism held a movie night open to the public, with about 20 guests in attendance. We began the movie night by sharing Dr. Greg Carr’s definition of racism as “the belief in a hierarchy of humanity based on race and the creation and maintenance of a system that enforces those beliefs.” During the movie night, we showed an American movie entitled “The Help.” This movie was chosen because of its focus on racism during the 1960s in America. After the movie, we discussed the issues highlighted in the movie and how they may be similar to present day racism in Russia.

The community event on April 28 featured presentations on all the services available at MPC and a cost analysis of what it means to have children in Moscow. The goal of the presentation was to inform women of what to expect if they are pregnant or happen to become pregnant during their time in Moscow. Over lunch, community members participated in a cultural exchange activity. Participants shared their country’s traditions related to childbirth, as well as nursery rhymes in their native language.

On June 16, we held our annual Children’s Party for all of the children in our charity programs, attended by 50 Russian, African, Middle Eastern, and Central Asian families. The event included games, activities, and crafts organized by numerous volunteers, as well as a hot breakfast and lunch provided by Beverly Hills Diner. All families were sent home with backpacks full of school supplies and take-home food bags.

The June 30 community event celebrated African American Music Appreciation Month with a presentation on the influence of African music around the world. Volunteers also prepared a hot lunch and everyone enjoyed a meal together.

Throughout the year, the Children’s Club for preschool-aged Francophone African (mostly Congolese) children continues to run in partnership with Civic Assistance’s Adaptation and Education Center for Refugee Children. Volunteers teach the children in French and Russian with the aim of improving the children’s readiness to apply for a place in Russian schools.