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Spain: Discrimination condoned by the authorities

Imagine that almost every day police officers stop you and ask for your documents, get angry and insult you. They do it when you don't have documents, but also when you do have them. They do it because of the colour of your skin.

Association of Undocumented Migrants in Madrid

The Spanish authorities must stop the practice of police selecting individuals for identity checks based on their ethnic or racial characteristics, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

[Stop racism, not people: Racial profiling and immigration control in Spain](#), exposes the real extent of identity checks by police based on ethnic and racial characteristics and the consequences for ethnic minorities.

“People who do not ‘look Spanish’ can be stopped by police as often as four times a day, for identity checks, at any time of day or night, in any place or situation,” said Izza Leghtas, Amnesty International’s researcher on Spain.

“This practice is unlawful under International human rights law.”

“It affects both foreigners and Spanish nationals from ethnic minorities. It is not only discriminatory and illegal – it also fuels prejudice – as those who witness such stops presume the victims to be engaged in criminal activities.”

According to Spanish law the police can check the identity of people in public places when there is a security concern, for example when a crime has been committed in the area. However, Amnesty International research has revealed that deliberate identity checks on foreigners in the absence of any security concern are widespread.

Certain police stations in Madrid have been given weekly and monthly quotas for the number of irregular migrants they have to detain thus encouraging officers to target people belonging to ethnic minorities.

Racial profiling, when the police stop to question and arrest people because of their skin colour does not always amount to discrimination, but is discriminatory and illegal according to international law if it has no reasonable or objective justification.

“The Spanish authorities are using stop and search powers abusively as a way to control migration. Spain has the right to control migration, however that should not be at the expense of the rights of migrants and minorities to equality and protection from discrimination,” said Izza Leghtas.

Furthermore, people who peacefully observe or document these identity checks, and inform people of their human rights in such situations, are sometimes intimidated and fined.

“Spanish police must provide officers with training on how to conduct identity checks in compliance with the principle of equality and the prohibition of discrimination, and bring to an end the intimidation of those who observe or document the identity checks,” said Izza Leghtas.

“It is time the authorities acknowledge and condemn the practice of racial profiling as discriminatory and unlawful and take measures to eliminate it,” Izza Leghtas said.

Amnesty International also recommends the Spanish government take action to ensure that there are no quotas for detaining irregular migrants and require that police officers record and document all stops.

Regular data on the number of police operations by area and motive should be published, distinguishing between those carried out for immigration control and criminal law enforcement,

“Addressing racial profiling by police is crucial in any serious attempt to combat racism and xenophobia,” said Izza Leghtas.

Testimonies

A refugee from Cameroon: “We can’t even enjoy being outside for a moment. Every day the police ask to see my documents at the exit of a metro station, inside the station. It makes me feel uncomfortable when I go out... There is a lot of racism in Spain. Sometimes when I sit down in the metro, the person next to me gets up. It’s like they don’t want me here.”

A Senegalese immigrant: “Life for migrants here is very hard. It is painful, even if you have your documents in order. The worst is when you’re black. Even now when I see police, they ask me for my documents. They can take you out of the train or the metro to check your documents. They say they are looking for criminals. But being black isn’t being a criminal.”

Jahid, an immigrant from Bangladesh: “Sometimes I am stopped three or four times in the same day. I show my documents, but sometimes they check the information to see if it is correct. When I’m on the way to work I’m in a hurry, they don’t care, they check them anyway. Being stopped like this makes me feel very bad, like I am not free.”

Babu, an Indian national: “I think I have been in all the police stations in the city. I have been to the same police station three or four times. All the policemen know me. I want people to know that we, migrants, we are not numbers. We have the same heart, two hands, the same as people who are working all over the world”.