



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA  
POLICING AUTHORITY



## Experiences of Policing amongst Brazilians and People of African Descent in Ireland



Integration  
Diversity  
Equality  
Analysis.

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# EXPERIENCES OF POLICING AMONGST BRAZILIANS AND PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT IN IRELAND

## Executive Summary

This report, commissioned by the Policing Authority of Ireland (the Authority) and conducted by the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR) with Dr Lucy Michael, investigates the experiences of policing among African and Brazilian communities in Ireland. The primary objective is to understand the nature and extent of interactions of these communities with the police, assess the perceptions and attitudes towards law enforcement, and identify areas for improvement to enhance community-police relations.

Recent EU research highlights that issues of trust and negative evaluations of the police among minority communities significantly impact police services' effectiveness. These challenges include under-policing, over-policing, racial profiling, and the need for better data on police interactions with minority communities. The EU context underscores the need for Ireland to align with broader European efforts to improve policing practices and ensure compliance with human rights standards.

## The experiences of Brazilian and African-descent communities in Ireland

The release of this report is especially timely due to recent incidents that have heightened concerns about Garda practices and their impact on minority communities. High-profile cases in Ireland such as the death of George Nkencho, together with rising anti-immigrant prejudice, have drawn significant attention to the issues of racial discrimination among ethnic and immigrant minorities and police accountability.

The demographic growth of African and Brazilian communities, combined with their unique socio-economic challenges, underscores the urgent need to address these issues to ensure equitable treatment and protection under the law. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive data on the policing experiences of these communities has been a significant gap in the current understanding and policy-making process. This report aims to fill that gap, providing a detailed and evidence-based examination of the systemic issues affecting these groups.

## Methodology

The research involved a national online survey targeting individuals of African descent, and Brazilians, for the purpose of collecting quantitative and qualitative data on their policing experiences, as well as focus groups in rural and urban areas and individual interviews. These methods captured a broad range of interactions, including direct contact with Gardaí, perceptions of police services, incidents of discrimination or abuse, and awareness of rights.



## Key Findings

The Garda Síochána has implemented several initiatives aimed at improving relations with minority communities, including diversity training and the establishment of a Hate Crime eLearning Programme. Despite these changes, the research indicates that even when hate crimes are reported, the responses from the Gardaí are often inadequate and sometimes harmful to victims. Many participants expressed a significant lack of trust in the Garda Síochána. Fear of not being taken seriously, potential repercussions and previous negative experiences deter many from reporting crimes. There is obvious good practice emerging around hate crime recording, but it is highly individualised and inconsistent across the organisation. Similarly, domestic violence responses by Gardaí have improved, but are outweighed by the negative experiences of some victims and inappropriate treatment of suspects of minority ethnic backgrounds, leading to underreporting of this type of crime.

A significant proportion of participants reported experiencing or witnessing negative interactions with the police. Common issues included racial profiling, discriminatory behaviour, and lack of cultural sensitivity. Participants indicated that racial profiling was a frequent occurrence, leading to feelings of mistrust and fear towards the Gardaí and a strong sense of injustice overall. Repeated exposure to these encounters has created a cycle of mistrust and resentment across whole communities. This has even affected community workers who have previously worked closely with Gardaí, and who now feel frustrated and hopeless about indifference in the Garda senior leadership towards the experience of their communities.

Interview and survey participants described traumatic experiences while being stopped by members of the Garda Síochána, including strip-searches, property damage, and wrongful arrests, some of which had long lasting psychological impacts. Key concerns for further investigation include the rapid escalation of minor offences to arrest and detention, inadequate communication of rights, and evidence of mistreatment, including racial abuse leading to distrust and trauma. Instances of unfair treatment and lack of transparency during these encounters have led many ethnic minorities to perceive reporting crimes or contacting the Gardaí as risky and potentially unsafe.

Participants demonstrated moderate awareness of certain rights, such as the right to legal representation or to see a doctor while in custody. Brazilians showed a higher awareness than Africans or African Irish individuals of their rights regarding stops, searches, custody and complaints. However, there was limited awareness of the obligation to provide a name and address if asked by a Garda and the inability to refuse a search. For example, 50% of Brazilians knew they had to provide their name and address if asked by a Garda, compared to only 29% of Africans and other people of African descent.

Both African and Brazilian participants expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of the complaints process and were wary of making complaints due to fears of future harassment or repercussions, with Brazilians particularly concerned about potential impacts on their immigration status. Awareness of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC) as a complaints body was notable, but there were misconceptions about other complaints bodies.

As a result, the overall perception of Garda behaviour and attitudes towards minority ethnic communities is predominantly negative. The Garda Síochána are viewed, overall, as providing a diminished service to minority ethnic communities and actively harming them through discriminatory policing. This perception is particularly strong among younger individuals and those who have lived in Ireland for a longer period. Africans and African Irish people showed lower trust and perceived stricter treatment based on ethnicity.

Positive personal interactions with individual Gardaí through community policing has only partly led to increased confidence among African and Brazilian groups. Community engagement initiatives, such as outreach activities and events, have been well received and appreciated by participants. However, efforts towards building trust in the organisation, particularly in respect of procedural justice, are urgently needed.

## Recommendations

This report highlights critical issues in the relationship between the Garda Síochána and African and Brazilian communities in Ireland. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving policy changes, enhanced training, and sustained community engagement. The findings and recommendations aim to guide the Authority and other stakeholders in fostering a more inclusive, fair, and effective policing system that serves all members of society equitably.

1. Fully implement the National Action Plan Against Racism Recommendation on Policing to *'Identify and eliminate any policing practices that target specific groups experiencing racism, including through racial or ethnic profiling'*, by:
  - 1.1. Adopting a comprehensive definition of racial profiling, drawing on the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) definition, and mandating the adaptation and implementation of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA's) guidance on preventing unlawful profiling; and
  - 1.2. Prohibiting racial profiling in law, including all forms of direct and indirect racial discrimination by Gardaí, fully implementing the 2019 recommendations to Ireland of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and
  - 1.3. Adding the prohibition of Racial Profiling to the Garda decision-making model
2. Put in place the necessary legislative provisions and procedures to allow the collection and publication of disaggregated data pertaining to race, ethnicity, religion, gender and disability across the entire Irish criminal justice system, including in all policing operations, the courts and crime statistics, to properly understand how racial and ethnic minorities are treated at each section of the justice system, including in relation to the provisions of the Victims Directive.

3. Put in place legislation to prohibit the bringing of vexatious charges by members of the Garda Síochána, in order to decrease their use against minority communities;
4. Provide a recording process for suspected racial profiling and a mechanism for informing practice and mandating the publication of information on the number of complaints of suspected racial profiling through Fiosrú, the Ombudsman and Complaints body (formerly GSOC);
5. Develop robust mechanisms within Fiosrú (formerly GSOC) and the Policing and Community Safety Authority (PCSA) (formerly the Policing Authority and Garda Inspectorate) to handle and analyse all complaints related to racial discrimination and racist misconduct, to monitor Garda conduct, and to review policies and practices in the light of findings;
6. Review and reform policies related to stop-and-search and other policing operations in the community to ensure that they are applied fairly and without bias, and to consider community impacts of all policing operations on minoritised communities;
7. Establish within the Conduct Regulations set out in the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024 specific reference to racial discrimination;
8. Implement mandatory comprehensive training programmes for members of the Garda Síochána on cultural competence, anti-racism and effective communication with minority communities, and in particular the elimination of racial profiling from policing practice (per CERD GPR36, ECRI GPR11);
9. Ensure that custody protections apply from the point of arrest (and during transportation to a Garda station), including the provision of guidance on use of force, the communication of information about rights and reasons for arrest, and the accountability of the Gardaí for an appropriate standard of care. The PSNI's policies relating to the role of the Custody Sergeant could serve as an example of good practice;
10. Establish intercultural partnership structures in each division between the Garda Síochána and diverse representatives within minority ethnic communities to facilitate outreach, promote trust and to engage in robust and regular dialogue, to review the effectiveness of policing policies and practices and to promote rights awareness, encourage crime reporting, and promote good community relations;
11. Implement ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 16 (GPR No. 16) to establish procedural safeguards—often referred to as a "firewall"—to separate immigration enforcement activities from other essential public services (including preventing a person who is reporting or giving evidence about a crime from having their immigration status checked) and communicate this procedure to minoritised communities.
12. Adequately capture data on the satisfaction of minority ethnic and migrant groups for benchmarking and review by including ethnic booster samples in CSO Crime and Victimisation Survey and The Garda Public Attitudes survey.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

## EXPERIENCES OF POLICING AMONGST BRAZILIANS AND PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT IN IRELAND

### TO GOVERNMENT, POLICING OVERSIGHT BODIES AND AN GARDA SIOCHANA

#### RACIAL PROFILING:

IDENTIFY AND ELIMINATE ANY POLICING PRACTICES THAT TARGET SPECIFIC GROUPS EXPERIENCING RACISM, INCLUDING THROUGH RACIAL OR ETHNIC PROFILING.

- ADOPT COMPREHENSIVE DEFINITION & GUIDANCE ON RACIAL PROFILING
- ADD PROHIBITION TO GARDA DECISION-MAKING MODEL
- REVIEW STOP-AND-SEARCH & OTHER OPERATIONS TO REDUCE BIAS
- CREATE RECORDING PROCESS
- PUBLISH COMPLAINT NUMBERS

#### CONDUCT & OVERSIGHT:

- REFERENCE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN CONDUCT REGULATIONS
- ESTABLISH ROBUST MECHANISMS ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN FIOSRÚ AND PCSA
- FULLY IMPLEMENT CUSTODY PROTECTIONS FROM ARREST

#### REGULATION:

- PROHIBIT RACIAL PROFILING IN LAW
- LEGISLATE VEXATIOUS CHARGES
- SEPARATE IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT FROM SERVICES
- LEGISLATE FOR ETHNIC DATA COLLECTION & PUBLICATION

#### INTERCULTURAL PARTNERSHIP:

- STRUCTURES IN EACH DIVISION
- OUTREACH & TRUST BUILDING
- DIALOGUE
- REVIEW OF POLICY & PRACTICE
- PROMOTE RIGHTS AWARENESS
- ENCOURAGE REPORTING
- PROMOTE GOOD COMMUNITY RELATIONS

#### MONITOR IMPACT:

- CAPTURE DATA ON SATISFACTION OF MINORITY ETHNIC AND MIGRANT GROUPS
- ASSESS COMMUNITY IMPACT OF POLICING OPERATIONS

# KEY FINDINGS

## EXPERIENCES OF POLICING AMONGST BRAZILIANS AND PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT IN IRELAND

### REPORTING CRIMES

- LOW LEVELS OF TRUST IN GARDA RESPONSES
- VICTIMS REPORT NOT BEING BELIEVED, NEGATIVE REPERCUSSIONS AND HOSTILE TREATMENT
- HATE CRIME RECORDING REMAINS INCONSISTENT
- COMMUNITY ADVOCATES FEEL LET DOWN

“THEY TREATED ME LIKE I WAS THE CRIMINAL. I CALLED FOR HELP AND ENDED UP TERRIFIED OF THEM.”

### GARDA CONDUCT AND USE OF FORCE

- ESCALATIONS FROM MINOR INCIDENTS TO ARREST
- EXCESSIVE OR DISPROPORTIONATE USE OF FORCE
- GARDA CONDUCT PERCEIVED AS LACKING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

‘ THE POLICE START TO LOSE THEIR NERVE, AND THEY GET MORE AGGRESSIVE.’

“I WAS SEARCHED SO MANY TIMES I STOPPED GOING OUT. I FELT LIKE A SUSPECT JUST FOR BEING ME.”

### STOPS

- POOR COMMUNICATION OF RIGHTS BY GARDAI
- AWARENESS OF STOP-AND-SEARCH RIGHTS VARIABLE
- MANY MISUNDERSTAND OR FEAR ASSERTING RIGHTS

“THEY STOPPED ME IN FRONT OF MY KIDS, MADE ME FEEL LIKE NOTHING.”

“WE’RE NOT SAFE WITH GARDAÍ, BUT WE’RE NOT SAFE WITHOUT THEM EITHER.”

### COMPLAINTS

- ONLY 1 IN 5 BELIEVE THEY WOULD BE TREATED FAIRLY IF THEY MAKE A COMPLAINT
- FEAR OF RETALIATION DETERS COMPLAINTS

“THE PROCESS OF MAKING A COMPLAINT IS VERY COMPLICATED”