



# Monitoring discrimination and racism in sport

The case of Finland



edited by





## **Monitoring discrimination and racism in sports. The case of Finland**

Edited by  
Liikkukaa – Sports For All, Finland

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## **1. General about the project:**

Sports is a mirror of society, some say. On the other hand, things that happen in sports also influence society. In the recent years, everywhere in Europe and in the world, racism in sports has made headlines. This might have been slogans and slurs, physical attacks or racism and discrimination through rules, regulations, and structures. Individuals, society, and sports reputation take serious damage because of racism.

Different European countries and their sports institutions have developed different ways of acting on racism and to monitor developments and incidents. Our project is part of the European Commission's Erasmus+ program and seeks to find out about best practices in monitoring racism. Without consistent monitoring of racism within sports, there cannot be any reliable data on the real situation and the dynamics. It is difficult then to develop any strategies and methods.

For this we conduct interviews in several member states, amongst them Italy, Hungary, Belgium, and Finland, in order to identify the different approach and methods in use and to eventually be able to make recommendations based on this research.

The main organization is the Italian Sports For All, UISP, Sport Per Tutti, <https://www.uisp.it/progetti/> and the research will be evaluated by the University of Liège. The partners in the project are:

- UISP APS (Italy)
- International Sport and Culture Association - ISCA (Denmark)
- Egyutt Az Interkulturalis Akcioert Alapitvanyunited Against Racism (Hu)
- Université De Liège (Be)
- Liikuntaa Ya Kultuuria Kansainvalisesti Liikkukaa Ry- Sports For All (Fi)
- Stop Racism In Sport (Be)

There are five countries involved, Italy, Belgium, Hungary, Denmark, and we are chosen to conduct the interviews in Finland.

### **Background:**

Liikkukaa – Sports For All got first contacted in 2021 through our network partners in Italy to ask about our interest to join the Monitora Erasmus+ Project together with partners in Hungary, Belgium and Denmark. The project was to evaluate monitoring racism in sports in different European countries. For Liikkukaa, having conducted similar research already twice on the national level within the past 12 years it was a great opportunity to build on our previous work and to evolve to the European level. The project plan was approved by the European Commission in the autumn of 2022 and project start was January 1<sup>st</sup> 2023.

## **2. Liikkukaa – Sports For All**

Liikkukaa! – Sports For All is a national umbrella organization with 80 member organizations in different parts of Finland directly involving about 15.000 people

Liikkukaa! – Sports For All aim is to promote social cohesion, mental and physical health and respect for diversity through sports and leisure activities.

The organisation is founded 2001, Since then Liikkukaa – Sports For All has organized sport and culture events and actively participated in seminars and work shops both as organizer and expert. Liikkukaa´s network consist of both national and international partners. Besides increasing membership and developing services Liikkukaa´s intention is to extend the national and international network and further deepen cooperation with them. Liikkukaa has wide experience in the challenges and benefits presented by immigration and diversity. Through network of members and partners the orgainsation maintains a strong connection to the grassroot work in Finland.

The member organisations are migrant sports initiatives and traditional sports clubs focused on the inclusion of immigrants as well as socially or culturally oriented organizations.

## **3. Preparations:**

The preparations for the projects research in Finland started in January 2023. We had steering group meetings and sessions to evaluate the situation based on our and others previous research. We also participated in relevant research publication events and had informal discussions with relevant actors in the field, as for example the former head (2002-2007) of anti-racism in the Sports federation and now being researcher for the Finnish Sports Ethic Watchdog SUEK in January (*no mandate to interfere*), the Secretary General of the Finnish governments Sports committee and the chairman of the Finnish anti-Racism network, RASMUS RY. We also actively participated and asked questions on March 16<sup>th</sup> during the official presentation of the results of the University of Jyväskylä´s LIITU-research for the national sports committee, evaluating the general participation in sports of the Finnish population.

Several online-meetings were held with the Monitora project group, both collectively and individually and after the physical meeting in Liege the group had one more online meeting in which the interview questions were finally discussed, formulated and agreed upon. Following this we were able to translate the interview questions into Finnish and to create a guide for our interviewers. In June we had a meeting with the full group in Rome and later

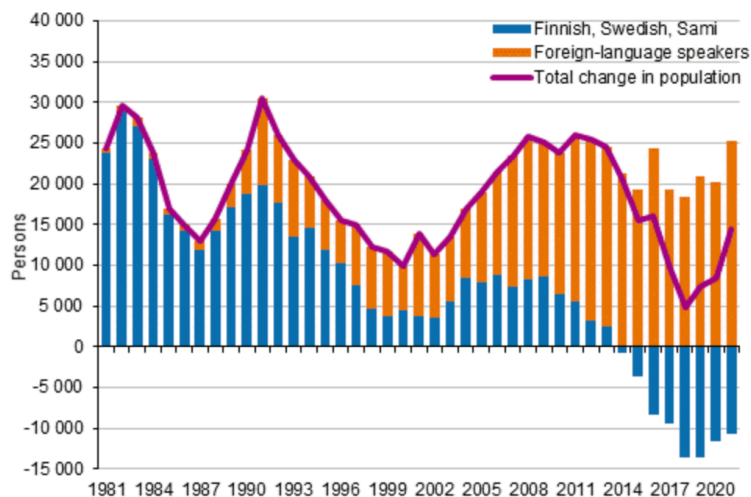
several online meetings during which we discussed the reporting on the interviews and two case studies for each country.

#### 4. Finland, country diversity and racism, history and current situation

##### Finland, population

Finland, as many formerly industrialized countries is facing a severe challenge concerning the aging of its population and the decrease of births (Statistics Finland, 2023). The only growing part in the population are migrants, or as the statistics names them, foreign language speakers and their children. In the bigger cities (over 50.000 population) from 10% to 38% of the school children are from foreign language households.

Change in the population by native language in 1981 to 2021

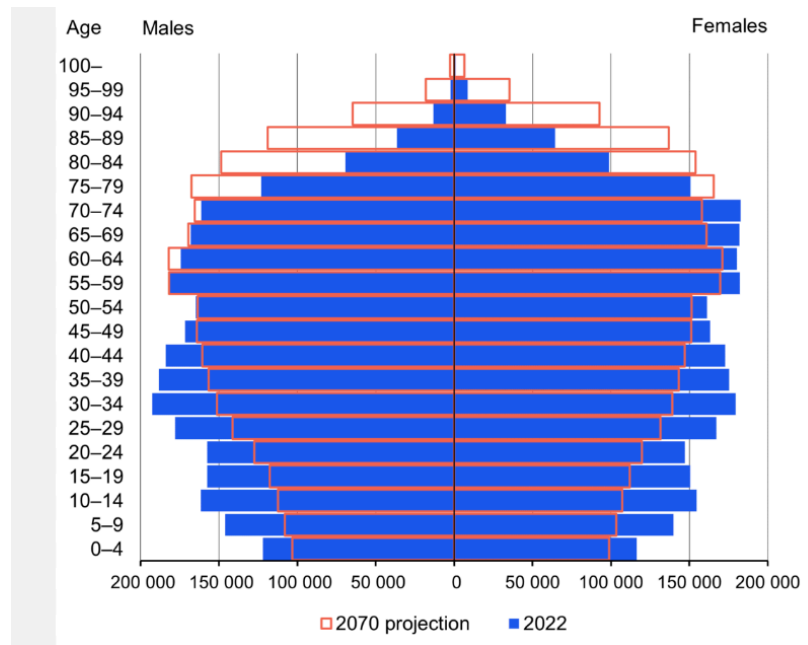


In 2021, Finland's population reached 5,548,241 people, with a net growth of 14,448 individuals, accounting for a 0.3% relative population increase. Notably, the number of native Finnish, Swedish, and Sami speakers decreased by 10,747, while foreign-language speakers increased by 25,195, marking the highest growth in at least four decades.

Population growth was most significant in cities like Espoo (4,336 individuals), Tampere (3,214), and Oulu (2,224), while 15 municipalities with at least 50,000 residents experienced growth, and six saw a decline.

The population increase in Greater Helsinki was solely driven by the foreign-language population, as the number of national language speakers decreased. Overall, 94 municipalities saw growth, while 213 experienced a decline in 2021.

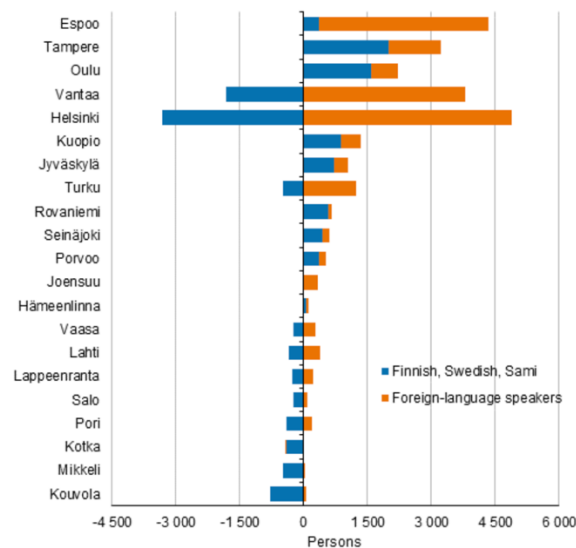
Kymenlaakso, Satakunta, and South Savo regions witnessed a population decrease of over 1,000 people, with Kymenlaakso experiencing the most significant relative decrease at 0.9%.



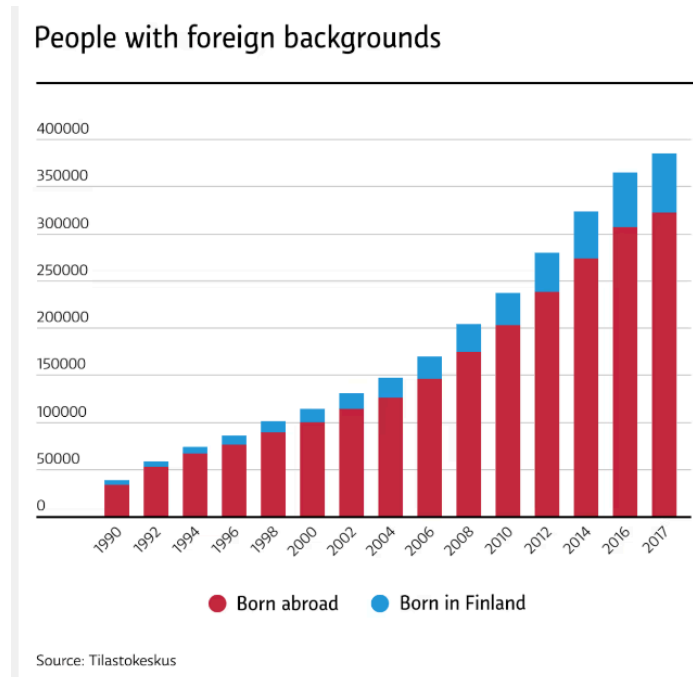
In terms of age distribution, there were substantial variations in wellbeing services counties, with the share of individuals aged 70 or older ranging from nearly 12% in Vantaa and Kerava to almost 24% in South Savo. Six wellbeing services counties had one-fifth of their population aged 70 or above.

The highest percentage of people with foreign origins was found in Åland (17.3%) and Uusimaa (15.7%), while South Ostrobothnia had the lowest share at 2.7%. Half of all individuals with foreign backgrounds resided in Greater Helsinki, with Vantaa (23.4%), Espoo (20.1%), and Närpiö (19.6%) having the highest percentages.

Change in the population of municipalities with at least 50,000 inhabitants by native language in 2021



The average age of first-generation individuals with foreign backgrounds was 38.9 in 2021, compared to 43.6 for the overall population and 44.4 for those with Finnish backgrounds. Second-generation individuals had an average age of 11.5 years. Additionally, 12.1% of children aged 0 to 6 had foreign backgrounds, with Närpiö and Vantaa having the highest proportions, where one in three children fell into this category.



#### 4.1 Country Political History

Finland had originally been populated by the Sami people, one of Europe’s few indigenous people. During the antique and early medieval times ethnic Finns migrated mainly into the countries east as well as ethnic Swedes into the south and west. From the early mediaeval times Finland had then been a more or less self-governed part of either Russia or Sweden, depending which of them would rule over the country at the time. During the last Russian rule Finland had its own citizenship and since 1906 its own parliament, with both men and women having equal voting rights, making the country the first in the world with equal voting rights for men and women.

Eventually the Soviets granted full independence on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1917, arguably rewarding the country for sheltering Lenin during the preparations of the Revolution in Russia. Finland took on the form of a democracy after years of fierce civil war between the left and the right wing. During World War II Finland allied up with Nazi-Germany, but abandoned the union shortly before the end of the war. Finland joined the European Union in 1995 and NATO as recent as April 2023 under Social-Democrat Prime Minister Sanna Marin.



Sanna Marin failed to reach the majority of the votes in the April 2023 elections and a right-wing government is in the makings now.

## **4.2 Diversity**

Due to its history and central geographic position at the Baltic Sea Finland is traditionally a very diverse and at least bi-lingual country. Additionally to the indigenous Sami People, other significantly large traditional ethnic and cultural groups are Roma, who settled in Finland since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, ethnic and linguistic Swedes, Finns, Russians, Jewish and Crimean Tatars of Islamic faith.

All of these groups fought together for Finland in its wars and have separate memorial places for their fallen soldiers. In spite of this, these groups enjoyed different status and privilege, Sami and Roma people the most discriminated against and Swedish and Finnish speakers sharing most of the country's wealth and leadership Tatars, Russian speakers and Jewish citizens are mainly integrated in the mainstream, while maintaining their own separated cultural life. Sami are still struggling for their rights and Roma are repeatedly reporting ethnic profiling and other forms of discrimination up to this day.

By the early 1980s Finland's non-Finnish population was less than 10000 with most parts living in the capital region. First larger population influx from outside the country after World War II were South American refugees in the 1970s, Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s and European matrimonial partners and work-related immigrants during the 1990s. By the end 1990s refugees from Somalia became the first large clearly visible ethnic minority in the country and from here on the country faced a large rise in publicly noticeable racism. It would take an incident within sports to force the country out of denial and to first take action (AP, news. 1995). We will describe this incident in a special chapter.

Today near to half a million inhabitants are of foreign background, with immigrants and children to immigrants being the only growing parts of the population (Statistics Finland. 2023). Finnish economy and industry is in great need of foreign labor.

## **4.3 Racism and colonialism**

Finland has no colonial history as a independent state, but provided soldiers and military leadership in Swedish and Russian conquests and benefitted of colonial trade. Finland, having adopted in the 13<sup>th</sup> century under Swedish rule, participated in the missionization in several African countries since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Historical racism in Finland is not well documented and processed and most of historic racism still is currently revealed in small steps. One of the earliest reported and documented incidence of racism in the country is from Finland's first ethnic African citizen, born 1875, Rosa Emilia Clay, a school teacher and theatre leader who left the country in 1904 to settle in the United States.

As mentioned above, Finland joined Nazi Germany as allies and also deported some of its Jewish citizens who were eventually killed in the nazis concentration camps. Outbreaks of racism are reported from the mid to end 1990s. A 2018 research found Finland to be the most racist country out of 12 European countries against people of African origin (Smith, Adam Oliver. 2018) and another research found significant problems with ethnic profiling (Keskinen, Suvi et al. 2018). A 2019 research found clear discrimination in the labour market for people with non-finnish names (YLE, 2019)

In March 2022 the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance released a warning against Finland for not implementing the two previous reports recommendations. Currently Finland is trying to build a government with the PS party, several of who's leading politicians have been convicted with racial hate speech and who's migration program had earlier been deemed racist by political scientists.

#### **4.4 Racism in Finnish sports, brief history**

The first time racism in Finnish sports forced itself to attention was when Darryl Parker, a black Basketball professional from San Diego was attacked by neo-nazis in the Finnish town of Joensuu and this incident got covered in the US media (AP, news. 1995). Since Finland had been in denial of racisms existence to this point, the international media coverage send a shock wave through the country. The ministry of education, responsible for sports in Finland, swiftly encouraged the Finnish Sports Federation, SLU, to create an office and post for anti-racism in sports and provided a budget of about 200000€ annual funding to cover the salary of an anti-racism officer, operation costs and to fund action against racism through NGO's. This office was established in 1996 and would have great positive effects against racism in Finnish sports, including monitoring for the following decade, but was gradually diminished by integrating the annual funding into the overall costs of the federation and appointing also other tasks to the anti-racism officer. Also funds were not anymore distributed to NGO's after 2009.

Later the Finnish sports federation was dissolved after having mismanaged funds and integrated into the Finnish Olympic Committee. The committee has communication officers and compliance officers, but no more specific office to deal with racism. One of the sidekicks of the SLU's antiracist action in the 2000s was the Football Federations project against racism which was abandoned in 2009 and ended with the threat of a court case with one of the projects workers, which was later settled out of court. Two years later the Ministry of Education would announce a new program for the integration of immigrants through sports which basically replaced anti-racist action in sports and shifted the responsibility away from NGOs and sports organizations towards the different municipalities. One of the effects of these changes was that out of hundreds of migrant self-build sports initiatives during the 1990s and 2000s most disappeared in the 2010s and participation of migrants in non competitive sports is reduced to the private sector.

Back in the mid 1990s racist attacks in sports were not reduced to the public case of the Joensuu basketball. Somali refugees had organized their own community football clubs in

Helsinki and participated in the regular lower leagues. Their games were often interrupted by field invasions, even by car, by neo-nazis armed with baseball bats. These incidents got very little public attention.

Meanwhile, even though the Joensuu 1995 racist attacks on Darryl Parker was the first time that racism in Finnish sports was forced into attention, it was not the first time it happened. At the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 1938 Abraham Tokazier, a Jewish runner from Helsinki was denied victory at the 100 meter run at the opening festival of the Olympic Stadium in Helsinki (Parviainen, Vesa. 2018). He was not granted any medal at all, his name was not mentioned in the winners report. In 2013 the SLU apologized for the wrongdoing and re-established Abraham Tokazier as the rightful medalist, after finding the winners families protests in its files.

Since then racism within different sports has been mentioned randomly and also racism within the structures, for example the so called “homegrown” rule which discriminates against young people and sports professionals who have not been born in Finland has been mentioned. In 2022 Finland's national football team's first black player, Glenn Kamara, suffered racism in a game against Montenegro and in the context, it was mentioned that racism is a problem in Finnish sports as well. Most recently there have been cases of Russophobia in social media, attacking Russian expat athletes for Russia's war on Ukraine. Also other news about racism in sports appears to be accelerating. In latest news the Icehockey federation punished a coach for reacting against racism and a Finnish basketball club abandoned a Baltic youth tournament in Estonia because its players were racially attacked. It seems that coaches on the grassroots take racism more seriously than the federations.

## 5. Other research

### A. The Stopped

This study delved into ethnic profiling in Finland, focusing on its prevalence, manifestations, and interpretations among those who experienced profiling and the police. It also scrutinized the underlying practices and rationales leading to ethnic profiling. The research aimed to generate insights into the distinctions and practices associated with profiling based on ethnicity, race, gender, and age, and to investigate the repercussions of ethnic profiling on those targeted, as well as the strategies they employ during and after such encounters.

**Table 3: The relative proportions of “yes” answers according to ethnicity of respondents<sup>20</sup>**

	Police (others)***	Police (self)	Salespersons & security guards (self) ***	Border control & customs officials (self)
Finnish Speaking majority	13,1 %	16,8 %	6,5 %	-
Swedish speakers	4,9 %	9,8 %	4,9 %	-
Former Soviet Union	19,7 %	14,1 %	9,9 %	15,4 %
Somalian backgrounds	35,9 %	23,1 %	30,8 %	17,9 %
Middle-East, Turkey and North African	46,1 %	28,1 %	21,3 %	29,9 %
others/multicultural	33,3 %	20,0 %	26,7 %	12,5 %
All	24,7 %	19,2 %	14,1 %	-

Police (others): *Do you know young people who have been stopped by the police because of their alleged foreign background or ethnic minority status?*

Police (self): *Have you been stopped by the police without any apparent reason?*

Salespersons & security guards (self): *Have security guards or salespersons in shops been following you or telling you to leave without any apparent reason?*

Border control & customs officials: *Have you been stopped by customs officers or border guards without any apparent reason?*

\*\*\*p<.005

A variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and data sources were employed, including individual and focus group interviews, participatory observation, and survey questionnaires. The study encompassed 185 participants, consisting of 145 individuals from ethnic or racial minorities who were interviewed about their encounters with ethnic profiling, along with 26 police officers and 14 other experts. The data collection took place in the Helsinki metropolitan area and Turku between 2015 and 2017. The survey data encompassed 362 respondents, including young adults aged 15–29 from the Finnish majority population and four ethnic minority groups (Russian, Kurdish, Arabic, and Somali speakers).

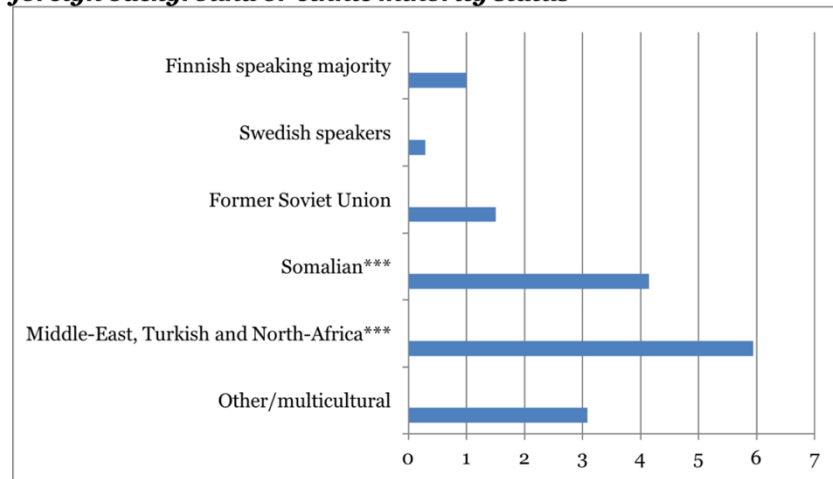
The research revealed that individuals belonging to racialized minorities often face surveillance and ethnic profiling by various actors in urban settings. Stops and experiences of ethnic profiling significantly impact their daily lives, disrupting routines such as commuting and shopping, while also highlighting their status as "outsiders" and, in some cases, potential suspects based on their ethnic or racial backgrounds.

Responses to and interpretations of these stops varied, with some individuals expressing indifference or satisfaction with the treatment received during identity checks, while most described these encounters as unpleasant, annoying, or humiliating. The study found that negative interactions with the police can reduce the willingness of racialized minority individuals to seek police assistance or report crimes.

Intersectionality played a central role in understanding ethnic profiling, with young men from racialized minorities being the primary targets, especially in outdoor locations and public transport hubs. Women and older individuals were also stopped, often in shopping contexts and border control points, involving a range of security personnel.

The study identified four key police practices associated with the risk of ethnic profiling: control of foreign nationals (internal immigration control), suspicion and search related to crimes, public order policing, and traffic stops. The discretionary power granted to the police and the lack of clear criteria for reasonable suspicion in the Finnish Alien's Act contributed to the risk of ethnic profiling. Police practices sometimes began with racialized criteria, with language skills inquiries added later.

**Figure 1: Logistic regression analysis: The risk (odds ratio) of knowing other people stopped by the police because of their alleged foreign background or ethnic minority status**



\*\*\*p<.005

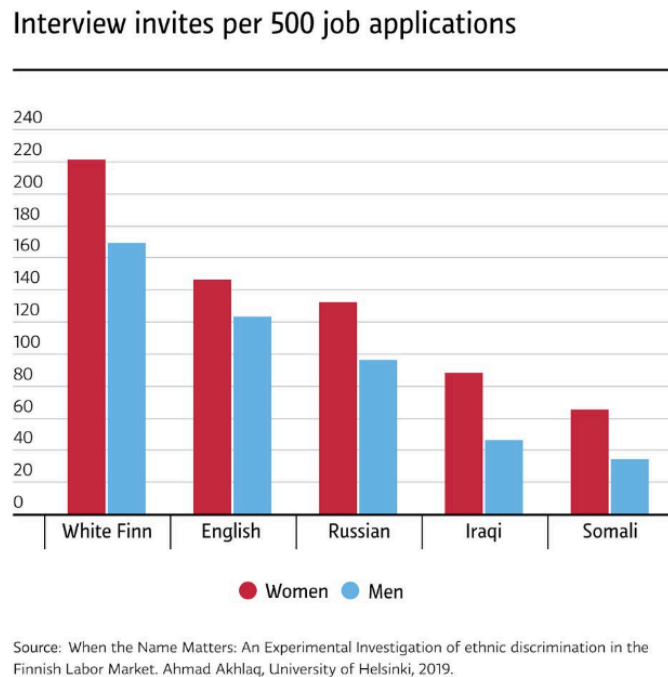
The study also highlighted the inadequacy of documenting the grounds for stops and ID-checks, particularly when the person stopped was a Finnish citizen or had a valid residence permit. Selective and ethnicity-based control acts by security authorities, especially security guards, were evident.

Overall, the research emphasized the need for information on the rights of those stopped and the complaint mechanisms related to ethnic profiling, as many respondents expressed uncertainty about their options for filing complaints. Despite numerous experiences of ethnic profiling, none of the interviewed individuals reported having filed a complaint. In addition

to research findings, the project "The Stopped – Spaces, Meanings, and Practices of Ethnic Profiling" produced media and artistic content.

### **B. Investigating the Impact of Applicant Names on Employment Success: A Study by Akhlaq Ahmad**

This research from 2019, conducted by Akhlaq Ahmad and funded by the Kone Foundation, delves into the pervasive issue of ethnic discrimination in Finland's job market (YLE, 2019). The study highlights the substantial impact of an applicant's name on their likelihood of securing employment, shedding light on the hierarchy that exists in Finnish workplaces. The study involved sending 5,000 job applications with both Finnish and foreign names to open job positions across various sectors, including restaurants and catering, retail, office work, cleaning, and customer service. Each applicant possessed identical qualifications and work experience, had completed their education in Finland, and demonstrated proficiency in the Finnish language. The applicants were divided into five ethnic groups: Finnish, English, Russian, Iraqi, and Somali backgrounds.



The results were startling. Finnish-named applicants received significantly more interview invitations than their non-Finnish counterparts. Specifically, out of 1,000 job applications submitted by Finnish-named candidates, 390 resulted in interview invitations, while Iraqi and Somali-named applicants received only 134 and 99 interview invitations, respectively. These findings suggest that non-European-origin applicants face substantial discrimination in the Finnish job market, with names playing a pivotal role in this bias.

Furthermore, gender also had a notable impact on the success of job applicants. Female applicants, across all ethnic backgrounds, outperformed their male counterparts in securing

job interviews. This indicates that Finnish employers may perceive female applicants as more rule-abiding employees or view male immigrants as greater potential threats.

The research raises concerns about the future employment prospects of Finland's youth from non-European backgrounds, as they are about to enter the job market in substantial numbers. Discrimination in the job search process can diminish their motivation for education and lead them to lower-paying jobs. Consequently, the children of immigrants may find themselves in the same low-wage sectors as their parents, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.

Akhlaq Ahmad's research underscores the need for increased awareness of discrimination in Finnish society and a deeper understanding of its scope. While initiatives like anonymous recruitment may alleviate some disparities, addressing the root cause—discriminatory attitudes—is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable job market.

In conclusion, this study provides crucial insights into the challenges faced by individuals with non-Finnish names in the Finnish job market. It serves as a call to action, urging policymakers, employers, and society as a whole to work towards a more just and inclusive employment environment for all, irrespective of their ethnic background or name.

## **6. Previous research in the field of Sports**

One part and benefit of monitoring racism in connection with sports would be to be able to compare previous data with the current situation and thus be able to make conclusions about development and successful action against racism. Unfortunately, until now monitoring of racism in Finnish sports has not been coordinated and neither been systematic. In order to review previous data documentation can be found in game reports, disciplinary processes, media reports and some previous research. The following research was reviewed during spring 2023 by Liikkukaa – Sports For All in preparation of the Monitora project interviews.

### **A. Päivi Berg: YLE article 2016**

Youth researcher Päivi Bergs research mainly underlines the importance of young peoples participation in sports clubs and warns of the consequences if thresholds for participation are too high for large groups within the population (Berg, Päivi. 2016). In her article, “Todays excluded from sports clubs are tomorrows marginalized” for the YLE news draws on several of her previous research projects, for example the 2013 “Youth on the Move” research, which she conducted together with researcher Sami Myllyniemi (Myllyniemi, Sami. Berg, Päivi. 2013). She explains how due to high costs and other thresholds socio-economical disadvantaged families children struggle to be able and participate in organized sports and due to this miss out on important early life experience, as travel to tournaments, building social networks or managing within a group, which leads to further disadvantage in later life and deepens the gap between different groups in society.

### **B. Grassroots Sports 2018**

Grassroots Sports 2018 is another research conducted by Liikkukaa – Sports For All and was mainly funded by the EU Erasmus+ program as part of an international partnership. The research was conducted by Christian Thibault and Emanuela Susheela Daniel (Daniel, Susheela et. Thibault, Christian. 2018). The project was designed in reaction to the European Commissions High Level Groups report “Grassroots Sports – Shaping Europe” (Bauman et. Cardoso. 2016) and focused on the potential financial savings in health care and social care through boosting grassroots sports and on the factors discouraging people in Europe from participating in sports and necessary measures to overcome these obstacles. The project found that the potential financial savings would be more than significant, that the fear of personal safety and racism were the major obstacles, and that competitive and pro-sports structures are insufficient in motivating large parts of the population to conduct sports. The major conclusion was that grassroots sports needs its own agency, structures, and funding.



### **C. MAPS Research, Monitoring Attitudes and Progress in Sports, 2012**

MAPS, Monitoring Attitude and Progress in Sports 2012, a research conducted by sociologist Mona Magi for Liikkukaa – Sports For All (Magi, Mona. 2011). The target was to identify the markers for racism in Finnish Sports and to provide a data base which would allow to monitor future development by comparison of data. For this referee and disciplinary reports in several Finnish football leagues were evaluated and the wellbeing of immigrant own sports initiatives was mapped out, interviews were conducted with immigrants and different sports federations leadership and random reports of racism were followed up.

It was found that in some leagues immigrants got fined up to 5x harder than perceived white Finns, that immigrant initiatives were lacking support and next to zero immigrants had been employed within the sports structures. Racism was found to discourage immigrants from participating in sports and some of the dress rules, for example in swimming, were keeping Muslim women out of sports. The research report was presented to all federations and to the ministry of education in 2012 but follow up funding for the research was rejected. Some of the raised data could still be useful comparison now.

### **D. LIITU 2023**

The LIITU – Children and Youths Attitude Towards Sports - research was conducted by the University of Jyväskylä in cooperation with the Finnish states Sports council and others with the target to create a nationwide data base about 7 to 19 year old's attitude, experiences and habits towards and within sports (Kokko, S., Hämylä, R., & Martin, L. 2023). The results have been received as disappointing and alarming, because sports activity of young people has decreased dramatically and is predicted to continue doing so. Liikkukaa – Sports For All Monitora - project staff participated in the research report publication event at the Olympic Stadium in March 2023, both in person as online and was able to ask project relevant questions. The event was well visited by basically all decision makers within Finnish sports.

#### **Liittu study results in brief:**

The Finnish School-aged Physical Activity (LIITTU) monitoring study offers comprehensive insights into the physical activity of Finnish children and youth aged 7 to 15. Data collected in March to June 2022 via online surveys and accelerometers, during the third COVID-19 wave and other events, reveals that while 61% of respondents noted increased activity in the past year, only 36% met recommended activity levels. Boys outperformed girls in meeting recommendations, and a decline in physical activity was observed as children grew older. Independent physical activity and sports club participation decreased across age groups. Common activities included skiing, football, skating, and swimming. The decline in physical

activity since 2018, especially among girls, is notable, along with increased obstacles reported by girls. Fewer participants engaged in sports club activities in 2022 compared to 2018. The report covers various aspects, including device use, sedentary time, parental support, and disparities between speakers and those with disabilities. Overall, promoting physical activity, especially among older children and girls, remains a challenge in Finland.

## **Bullying and inappropriate treatment**

In recent years, there has been an increasing discussion about inappropriate treatment in sports. However, the phenomenon and its prevalence have been relatively understudied. The issue of children and young people experiencing violence in organized sports activities was first addressed in the Child Victim Survey in 2013. This survey was repeated in 2022. Both surveys included questions about various organized activities, with sports being the most common, engaging 75% to 79% of participants. Mental violence was found to be more prevalent in sports (20%) than in other organized activities.

A 2022 study of athletes aged 16 and older conducted by the Finnish Center for Ethics in Sports also revealed instances of inappropriate treatment. Young athletes, in particular, are at risk of bullying, violence, and other forms of inappropriate treatment in sports.

In a 2016 study, discrimination and bullying experiences of children and young people in sports were examined. Over one-third of the participants reported being discriminated against or bullied, and about one-fifth of these experiences occurred in sports. Sports activities ranked as the third most common location for discrimination and bullying, following school and the internet.

This year's study examined various forms of inappropriate treatment in sports, who was responsible for it, how it was handled, and whether it had ceased. Inappropriate treatment referred to any actions perceived as disrespectful or unpleasant by young individuals. The study revealed that various forms of inappropriate treatment occur in sports, with 23% of young individuals who participated in sports reporting experiencing it. The most common forms of inappropriate treatment included mocking or name-calling, swearing and shouting, and exclusion from the group, with these forms of mistreatment primarily considered psychological abuse. Threats, coercion, and physical violence were less common but still prevalent. Sexual harassment was the least common form of inappropriate treatment.

The study found that the most frequent perpetrators of inappropriate treatment were peers (45%), followed by coaches or trainers (23%). Sometimes, young individuals themselves (6%) or parents of teammates (6%) were also responsible, involving adults in at least one-third of inappropriate treatment cases. Incidents involving spectators and online bullying were also reported to some extent.

When addressing inappropriate treatment incidents, young individuals most often turned to adults, such as their parents (35%) or coaches (10%). However, nearly one-third of those who experienced inappropriate treatment did not report it to anyone.

It is worth noting that a significant portion of young individuals contemplated quitting organized sports due to inappropriate treatment, with over 36% considering it. This percentage was higher among athletes who competed at the national level.

**Conclusion:**

Although the research is rather large and also deals with different societal groups and discouraging factors such as harassment, no data has been evaluated and no attention has been paid concerning migrant and racialized youth and racist incidents and structures. This even though above mentioned groups are the only growing parts in Finland's population, for example Helsinki population in the age groups concerned consists of 25% non native Finnish speakers and racist incidents are reported at high frequency in the media. So this might be seen as a missed opportunity, given that this is the main monitoring tool for youth in Finnish sports. It does indicate however, how bullying and similar behavior is turning away a large part of young people from sports. The methodology could be used to identify racism in sports as well. Since this study is done tri-annually, this would be a great tool to monitor racism in youth sports.

## **7. Monitora Interviews**

### **Preparations**

The interviews contain of 5 main questions and are documented on video, audio and/or in written form. We also discussed the nature and number of the interviewees and settled for 20 interviews to be conducted with persons representing different institutions from different parts of the field. Namely: Actors in governmental institutions, actors in sports organizations, actors in sports clubs from different sports, societal actors, potential targets of racism, authorities, police and journalists. Because Finland being a rather small country and people being somewhat aware of each other we were careful to choose interviewer/interviewee couplings with no previous inter-personal or institutional history to keep the interviews and the result as neutral as possible. The interviewers were Jean Marc Alingue, Emanuela Susheela Daniel, Kirsi Mutshipule and Christian Thibault.

By the end of April we were prepared to conduct the chosen Interview partners and to pair them with the suitable interviewer. As the target was to conduct 20 Interviews and we anticipated that not everyone would agree to the interview we chose 30 potential interview partners. We researched possible confidentiality regulations and their impact on the interviews to be able to ensure potential interviewees their personal data safety. We created a five-page info in English and Finnish for the interview partners and a cover text for the first email contact to ensure neutral and equal communication with all interview partners. By mid May about 65% of the 20 interviews had been agreed upon and about 50% had been conducted. Some arrangements with other interviewees were still pending, but from half about 50% of the contacted 30 we had not yet heard back in spite of reminders having been send and their might be the need to contact 3 or 5 additional persons. 2 or 3 of the contacted persons felt they were not in the right position to answer our questions and had suggested others whom they felt were in a better position, partly delegating downwards in the organizations hierarchy, but also the opposite appeared, as well as one interesting new potential interview partner having been pointed out during one of the already conducted interviews. It took until mid June to complete the targeted 20 interviews.

Additionally several semi-formal interviews have been made, in form of phone conversations, lunch meetings and online chats, mostly in connection to the two case studies.

### **Methods and target groups**

Interviewees were guaranteed anonymity. All interviewees were presented the same questions. Most of the interviews were conducted directly, person to person, some were online via zoom and have been documented on video. Additionally to the 20 interviews quoted, we also received informal answers by mail and had several informal meetings, as for

example a lunch meeting or a meeting at a sports venue, where the interview topics were discussed with relevant actors. Some of those discussions have found an echo in the final conclusion section.

To ensure anonymity of the respondents and to be able to compare the approach of different levels within sports with each other we have grouped the answers in the following way.

Group 1, Researchers and Journalists, (R), 5 interviews

Group 2, Grassroots (G), Parents and coaches, 6 interviews

Group 3, Public Servants (Governmental) (PG), 3 Interviews

Group 4, Federations (High Level) (F), 6 Interviews

**Interview questions:**

1. Have you ever witnessed any form of racism within sports and if so, how did you act on it?
2. Are you aware of any practices in place to monitor racism within sports and if so, what are those practices?
3. Do you recognize the monitoring practices of racism within sports as being effective and sufficient?
4. Are you in any position or role to be involved in the monitoring and reporting of racism within sports?
5. Is there anything you would like to point out additionally in the context of racism within sports?

## **8. Interviews, results**

### **Answers by groups:**

#### **Group 1, Researchers and Journalists (R):**

##### **1: Have you ever witnessed any form of racism within sports and if so, how did you act on it?**

Not all respondents have directly witnessed racism in sports but have been involved in research on racism's structural aspects in sports, especially concerning financial and cultural inequalities. They have worked on highlighting these issues and considering ways to address them. Respondents believe that Finnish media sometimes have a racist attitude when reporting on migrants' actions. They mention a feeling of exceptionalism in Finnish beliefs, where nothing Finns do is considered wrong. Additionally, they note that some of the population feels like the new minority and that the press and politicians may exploit immigrants for political gain. They also mention nonchalance towards racist acts, discrimination based on stereotypes, and structural racism within the system.

One respondent told that in the world of Finnish press, reports about racist incidents in sports are sometimes covered, including fan chanting racist songs or when a referee stops a game. In elite football leagues, athletes with migrant backgrounds who face bullying receive support from the press and the football community.

**Quote:** "I have not directly witnessed racism in sports, but I have been involved in research on racism's structural aspects in sports, especially concerning financial and cultural inequalities. I have worked on highlighting these issues and considering ways to address them."

##### **2: Are you aware of any practices in place to monitor racism within sports, and if so, what are those practices?**

The respondents are not aware of specific practices in place to monitor racism in sports but believe that these practices may vary among sports organizations and associations. One respondent suggests that national media lack enough journalists with migrant backgrounds to investigate racism in Finnish sports effectively. They emphasize the need for more reporters from diverse backgrounds to provide a fair perspective on the issue.

**Quote:** "I am not aware of specific practices in place to monitor racism in sports, but these practices may vary among sports organizations and associations."

**Question 3: Do you recognize the monitoring practices of racism within sports as being effective and sufficient?**

The respondents do not consider the current monitoring practices effective and suggest that addressing racism in sports relies heavily on individuals' abilities to recognize and report it, given the heavy burden of proof required. They suggest that the Finnish national media do not cover racism effectively in sports, particularly concerning high-profile athletes. They highlight the difficulties of addressing this issue without a deep understanding of the context and the necessary time for reflection.

**Quote:** "I do not consider the current monitoring practices effective, and addressing racism in sports often relies on individuals' abilities to recognize and report it, given the heavy burden of proof required."

**Question 4: Are you in any position or role to be involved in the monitoring and reporting of racism within sports?**

Respondents, while not officially involved with sports organizations or associations, recognize the responsibility of individuals, especially parents, to support those who experience racism in sports. They emphasize the importance of offering support and reducing the burden of proof for victims.

**Question 5: Is there anything you would like to point out additionally in the context of racism within sports?**

The respondents emphasize the importance of addressing racism in sports and encourage efforts to create tools for better measurement and awareness. They also highlight the need for self-reflection and critical examination of the extent of such issues.

**Quote:** "We need more activism to raise awareness."

## **Group 2, Grassroots (G), Parents and coaches, 6 interviews**

### **1. Have you ever witnessed any form of racism within sports and if so, how did you act on it?**

Respondents have witnessed racism in the sports they participate in. They emphasize their proactive approach as a team to address and prevent such incidents, using various measures. Finnish football is described as xenophobic, with players segregated based on nationality, language barriers, and biases. It's noted that racist language is more prevalent in Finland compared to some other countries. One interviewee works in a multicultural area, where the prevalence of diversity possibly contributes to the reduced occurrence of racism.

### **2. Are you aware of any practices in place to monitor racism within sports and if so, what are those practices?**

Some respondents are aware of policies aimed at preventing racism in sports. Athletes receive annual talks on racism, and clubs have written policies against inappropriate behavior, although they are not consistently enforced. The need for more focused attention on combating racism in football, from grassroots to top-level, is highlighted. The effectiveness of monitoring practices is questioned.

**Quote:** "Some time ago when I started as a football coach at first there was this indirect racist facial expression and behavior of not accepting a black woman to be a coach."

### **3. Do you recognize the monitoring practices of racism within sports as being effective and sufficient?**

Respondents in Finland express frustration with the inadequate implementation of policies and a lack of widespread knowledge about them. They emphasize the need for more protection from sports organizations. The impact of anti-harassment programs in Finnish schools is limited outside the school environment, with influences from home and societal attitudes contributing to the issue.

While there's acknowledgment of progress, respondents emphasize that more collective effort is required to eradicate racism in sports.

### **4. Are you in any position or role to be involved in the monitoring and reporting of racism within sports?**

Respondents express their commitment to justice and their role as team players in protecting themselves and their peers by detecting, monitoring, and reporting racism. Coaches have attempted to create new rules to combat racism but face resistance from Finnish partner



coaches. Individuals in various roles, including coaching, express their responsibility to report any form of racism.

### **5. Is there anything you would like to point out additionally in the context of racism within sports?**

Respondents call for organizations and individuals to be more vocal and proactive in combating racism, emphasizing the importance of taking real action.

Suggestions include starting anti-discrimination education at a young age, teaching appropriate responses to racism, increasing the presence of professional coaches, and providing more funding to promote equality in sports clubs.

**Quote:** “I would like to say to the people and organizations fighting against racism to please be more verbal and to seriously speak up, not to be intimidated and silent, take real action and speak up.”

### **Group 3, Federations (High Level) (F), 6 Interviews**

Racism has been an enduring issue in the world of sports, and high-level federations in Finland are not immune to its effects. In a series of interviews with six representatives from these federations, valuable insights emerged regarding the presence of racism in sports, the practices in place to monitor it, and the effectiveness of these measures. Additionally, the interviewees shed light on their roles in addressing racism and shared their perspectives on this pervasive problem.

#### **Interview answers:**

#### **1. Have you ever witnessed any form of racism within sports and if so, how did you act on it?**

Racism and discrimination were found to be most prevalent in futsal, primarily occurring between opposing players. This often unfolds in the realm of social media, which has become a breeding ground for hate speech and racial slurs. While racism among spectators and athletes in track and field was deemed rare, the sport faces another challenge. It struggles to attract young individuals from migrant backgrounds, potentially due to structural discrimination and financial barriers. Notably, several interviewees, including a general manager, recounted their personal experiences with racism during their extensive careers in sports. Their testimonies underscored the unfortunate reality of racism's pervasive nature, especially on digital platforms.

**Quote:** “Racism takes many forms in sports. We have the situation where migrant kids are not much seen in our sports, the reason can be structural racism and discrimination.”

**2. Are you aware of any practices in place to monitor racism within sports and if so, what are those practices?**

High-level federations are actively collaborating with partner organizations to combat discrimination and racism within sports. These efforts encompass promoting awareness through discussions and facilitating interactions between athletes. The Finnish Football Federation stands out with its clear and comprehensive rules against racism and discrimination.

However, despite various campaigns and workshops addressing racism, there is no formal monitoring system in place to systematically track incidents in Finnish football. Several committees and organizations are involved in addressing racism, but a significant challenge remains: the lack of comprehensive data on such incidents. To encourage reporting, federations have introduced forms that allow individuals to report racism anonymously, if desired.

**3. Do you recognize the monitoring practices of racism within sports as being effective and sufficient?**

The effectiveness of monitoring practices was questioned, primarily because high-level federations possess limited authority to combat racism effectively. Instead, this responsibility falls on organizations like the Finnish Football Association and the Olympic Committee, which have the legal mandate to address racism. Nevertheless, the lack of comprehensive data on racist incidents remains a significant concern.

High-level federations acknowledge the need for increased emphasis on combatting racism, especially with the growing number of athletes involved. There is also an element of uncertainty regarding how other sports organizations handle racism, indicating a need for more comprehensive anti-racism efforts across the board. Sports relies on different highly promoted agencies for collecting and facilitating reports, yet these agencies themselves do not feel competent or empowered.

**Quote:** "There isn't much emphasis given to the fight against racism by our federation. 30 minutes per year to meet a team, discuss on light issues and take a picture with the team."

**4. Are you in any position or role to be involved in the monitoring and reporting of racism within sports?**

While interviewees hold positions within the Finnish Olympic Committee, which allows them to voice their views on football players' situations, they are not equipped to collect data or formally monitor racism. Coaches and leaders within sports teams play a role in observing and addressing racism within their respective teams. However, it's important to note that monitoring racism is not a formal part of their responsibilities.

**5. Is there anything you would like to point out additionally in the context of racism within sports?**

High-level federations are currently directing their attention towards campaigns related to match-fixing and emphasizing the importance of diversity in sports. Interviewees highlight the necessity for representation from migrant backgrounds within their sports. Moreover, they emphasize that anti-racism efforts should be a collective responsibility, expressing concerns about the potential oversight of racism within organizational structures.

**Quote:** "I see a risk that we ignore racism in the structures just because we have succeeded to decrease the obvious cases of direct racism at the venues."

**In conclusion:**

These interviews with high level representatives from sports federations in Finland reveal the multifaceted nature of racism in sports. While efforts are being made to combat racism and discrimination, the interviews underscore the need for more robust monitoring systems, increased awareness, and collective responsibility across sports organizations. There also is a confusion about competency and agency. Actors are hinting at each other for responsibility of monitoring, but nobody sees themselves impowered. Addressing racism on social media platforms and ensuring diverse representation within sports are challenges that require immediate attention. Ultimately, these insights provide a valuable perspective on the ongoing struggle to eliminate racism from the world of sports.

## **Group 4, Public Servants (Governmental) (PG), 3 Interviews**

### **Introduction:**

Here we explore the perspectives of three government officials who play pivotal roles in monitoring and addressing racism within the realm of sports. Through their responses, we gain valuable insights into the presence of racism in sports, existing practices to combat it, their effectiveness, and the officials' roles in the process.

### **Interview answers:**

- 1. Have you ever witnessed any form of racism within sports and if so, how did you act on it?**

The interviewees' responses highlight various instances of racism within sports. One incident involved a basketball game where a black player was unfairly singled out by a referee due to an unfortunate choice of words. This incident exemplifies the subtle yet pervasive nature of racism within sports.

- 2. Are you aware of any practices in place to monitor racism within sports and if so, what are those practices?**

The government officials discussed the practices in place to monitor racism within sports. In the football federation, referee reports concerning racism were collected annually and evaluated. However, these reports likely represent only a fraction of the actual incidents, indicating that many cases go unreported. The officials also mentioned the importance of ethical considerations and equality plans when evaluating sports organizations seeking government funding.

**Quote:** "The majority of inappropriate situations that we receive reports about are related to other issues than racism, for example, sexual harassment."

- 3. Do you recognize the monitoring practices of racism within sports as being effective and sufficient?**

While they acknowledged the significance of the practices, the officials expressed concerns about their adequacy. They believe that there is still much work to be done to combat racism effectively in sports. The lack of comprehensive data on racist incidents was identified as a major challenge.

**4. Are you in any position or role to be involved in the monitoring and reporting of racism within sports?**

The officials, in their roles, have the capacity to influence and initiate actions against racism in sports. They can impact policy decisions, funding allocation, and research initiatives. Additionally, they maintain a close connection with sports organizations, enabling them to encourage ethical conduct and anti-racist efforts.

**5. Is there anything you would like to point out additionally in the context of racism within sports?**

The interviewees shared additional thoughts on tackling racism in sports. They emphasized the need for a multifaceted approach, combining penalties and education to combat racism effectively. They highlighted the challenges of issuing bans to unruly spectators and addressing racism faced by foreign teams in international competitions. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of international collaboration to establish unified anti-racist standards across sports.

**Quote:** " I think a lot about what the best methods are to erase racism in Sports. Are they maybe a combination of penalties and education?"

**Conclusion on government officials interviews:**

Government officials involved in monitoring and addressing racism in sports play a crucial role in promoting equality and fairness within the sporting community. While progress has been made, there is a consensus that more needs to be done to eliminate racism in sports comprehensively. The insights provided by these officials shed light on the challenges and opportunities in this ongoing battle against discrimination in the sporting world.

## **Conclusion on all interviews:**

As the main impression by all Liikkukaa – Sports For All project staff and interviewers the lack of awareness, information and coordination between the actors stands out. Since about 30% of the people contacted did not respond, we can only speak about those who did, but interviewers felt that interview partners were generally interested in the topic, understanding its urgency and friendly towards the interviewers and felt that something should be done against racism and to monitor it, but nobody really felt fully responsible, resourced, and empowered to do so.

There was a feeling that there was the assumption that someone else would take care of it, but who that is, was largely unclear, except for one interviewee who hinted to the direction of a sos-racism hotline. As an answer to our interview request the persons responsible for this told us they have not received any reports. It appears that politicians and public servants are aware of those programs, but people on the grassroot level are not.

Victims of racism and those potentially to be victims said they prefer to stay in peer groups, where the risk of encountering racism is smaller. They also feel they must deal with racism on their own. Media is not interested to report, unless a famous person or club is involved. A lack of understanding of the different types of racism and its nature became obvious. Most of all there was very little awareness off structural racism except for those who pointed out that others and those “higher up” were not aware of it. Respondents call for organizations and individuals to be more vocal and proactive in combating racism, emphasizing the importance of taking real action.

Suggestions include starting anti-discrimination education at a young age, teaching appropriate responses to racism, increasing the presence of professional coaches, and providing more funding to promote equality in sports clubs.

Racism was largely perceived as being reduced to something spectators would shout during games. While only very few interviewees seemed to be aware of what structural racism is, micro-aggressions were even less known and mentioned by only one interviewee.

There was some awareness of this problem by some of the people in responsibility. Nobody was aware of any systematic collection or evaluation of data. Except for one person who pointed out that the football federation is evaluating referee reports on racism. There was a tendency of delegating. It was also pointed out that the general attitude in the country plays into what is happening in sports. The responses provide a multifaceted view of racism in sports, highlighting both the presence of the issue and the need for more effective prevention and action. It was pointed out that only grassroots organizations and activists are serious about the problem, but that they are lacking the resources to efficiently monitor racism in sports.

While there are contradictions in some perspectives, the overall message is clear: racism in sports remains a challenge that requires better monitoring, education and a collective effort to eradicate. Recommendations include the need for the Finnish sports to request more feedback on racist incidents, which could encourage coaches to act against racism.

**Special note:**

Most government officials including the minister (in an interview) have hinted to the “You are not alone” project as the ultimate address for monitoring racism in sports. When we had already earlier contacted them for an interview, this was the answer:

“Thank you for your message! It's great that such a collaborative project has been undertaken to investigate situations and practices related to racism in the world of sports.

The "You Are Not Alone" service is intended for anyone who has encountered or observed any form of inappropriate behavior in the world of sports. Therefore, incidents related to racism can also be reported to our service, although these themes have not been widely brought to our attention thus far. While we collaborate with the sports community (e.g., by providing training to sports clubs and sports federations), we are not directly involved in grassroots sports. As experts from the "You Are Not Alone" service, we are not in a position to personally detect, monitor, or report racism in sports. So, when it comes to racism in sports, we largely rely on research, reporting, and other media sources.”

## 9. Case Studies

We have chosen two case studies to highlight the need to improve monitoring of racism in sports and the consequences of failing to do so. The cases also demonstrate the need to clearly address competency, advocacy, and responsibilities, to provide education and not least of all, resources. We have been able to interview several of the actors involved in the case studies, however they were promised anonymity. The case studies were researched and composed by Jean-Marc Alingue, Susheela Daniel, Kirsi Mutshipule and Christian Thibault.

### 9.1 Case Study 1: Addressing Racist Incident in Finnish Junior Ice Hockey

#### Background

In November 2022, a 13-year-old junior hockey player from Lahden Pelicans, Finland, reported being subjected to a racist insult during a game. This incident exemplifies the urgent need for clear competency, agency, and structures to effectively monitor and combat racism in sports, particularly within the Finnish Ice Hockey Association (Jääkiekkoliitto).

*Note: For this case study we had been able to conduct one informal interview and one formal interview with representatives of some of the authorities involved. This was done under the promise of animosity. The conclusion made in the case study was supported by these persons.*

#### Incident

During the closing moments of the game, the player informed his coaching staff that he had been targeted with a racist slur by an opponent. This wasn't an isolated incident, as the player had faced similar abuse before. He described the insult as containing two offensive words, one beginning with 'F' in Finnish and the other being a racial slur (IS, 2022).

#### Response

Lahden Pelicans' junior team sought to address the racist taunting and planned to appeal to the Sports Legal Protection Board regarding the Finnish Ice Hockey Association's actions. This highlighted the importance of having a competent and empowered body capable of handling such situations. The team believed that the association was not taking the incident seriously enough and were concerned about the educational rights of young players.

#### Game Suspension

Pelicans abandoned a junior game in early November due to the alleged racist insult. The team's coach wanted referees to address the situation promptly, but according to him, they



did not. The consequences were severe, with the head coach receiving a three-game suspension, and the club was fined €1,000 based on the association's rules.

## **Investigation**

The Finnish Ice Hockey Federation's competition manager, Pirkka Antila, stated that the federation took discriminatory behavior seriously but noted that referees couldn't confirm the racist language. This underscored the pressing need for clear structures and guidelines for monitoring and addressing discrimination incidents. The incident was investigated by the opposing club, and the accused player was also probed. However, with conflicting accounts, the association relied on its rules and available evidence (IS, 2023).

## **Resolution and Reconciliation**

In June 2023, after significant public pressure and damage to its image, the Finnish Ice Hockey Federation admitted wrongdoing. They agreed to pay €3,000 each to both the junior player who experienced racism and his coach, who had previously been penalized for suspending the game. Additionally, the federation committed to covering all expenses related to the dispute, demonstrating the importance of having mechanisms in place for accountability and restitution.

The federation acknowledged the discrimination and the need for corrective actions, offering apologies to both the player and the coach, as stated in the Equality Ombudsman's press release (MTV, 2023).

## **Promoting Equality in Sports**

The resolution of this case serves as a poignant reminder of the necessity for clear competency, agency, and structures to effectively monitor and combat racism in sports. The Equality Ombudsman emphasized that everyone has the right to non-discrimination in sports, especially when young players are involved. It is essential to address and prevent racist and discriminatory behavior firmly.

The federation has reportedly made significant improvements in its operations by issuing new guidelines to referees and teams to handle discrimination incidents. According to the Equality Ombudsman, the federation has also committed to disseminating these guidelines through training and communication efforts. They aim to enhance their disciplinary procedures and competition rules to prevent discrimination and unlawful retaliatory actions effectively.

## **Challenges in Addressing Racism**

This case highlights the challenges in addressing racism in sports. The incident was clear-cut, witnessed by many, and documented extensively. However, the lack of competency and agency to address racism when it is missing from the referee's report resulted in a protracted and painful process.

The Finnish Sports Ethical Commission (SUEK) expressed concern about the case but lacked the authority to act without a request from the Olympic committee. The Olympic committee, in turn, couldn't intervene because the Ice Hockey Federation is not a member.

## **Ongoing Case**

The Finnish Ice Hockey Association is attempting to create new guidelines to prevent similar incidents in the future. However, the case underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive framework that ensures swift and effective action against racism in sports.

## **Conclusion**

This case underscores the critical importance of establishing clear competency, agency, and structures to monitor and combat racism in sports. While the incident was unequivocal and widely condemned, the absence of mechanisms to address racism when it is not included in the referee's report led to a prolonged and frustrating process. It is imperative to create a robust framework that can swiftly and decisively address racism in sports, protecting the rights and well-being of athletes, particularly young players.

## **9.2 Case Study 2 for Monitora 2023: Controversial Incident at Itäkeskus Swimming Hall Involving "Finland First" Activists**

### **Background:**

A Representative from the Finnish Swimming Teaching and Lifesaving Federation (FSL) and the University of Jyväskylä, in collaboration with the Finnish National Agency for Education, conducted a nationwide study on swimming skills in 2022 (SUH, 2023).

The study found that a substantial 45% of sixth-grade students lacked adequate swimming skills or had none at all, there are still age groups with insufficient swimming skills, raising concerns about children's safety in water environments.

The Finnish Safety and Chemicals Agency (Tukes) also observed the consequences of this issue in its oversight of services. Reports submitted to Tukes indicated that children's inadequate swimming abilities led to serious water-related dangers and accidents.

Tukes and FSL are advocating for heightened attention to be given to assessing the swimming abilities of children and young people, as well as ensuring their safety in aquatic environments. Service providers need to recognize that their facilities may be accessed by customers who lack swimming skills, including slightly older children, and they should be prepared for such scenarios.

It has often been stipulated that swimmers under the age of ten or those unable to swim can only enter the water in the company of a person at least 15 years of age who possesses strong swimming skills. Consequently, the swimming abilities of ten-year-olds are not routinely assessed, especially if they are accompanied by friends. Parents bear the responsibility for their children's safety in aquatic environments, emphasizing the importance of parental vigilance.

In cases where necessary, customers can be inquired about their swimming skills or requested to demonstrate their swimming ability. Beyond supervision, a variety of measures must be considered to ensure the safety of individuals who lack swimming skills in service settings.

Promoting water safety and ensuring that everyone residing in Finland can be secure in aquatic environments are vital, given that Finland's culture and leisure activities heavily revolve around its lakes, seashores, and saunas.

**What happened:**

In February 2017, the anti-immigrant Suomi "Finland First" movement extended its activities from the streets to a swimming hall in Helsinki. During this incident, a group of Suomi Ensin activists, including a Lahti municipal election candidate, organized a "swimming patrol" at Itäkeskus swimming hall.

The reason for this surveillance, as explained by the right wing activist, was to respond to a Facebook request to investigate disturbances that had reportedly occurred at the swimming hall. During the patrol, the activists reportedly confronted individuals of foreign backgrounds. The activists recorded their experiences during the visit and later shared them on YouTube.

Following this incident, an anonymous individual contacted Etelä-Suomen Sanomat and informed them that they had filed a complaint with the Helsinki police regarding the swimming patrol. The complainant requested an investigation into potential offenses related to public decency, harassment, coercion, and disruption of public order by the participants in the swimming patrol. They argued that the incident had racial, ethnic, and religious elements.

The Helsinki police confirmed that they had received a complaint about the incident. The far right activists dismissed the complaint as insignificant, while the police were keen to observe how the situation would develop. It is worth noting that the Helsinki Sports Department, responsible for managing the Itäkeskus swimming hall, had prior knowledge of the activists' swimming patrol through social media. The on-duty manager was present during the incident, although permission from the staff had not been sought.

**The outcome:**

The case was largely reported in the media. During interviews with the sports department, the swimming and life-saving federation, the swimming hall staff and the police it occurred that everybody still has a memory of this high profile case. However, nobody had followed up on the request for police investigation and there was no official record of the case.

### **9.3 Related incidents:**

To put the case studies into context and perspective, similar cases were evaluated, and the correlations were significant. They further underline the need for proper monitoring and follow up even on single cases as they might be related to a deep-rooted challenge.

#### **1. Jakomäki Muslim Women Swimming Hour**

In 2011, the Jakomäki swimming hall closed down its swimming hours for Muslim women. The decision to discontinue separate swimming hours for Muslim women was made due to negative feedback from other swimmers, according to the head of the sports facility department. Prior the Jakomäki swimming hall offered a designated swimming session on Saturday mornings known as the "immigrants' swimming hour" after a Muslim girls' swimming class. This session also attracted other women.

The head of department stated that the decision to discontinue the separate session was made at a higher level of authority. He emphasized that the timing of the session had been a point of contention. Previously, the swimming hall was not open to the public on Saturdays and had now been opened to give Muslim women the opportunity to learn to swim, which led to debates (YLE, 2011).

#### **2. Blogger Exposes Messages from Suomi Ensin Movement Leader – "Targeted Actions in Collaboration with Alternative Media"**

This case delves into the exposure by a prominent blogger, of a series of messages written by the leader of the "Finland First" anti-immigrant movement. These messages shed light on the organization's strategies and its collaboration with alternative media outlets. The blogger's post unveils messages authored by a key figure within the Suomi Ensin (Finland First) movement. These messages reveal a concerning agenda behind the organization's activities. The movements critical comments about the country and its political leadership underscore the group's nationalist sentiments. According to the messages, the organization's objectives include disrupting, pressuring, and intimidating entities that collaborate with immigrants and their children, encouraging them to reconsider their "liberal projects".

"Finland First" was a Finnish nationalist party that evolved from the "Finland First" anti-immigrant activists group into a political party. The party was known for its street activism and active presence on social media. It fielded candidates in parliamentary, European Parliament, municipal, and regional elections. After the 2023 parliamentary elections, the party was deregistered due to its failure to secure any seats in two consecutive parliamentary elections. In July of the same year, the party filed for bankruptcy and announced the cessation of its activities.

The so-called "targeted demonstrations" aim to "identify individuals of concern and approach them closely." In one instance, the group attempted to confront an individual, highlighting

their confrontational approach. In another instance, the leader mentioned an incident where protests took place during karate courses offered to asylum seekers, suggesting that such actions might have deterred organizations from providing free karate classes to refugees.

The messages reveal that the harassment of individuals and organizations supporting immigrants persisted. Even when an activist sought to intervene during an incident, the leader continued with their provocative rhetoric. Questions arose about the guidelines for addressing hate speech incidents and why facility staff did not intervene.

Alternative media outlets appear to play a significant role in Suomi Ensin's operations. The leader has been featured multiple times on platforms such as MV-lehti, emphasizing the importance of coordinated actions with alternative media. They believe that personalizing and publicly exposing the individuals they target, and then confronting them in person, holds more sway than mere articles or online discourse.

On April 9, 2019, the Helsinki Police Department announced suspicions of incitement against members of the party's parliamentary election campaign, including then-chairman Marco de Wit and another candidate, Kristiina Brandt. The police alleged that campaign advertisements displayed discriminatory content against immigrants and sexual minorities, potentially meeting the criteria for criminal charges.

### **3. Racism and Verbal Abuse in a Helsinki Swimming Hall**

In February 2020, an unfortunate incident of racial harassment occurred at a Helsinki swimming hall, involving the mother of Nasima Razmyar, Helsinki Deputy Mayor for Culture and Leisure. This case highlights the importance of addressing racism and verbal abuse in public spaces (Iltasanomat, 2020).

Nasima Razmyar, Helsinki's Deputy Mayor for Culture and Leisure, took to Twitter to reveal that her mother had become the target of racist verbal abuse while at a local swimming hall. Razmyar initially learned of the incident through a Twitter thread posted by an immigration affairs specialist.

The thread detailed an intervention in a situation where "the mother of a multicultural politician" was subjected to racial hate speech while engaged in water aerobics. The aggressor had allegedly confronted Razmyar's mother with derogatory remarks, accusing her of living in the country through illicitly obtained funds.

Upon coming across the Twitter thread, Razmyar had an inkling that her own mother might be the victim. She promptly confirmed her suspicion through a phone call to her mother, who had chosen not to worry her daughter with the incident. Razmyar expressed gratitude to those who had intervened in the distressing situation, emphasizing the unfortunate prevalence of racism and hate speech in Helsinki. She recognized the need for collective efforts to combat such behavior.

It later was revealed that the aggressor had previously targeted Razmyar's mother as well. Despite her intervention, the individual persisted in their racist outbursts. Efforts to involve the facility's staff met with limited success, as staff members were hesitant to confront the situation directly. This raised questions about the guidance provided to staff regarding addressing hate speech incidents.

Tarja Loikkanen, Director of Sports in Helsinki, acknowledged that racism and inappropriate conduct were not tolerated in sports facilities. However, she noted that the means to address verbal harassment and racism were somewhat limited. Staff members could, at best, issue verbal warnings regarding such behavior. In extreme cases, customers could be expelled from the premises, or even subjected to a ban. Loikkanen conceded that determining the threshold for taking such actions could be challenging. She highlighted the need for clearer guidelines and training for staff to effectively tackle incidents of this nature.

This at the Helsinki swimming hall further underscores the persistent issue of racism and verbal abuse in public spaces. While steps have been taken to address such behavior, there is a need for improved training and guidance for staff to ensure that hate speech incidents are effectively addressed. This case serves as a poignant reminder of the ongoing struggle to create inclusive and respectful environments for all individuals in public facilities.

#### **4. Filming of immigrant youth in Espoo Swimming Hall**

In the summer of 2023 an anti-immigrant activist entered the swimming hall in the Helsinki neighbor city of Espoo in order to film immigrant looking children allegedly misbehaving during their time in the facility. The life guard on duty to the man to stop because he felt the man was harassing the children. Since the life guard also appeared to the extreme right activist to have been born to an immigrant family, the life guard now became the target for the filming and verbal abuse. The police was called and came to guide the man out. He was told that no case would be filed against him and that he was free to come back the next day.

All this was filmed and uploaded to Youtube by the anti-immigrant activist. The post had almost 3000 views immediately and the far-right activist was celebrated by his peers on youtube (Youtube, 2023).

#### **5. Tragic Drowning Incident in Helsinki's Jakomäki Sand Pits**

In late July 2023, a heart-wrenching incident unfolded in Helsinki as a 10-year-old boy tragically drowned at the Jakomäki sand pits. The young victim belonged to a Finnish Somali family.

The life of the 10-year-old was lost at the Jakomäki sand pits in Helsinki.

The sorrowful sequence of events began to unravel on Sunday evening when the child failed to return home. Concerned family members promptly contacted emergency services to report the disappearance, leading authorities to initiate a search operation in the vicinity.

Ultimately, the boy's belongings were discovered on the shores of the sand pit, prompting the deployment of divers to the scene.

The child drowned at the Jakomäki sand pits on Sunday and was found lifeless just past midnight. There were reportedly other individuals present at the scene during that time. As of now, no criminal activity is suspected in the case, with the police investigating the incident as a matter of determining the cause of death. Chief Detective Ritva Elomaa emphasized the meticulous examination of the circumstances surrounding the tragedy. Additionally, inquiries into potential liability are underway. The investigation continues with interviews and testimonies from individuals involved.

The pond's edge became a makeshift memorial adorned with candles, flowers, Legos, and toy cars in memory of the young schoolboy. Messages on the candles read "rest in peace" and "good friend." A round stone also anchors a small letter in place. One heartfelt note expressed, "You made me laugh back in preschool. I will always remember you."

The Jakomäki sand pits, located in Northern Helsinki near the Vantaa border, are not official swimming areas, although the establishment of an official swimming spot in the area has been considered at times (Iltalehti, 2023).

According to interviews conducted, immigrants are known to prefer swimming in secret and non-official spots in order to avoid racist harassment by other swimmers.

### **Conclusion:**

This case study highlights the exposure of messages from the leader of the Suomi Ensin movement and the concerning agenda behind the organization's actions. It emphasizes the movement's confrontational tactics, involvement with alternative media, and its persistence in targeting individuals and organizations supporting asylum seekers. The study underscores the challenges of countering such behavior and the role of alternative media in promoting and amplifying these messages.

It also reflects how proper monitoring and follow up could have led to identifying the dangers of this particular individual and the groups for the safety and well-being of young people in Finland. After all this activity has been going on for over a decade and has arguably effected hundreds of people, including young people and children in Finnish sports, even leading to fatalities. All the necessary information was out there and although authorities have repeatedly expressed their concerns it was neglected to take action.



## **10. Recommendations**

- Information between politics, public servants, NGO's, federations, clubs and potential victims of racism must flow easier and more direct.
- Different institutional actors and NGO's need to agree on a centralized monitoring system. Monitoring of racism in Sports, along with diversity promotion in sports needs an independent and well resourced agency.
- Actors and those responsible in the field need anti-racist training from the basics to the larger picture, in order to be able to identify different forms of racism and to work against them.

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