

Working Life for Everyone podcast: Mona Eid

Interviewer: You are listening to Working Life for Everyone, a podcast where we broaden our horizons about the world of work and discuss the inequalities of the Finnish labor market with people who have dedicated their careers to doing something about them. My name is Jarkko Immonen and I am one of the career counselors at the University of Helsinki career services.

Today we talk about racism, I am joined by a project manager Mona Eid from the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare. Mona is also a long time collaborator at the Ruskeat Tytöt cultural media and the creator of the magnificent Kaikkien Koulu? podcast which has been one of the key inspirations behind this one. Welcome Mona, it is a pleasure and a privilege to have you on the show.

Mona Eid: Thank you Jarkko, and thank you for the nice words as well.

Interviewer: Before going into the big picture stuff, let us talk about you for a moment. As I already sort of mentioned in your introduction, you have had a long and rich career in doing anti-racism. Can you share something about your own career journey and how it has led up to where you are now?

Mona Eid: Well I would say that maybe my career journey has not been a straightforward journey, but there have been many divergent routes and I have not been a very good planner. But I have always tried to seize the moment when something interesting comes up, and if my intuition says that maybe you should go to that direction, then I have taken that opportunity. So I would say that my career journey, I have not been well planning that at all actually. I would say that my career in doing anti-racism is not maybe that long from that point of view, but maybe diversity and equity issues have been kind of a red thread during my whole career you would say. And my original field of study has been educational sciences and before that humanities, including language and literature studies, and cultural studies. So, I think that red thread has been there all along, kind of because those social justice issues have been close to my heart.

Interviewer: Mmh.

Mona Eid: So yeah, I would say that.

Interviewer: Thank you. One thing I often discuss with students is what ultimately constitutes work and/or career. What kind of roles have different forms of work such as activism, volunteering, communal activities or other so-called alternative types of work played in your career path?

Mona Eid: Yeah I think from early on when I started working, there has been work-related matters which are not maybe payed or are voluntary work, and they have kind of opened up horizons for me. For example, when I started working at the university in 2007, on the side I was working at the girl's house in Helsinki, I was guiding multicultural girls' groups, and that gave me another perspective and I felt that my guidance and teaching skills were used in that. So I think that these volunteering and communal activities or activism have given me openings to other positions but also I have learned a lot from them. And I think that my current job is a result of those activities that I have done on the side of my paid work. For example, my work at Ruskeat Tytöt has started from volunteering, and then I have moved on to being a part of it and getting a bit of salary from there as well. And also these, how do you say, funding applications, I have been able to do it when I have been working at Ruskeat tytöt, so I was working on a apuraha.

Interviewer: Mmh, a grant?

Mona Eid: On a grant basis, at some point as well.

Interviewer: Mmh.

Mona Eid: But it also has required that my paid job has given me this opportunity to take leaves of absence. I have been very privileged in that sense that I have been able to do that and combine these two, when for example the granting period has taken more time and I have wanted to focus on certain issues. But of course I realize that from this precarious working career perspective, I have been privileged as I have always had a job where I can return back to.

Interviewer: Mmh.

Mona Eid: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you mentioned learning something along the way, and on that note, what are some of the lessons you have learned during your journey? Like what would you say now to a younger version of yourself?

Mona Eid: Hmm, yeah, I think the lesson is that you can never predict life, or you cannot predict a career either. I mean of course some people maybe are more straightforward oriented so they know what they want to do in life, but my kind of red thread has been to explore. So I would say to my younger self that do not stress where you are going to be in ten years or twenty years, that life will guide you and lead your way, and be kind of open to opportunities. And also do not judge yourself if you take missteps because I think they are also learning experiences, so maybe I would say that [laughs].

Interviewer: Mmh, wise words. Moving to your current position at the institute of Health and Welfare, I understand you are coordinating a project where you create an online course for organizations and students about anti-racism, is that correct? And if so can you tell us a little bit about the project and the course?

Mona Eid: Yes, so I have started this year to coordinate, I am a project manager of an online course on anti-racism, which is directed towards, actually the focus group is everybody, but especially people working in the health sector and the well-being sector, and also the educational sector, and as police. So we are going to build an online course, where the majority of the material will be video lectures, and they are kind of a TED-Talk lecture series of eighteen minute lectures and there are sixteen of those lectures. It is kind of a general outline of anti-racism and anti-racist themes, and then we also have a section which is directed towards these certain fields. But there is also two more general lectures on anti-racist workplace and anti-racist leadership, which I think is good material for everyone.

So I hope that this will be published, or the plan is that when we publish next autumn it will be available for free for everyone. So this is the project and it is an ongoing project and it has been very hectic, but I am really glad of the outcome, I have just seen those videos, the raw materials of the videos and I am really looking forward to publishing them soon.

Interviewer: And once published, where might one find this course?

Mona Eid: Yes, so you can go to the website of the Health and Welfare Institute, it is [THL.fi/antiracism](https://thl.fi/antiracism) or [antirasismi](https://thl.fi/antirasismi), so you can find the links from there.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mona Eid: Yeah.

Interviewer: We will take note of that, and now that we are recording this is in June 2022 but the time you hear this, dear listener, that course might be already up and running, so take heed of Mona's advice and head over to the THL website to learn more.

Alright, big picture time. Going back a little bit to what you said about the anti-racism course that you are working on, from your point of view what does the racism of the Finnish world of work look like today, where and how does it rear its ugly head?

Mona Eid: Yes, we have had several research base material of the racism that happens in the Finnish working life. And of course the Ombudsman for Equality and Equity has these kind of barometers which report the cases for discrimination. For example, but according to these studies, it has been shown that people who do not have a Finnish name or a local name are discriminated in the recruitment part of the process, and there are manifold more chances to get an interview for work when you have a Finnish name. So that is the most basic case, I think, which has been kind of widely known already, and I think it is a larger picture as well, because we can also think about who gets selected in, for example, higher education, and who has the abilities for example, academic Finnish or Swedish to get in and how are they supported earlier already in their schooling here. People who come from other parts of the world, for example.

So that is one case and the recruitment is one case, and also when you get into a job place, how diverse is it and how are things dealt with inside the institution, and how for example cases of discrimination are handled, or do we have equity and diversity plans in place which are concrete and not just rhetoric. So these kinds of things come to my mind.

Interviewer: Mmh. One major issue pertaining to our theme is the language barrier, namely the generally high level of Finnish and/or Swedish skills required in recruitment across the board. What do you make of it in terms or racism, are the two phenomena linked, and if so, how?

Mona Eid: Yeah, this is also something that has been discussed a lot. I am not an expert in this area but, I would say that sometimes the language requirements may be kind of an euphemism of, or somehow used as an excuse for not hiring, and the Ombudsman of Equity and Equality has made a note of these kinds of cases where the requirements are exceptionally high for a position that does not require in actuality that kind of skills. So in the recruitment policies, there should be more awareness of how these language policies might be discriminatory, and where we can see that the requirements are too high, and that

people could do their work well with lower language skills. Also, how language skills could be supported also during the work life, that you do not have to be ready at the recruitment point of time, that you could also evolve after being recruited. I think those are things that should be more discussed and the HR offices should be more aware.

Interviewer: Mmh.

Mona Eid: And because all the time there is talk about that we should diversify our working life and that we are lacking people, we need more people to come and work. So these things have to be discussed and thought about now if we want to have more workforce in Finland in the future.

Interviewer: Mmh. Continuing on that not, from where you are standing, does it look that the barrier is as strong and intact as ever or is it cracking in places?

Mona Eid: Well I think there is more awareness of that and I think one thing is that we have more studies about it and more also studies about how these can be discriminatory. I think what shows that it is cracking in places is that we have also projects that aim at taking down these barriers, for example this, also in THL, The Institute of Health and Welfare there is a project called Manifold More which aims to diversify, or give tools for diversifying the work force. They have a very good set of recommendations for how to make recruitment, for example, more inclusive, and one of the things is how these language requirements are described and how they are used.

Interviewer: Mmh. Kind of looking at the other side of the coin, are there some common misconceptions that people have about the racism regarding the Finnish labor market, and/or the language barrier? If so, feel free to correct them here and now.

Mona Eid: Well I think, in general when you think about racism, it very soon comes to this point that people start to erase it, and I think what is a misconception is that the Finnish market would only be meritocracy based, because there are also other things that affect people. So when people do not get hired, usually when you do not realize the societal circumstances, you might blame only yourself and you should also see the structural barriers, for example, these language requirement barriers or alt-right racism in terms of not being asked for an interview because of your name or your appearance, for example. So, this meritocracy basis that everybody is in the same line is somehow a misconception I think, and we do not realize that we are- or there is not much awareness of how racism affects people, also in working life.

Interviewer: Mmh. And racism is no flash in the pan either, we know its roots go deep into our history, if you think back to your own student days, or when you were only taking your first steps in your career, has anything changed, and if so, has it been for the better or for the worse?

Mona Eid: Well I would say a lot of things have changed, and one major thing is that there is more awareness, and also there have been more structural changes with regards to for example, diversity and equity. Now for example, we have a law that requires that every organization and institution with over 30 people has to have an equity and diversity plan in place, and so these kinds of structural changes happened during my time in work life already, so I am optimistic that things will go even further forward. But I think one key point is that there is more discussion and more awareness of these matters.

Interviewer: Mmh. Following that quite naturally, how do you perceive the future regarding racism in the working life, what do you predict it will look like in say five or ten years, and if you think there is hope for a better tomorrow, why do you believe so?

Mona Eid: Yeah I hope that there would be less discrimination and that regardless of where people come from, for example their background, social class, ethnicity, skin color, name, it does not have an effect in getting to a certain field or in getting hired in working life. I hope that it would not be, for example, as difficult for a Roma young person to get even a job at a TET practice place in the comprehensive school which we have, because now it is really hard and they get their first experiences of discrimination already in comprehensive school, which is really sad, and the same pertains to people with disabilities. So I am hoping that this will disappear and that we will have more equity in working life and that diversity would be considered an asset rather than something that is a necessary bad thing that just has to happen.

So I am kind of sure that it will happen because it is kind of a requirement when looking at the whole society, because we need more workforce. We are getting a lot of people who are aging and there is not enough working force to sustain this system in that way, so also the society needs it but also we need it just for more creativity and more diverse ideas, so we need diversity in that sense. So I would say that the working life is going to be more diverse, and these issues are more on the table, and I am hoping these issues will be more on the table with regards to leaderships and how organizations are led because I think change happens from there. And when people are more aware then it will hopefully happen. If I would not be hopeful, I could not do this work, so that is how I see it, hope gives me a drive to do this work.

Interviewer: Mmh, and kind of taking a step down from the future to where we are now, what would you like to say to our students struggling with racism in their lives and careers right now?

Mona Eid: Yes, at first I would say that I am very sorry if you have had experiences, or when you have had experiences of racism in your lives and maybe in your careers, and it is a thing that should not happen and it is not your fault, and I am hoping that you will find peer groups where you can also discuss these struggles. Because sometimes when you share your story it helps you. Also, I would say that you do not have to carry the burden yourself and there are luckily already a lot of people who are doing work in anti-racism in working life, so things are changing although maybe from your experiences the barriers seem overpowering. But I would like to give you hope and I would like to advise you to seek support.

Interviewer: Anything more you would want to add to our discussion today?

Mona Eid: Well maybe just that working towards anti-racism is a phenomena where everybody has to join, it is not a struggle for only the minorities or the visible minorities or black or brown people, but it is everybody's job to make this world or our society more equitable. And when discussing working life, we have to think of the individual level, the organization level and the societal level, so these all have to be thought about. Yeah, maybe that is what I wanted to say [chuckles].

Interviewer: Thank you so much Mona, it has been a pleasure having you on the show.

Mona Eid: Thank you, thank you for having me.

Interviewer: Thank you for listening to Working Life for Everyone, this podcast was brought to you by the University of Helsinki career services.

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