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Final Report

Exploring Discrimination Experiences: A Dialogue Between Young Individuals and Youth Workers

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Introduction

Intersectional discrimination is a complex and pressing issue that underscores the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination faced by individuals within society. These intersecting dimensions of identity often create unique and compounded challenges for marginalized communities, making it essential to address discrimination from an intersectional perspective. Intersectional discrimination englobes scenarios where multiple grounds for discrimination are interconnected. This includes the interrelation of gender with other factors such as race, color, ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, gender characteristics, genetic traits, religion or belief, nationality, or disability. Efforts to combat this issue must involve a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of various forms of discrimination and seeks to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion across all aspects of society.

The evidence of detrimental physical and mental health effects, as well as the impact on economic opportunities and social well-being resulting from discrimination and racism, is well grounded in a substantial literature. It is particularly crucial to consider the experiences of vulnerable women to multiple forms of at the intersections of ethnicity and gender identity. Among those disproportionately affected, young people emerge as a particularly vulnerable demographic, grappling with heightened susceptibility to the adverse effects on health and well-being stemming from discrimination and racism (1).

Youth work serves as a dynamic social practice at its core, actively engaging with both young individuals and the broader societies they inhabit. Its primary objective is to cultivate the active participation and inclusion of young people in their communities and decision-making processes (2). Specializing in providing support to vulnerable young individuals navigating life challenges during critical stages of development, youth work could experience the added difficulties some face due to specific social, political, cultural, and economic contexts.

Youth workers, as employees of community-based organizations, play a crucial role in supporting young individuals through workshops, training, counseling, and organizing social activities, especially for those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Recognizing the transformative power of youth workers' empathy and sensitivity, we acknowledge that these qualities enable them to reshape situations fraught with negative emotions, turning them into opportunities for empowerment for young individuals. This transformative potential holds the key to altering young people's perceptions of themselves and their capabilities (3).

We believe that the exposure to critical dialogue is imperative in this process, based on the presentation of provoking questions and subsequent critical reflection, fostering



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responses that not only challenge existing perspectives but also provide valuable insights for informing future actions. We believe that a discussion group among young people and youth workers, with its overarching goal of facilitating young people's self-construction of understanding and encouraging meaningful collaboration, is the best means to achieve this result, also as it extends its impact beyond the immediate group dynamics. This inclusive approach involves diverse audiences and considers consequences that transcend the group itself, fostering the creation of community connections. Furthermore, the focus group maintains a high degree of rigor, creating an environment that not only encourages critical thinking but also nurtures creative insights among the participants. In essence, the focus group serves as a dynamic platform for youth engagement, promoting a holistic approach that intertwines personal development, community connectivity, and the cultivation of critical and creative thinking skills. This methodology allows us to enhance the active role of young people in their relational context and acquire, through practice, not only a cognitive but also an emotional understanding.

Consequently, any theory or model employed does not assert universal truths but rather serves as a lens grounded in the local, cultural, and historical milieu for understanding (4). This perspective is nuanced, recognizing that each community possesses a unique way of interpreting the world. It fosters an environment that respects and embraces diverse opinions, attending to traditions, communities, and situated practices, necessitating a constant flexibility on the part of those involved. According to Alvesson and Deetz (5), this creates a space for inquiry where diverse views can engage in dialogue with each other.

This study is conducted as part of the project **At the Crossroads of inequalities / discrimination**, the aim of which is to raise the quality of youth work and strengthen their knowledge and competences to be better able to address and overcome intersectional discrimination affecting the youth. The objective of the study was to identify the current state and perception of intersectional discrimination, with a focus on gender, “race” and ethnicity, among youth workers and youth in Italy, Romania and Slovenia. To understand this reality, we proposed a methodology with an interactive approach, in which the aim is not only to collect data but also to stimulate critical dialogue and reflections among young people and youth workers. Guided dialogues about discrimination were performed with a multifaceted approach, aiming to encompass a diverse array of situations with social, cultural, educational, environmental, and/or political dimensions. The activity was executed collaboratively, involving both paid and volunteer youth workers, operating within non-formal and informal learning frameworks that revolve around the voluntary engagement of young individuals.

In addition, to better comprehend the actual situation in the field of intersectional discrimination in the countries and in youth work, a secondary research was carried out to review national legislature, policies, existing research and potential good practices. A

research on already existing approaches and good practices relating to training of youth workers regarding intersectional discrimination was carried out at the EU level that will assist in the second aim of the project, namely the development of training for youth workers on intersectional discrimination.

CHAPTER I – BACKGROUND

Conducting a comprehensive literature review on this topic is of paramount importance to allow researchers to gain a deep understanding of the historical context, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence surrounding this complex issue. Moreover, it enables identification of gaps in the literature and areas where further investigation is needed. A literature review also helps to refine research questions, hypotheses, and methodologies, providing a solid foundation for subsequent research endeavors. Moreover, it ensures that new research builds upon and contributes to the existing body of knowledge, fostering academic progress and informing policy and advocacy efforts aimed at addressing intersectional discrimination effectively.

Aiming to conducting a thorough bibliographic research, we adhered to a structured methodology, encompassing the following steps:

- a) Identification of pertinent keywords;
- b) Utilization of academic databases, including PubMed, JSTOR, ProQuest, Google Scholar, alongside scholarly articles, books and official reports;
- c) Scrutiny of abstracts and titles of search results for relevance assessment;
- d) Compilation of a comprehensive report, summarizing the primary data gleaned throughout the review process.

In our study, we incorporated research that presented qualitative (interpretive and textual) data on intersectional identities, discrimination, and social inequality among youth workers and young individuals from Slovenia, Romania, and Italy. We deliberately excluded papers related to studies conducted outside the scope of this project's countries. Our exclusions also applied to publication years, focusing solely on studies published between 2000 and 2024. Additionally, we incorporated official documents published by European Union organizations and institutions into our review.

This chapter is dedicated to conducting a comprehensive desk review, delving into legislation, policies, strategies, and statistics related to discrimination within each of the three project-participating countries: European Union, Slovenia, Romania, and Italy.

1. Legislation, policies, and strategies on discrimination

Although democratic states promote equal opportunities in society as essential for social welfare and cohesion, unfortunately discrimination continues to be a reality for many



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people belonging to a particular social group or could be attributed to the combination of several different grounds for discrimination.

Recent studies have increasingly demonstrated that individuals often belong to more than one disadvantaged group, experiencing complex and potentially unique forms of discrimination. These experiences cannot be adequately explained by focusing on a single ground of discrimination. We advocate for a holistic approach in European and national anti-discrimination legislation, recognizing intersectionality as a crucial tool. This perspective is essential for accurately portraying structures of inequality and empowering legislators, policy-makers, and judges to dismantle these structures and devise remedies for distinct cases of discrimination. Achieving this integration requires cohesive legislation, policies, strategies, or court decisions, rather than treating them in isolation.

Before we commence, we believe that it should be important to establish clear definitions for the expressions that will be utilized throughout the text, aiming to prevent any potential confusion.

Direct discrimination: It occurs when a person is treated less favorably than another person who has been, is or would be in a comparable situation, based on any of the discriminatory criteria laid down in the legislation in force.

Indirect discrimination: Occurs when an apparently neutral provision, criterion, or practice disadvantages certain persons based on criteria laid down by the law in force, unless such provisions, criteria or practices are objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the methods of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary. Indirect discrimination is also any active or passive conduct which, by its effects, unjustifiably favors or disfavors, subjects a person, a group of persons or a community to unfair or degrading treatment compared with others who are in an equal position.

Multiple discrimination: It occurs when a person or group of persons are treated differently, in an equal situation, based on two or more cumulative discriminatory criteria.

Intersectional discrimination: involves intertwined grounds of discrimination, creating a unique type of bias. Unlike multiple discrimination, intersectionality considers all intersecting grounds without prioritizing one over the other. It takes into account the various aspects of people's experiences and identities, using a bottom-up approach. Applying an intersectional approach to analysis and policies requires rethinking how we understand identity, equality, and power imbalances. Intersectionality looks at the ways in which various social categories such as gender, class, race, sexuality, disability, religion and other identity axes are interwoven on multiple and simultaneous levels, which leads to systemic injustice and social inequality.

Harassment: Any conduct that results in an intimidating, hostile, degrading, or offensive

environment based on race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, social class, belief, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, refugee or asylum seeker status or any other criterion.

Victimizing: Is any adverse treatment in response to a complaint or action in court or before the competent institutions concerning a violation of the principle of equal treatment and non- discrimination. It is also considered to be a form of discrimination and is an order received by one person or group of persons from another person or group of persons to discriminate.

1.1. European Union

The European Union stands firm in its commitment to advancing and safeguarding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law globally. At the core of EU engagements with other nations and regions lies a steadfast dedication to human rights. The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) serves as a crucial player, offering impartial and evidence-driven guidance to both EU and national authorities. Through this role, it enriches discussions, policies, and legislation surrounding fundamental rights, ensuring their quality and focus. The FRA advises on a broad spectrum of fundamental rights issues, including discrimination, access to justice, combating racism and xenophobia, data protection, victims' rights, and children's rights (6).

The principle of non-discrimination of workers based on nationality and gender was introduced in the Treaties of Rome in 1957 to promote freedom of movement, equal pay, and other conditions. The Defrenne judgment, handed down by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in 1976, affirmed equal pay as a fundamental principle of the Community, accessible to European citizens even in Member States lacking specific legislative provisions.

While the initial strides in anti-discrimination were tied to economic integration needs, significant progress was made with political integration, marked by the transformation of the European Economic Community (EEC) into the European Union in 1992. The Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 bestowed upon the EU new powers to combat discrimination (Article 13), leading to a rapid expansion of legislation in subsequent years (7).

Furthermore, non-discrimination was enshrined as a fundamental right in the Nice Treaty of 2000 through the adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which includes a dedicated section on equality. With the Lisbon Treaty's entry into force in December 2009, the Charter became legally binding in the EU, holding the same weight as the Union's treaties. Additionally, the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999 saw the EU acquiring new powers to address discrimination based on race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation, exemplified by the unanimous adoption of Directive 2000/43/EC (Racial Equality Directive) and Directive 2000/78/EC (Employment Equality Directive) by the Member States (8).

About gender equality, EU Strategy fulfills the von der Leyen Commission's pledge to realize a Union of Equality. This strategy outlines policy objectives and initiatives aimed at achieving substantial advancements by 2025 toward gender equality in Europe. The overarching aim is to establish a Union where individuals of all genders, ages, and backgrounds have the freedom to pursue their aspirations, enjoy equal opportunities for success, and actively engage in and lead our European society (9).

1.2. Slovenia

Based on existing knowledge on intersectionality and intersectional discrimination in Slovenia, the research focused not only on the multiple discrimination, but also on the separate, individual discrimination. The research proved that this approach was a legitimate one, as there has been very little work carried out in Slovenia on the topic, may it be at the systemic level, with regards to research or youth work.

It is clear that there is a need for more research with regards to intersectional discrimination in Slovenia, in order to better understand its existence and the extent of its existence. In Slovenia, racism is often perceived as not existing, which makes it even more difficult to understand the intersection of discrimination due to race and gender. Due to this perception, racism is often normalized or excused for ignorance in Slovenia.

Intersectional discrimination in Slovenia is a topic that is barely covered by Slovene legislation. At the same time, it is also not researched at great length and there is very little statistical data available.

As part of the EU, Slovenia is bound to respect the Treaty on European Union and the EU Charter of fundamental rights, which enshrine the fundamental rights of all persons in the EU. Both recognise the right to non-discrimination based on race and ethnicity. As all EU Member states, Slovenia is also a signatory to the international convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination.

The Slovene Constitution (10) calls for equality before the Law in its 14th article, stating that everyone shall be guaranteed equal human rights and fundamental freedoms irrespective of national origin, race, sex, language, religion, political or other conviction, material standing, birth, education, social status, disability, or any other personal circumstance.

Discrimination is defined in the Protection Against Discrimination Act (PADA) (11) as any undue actual or legal unequal treatment, differentiation, exclusion, limitation or failure to act due to personal circumstances, the result or consequence of which is hindrance, reduction or nullification of equal recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, other rights, legal interests and benefits. The article states that discrimination due to any personal circumstances is prohibited. PADA does not address intersectional discrimination, yet it has been recognized that with its adoption the Slovene legal system recognized the possibility of multiple discriminations due to multiple personal

circumstances (12).

With the adoption of PADA in 2016 a new institution was established in Slovenia, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality (13). The Advocate is responsible for protection against discrimination in the public and private sectors, while also providing information, advice and advocacy to anyone who believes to have been discriminated against. The Advocate considers cases of discrimination that occur due to the gender, nationality, race or ethnic origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, parenthood, pregnancy, and any other personal circumstances. The Advocate also investigates discrimination in official procedures, provides assistance in exercising the rights of victims and administrative and judicial proceedings, and assesses the discriminativeness of regulations. The Advocate monitors the state of discrimination in the country.

The gender equality levels of Slovenia are higher than the EU average, yet the rate of progress in Slovenia is slower than that of the average. The key legal instrument in Slovenia in the area of gender equality is the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act (14), which was adopted in 2002. The first national program on gender equality was adopted in 2005 and the latest national program that is in place until 2030 was adopted in September 2023 (15). The act does not include intersectional discrimination, yet the national program does. It discusses the existence of intersectional discrimination, namely between gender and ethnicity, gender orientation and identity, migration status, rural women, young and old women and women with differences. The program has specific goals, the following are related to intersectionality: consultations in public administration on gender equality, using the intersectional approach, promotion of equal rights at the workplace with the emphasis on vulnerable women facing intersectional discrimination, promotion of gender equality in school curricula, including an intersectional approach, and improving the position of women in science, using an intersectional approach.

When it comes to racism, no specifically dedicated national legislation exists in Slovenia, discrimination based on personal circumstances such as race is included in broader legislative acts, as already mentioned. (National legislation - discrimination, equality: <https://zagovornik.si/en/about-us/legislation/> international documents: ECRI fifth report on Slovenia (2019)).

In Slovenia, the special rights of the Roma community are guaranteed with the implementation of the constitutional provision, the Roma Community in the Republic of Slovenia Act as the basic law, and through other legislative provisions applicable to the Roma community. (National Program of Measures for Roma of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for the Period 2021–2030).

The Republic of Slovenia has also ratified two important documents of the Council of Europe relating to the protection of minorities and the protection of minority languages, specifically the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (hereinafter referred to as: FCPNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

(hereinafter referred to as: ECRML), which means that the state, as a signatory to both documents, is committed to protecting national minorities and regional or minority languages.

1.3. Italy

The political system of Italy is based on its 1948 Constitution, which establishes Italy as a unitary parliamentary republic with a multi-party system. The Italian Constitution guarantees the protection of human rights, civil liberties, social justice, and regional autonomy (16). According to fundamental rights and directive principles of the state policy (article 2), the Republic recognizes and guarantees the inviolable rights of the person, both as an individual and in the social groups where human personality is expressed. Further, article 3 recognizes the principle of equality of all citizens, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions. It is the duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles of an economic or social nature which constrain the freedom and equality of citizens, thereby impeding the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organization of the country. Part One of the Italian Constitution concerning rights and duties of citizens is composed of the following Titles: (I) Civil relations; (II) Ethical and social relations; (III) Economic relations; (IV) Political relations. Among social rights, articles 31 and 32 concern the protection of the family and health (16).

The Workers' Statute (Law no. 300 of 20 May 1970) prohibits employment discrimination based on various grounds, including sex, political opinions, union-related activity, religion, race, language, disability, age, sexual orientation, personal beliefs, and recently, nationality (added by Law no. 238 of 23 December 2021). Additionally, Italy has enacted several laws (Legislative Decree no. 215 of 9 July 2003; Legislative Decree no. 216 of 9 July 2003; Legislative Decree no. 198 of 11 April 2006) in alignment with the European regulatory framework. The European Directives on Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation, reflected in these laws, unequivocally state that applying discriminatory selection criteria in the workplace is unlawful. These directives explicitly prohibit discrimination in hiring, admission to training or apprenticeship programs, career promotion, as well as regarding compensation and termination (17).

Moreover, on 1 January 2022, came into effect the Section 4 of the Equal Pay Law which introduced the Gender-equality Certification, whose aim is to reduce the gender gap in opportunities for professional progression, equal pay for equal work, policies for managing gender differences, and maternity protection.

As per Legislative Decrees no. 215 and no. 216 of 2003, sexual and gender harassment are forms of discrimination. Sexual harassment encompasses any behavior, whether verbal, non-verbal, or physical, related to sex, which has the effect of offending the individual dignity of a worker (regardless of gender). Gender-based harassment refers



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to any conduct that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, humiliating, and offensive environment based on their gender. Harassment based on racial or ethnic origin, religion, personal beliefs, disability, age, sexual orientation, and sexual harassment constitutes serious breaches of employment obligations within the company's administrative and managerial spheres. This remains true regardless of the harasser's identity, provided the employer is aware of the situation and fails to take necessary measures. According to Italian law, it is impermissible to subject an individual to harassment, compromise their dignity, or foster a hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment due to a protected characteristic. Additionally, sexual harassment is explicitly prohibited (17).

In the past few years, Italy has experienced a surge in populist and anti-establishment movements, prominently exemplified by the emergence of parties like the *Movimento 5 Stelle* and the *Lega Nord*. These political entities have adeptly tapped into the prevalent discontent among the populace, championing policies aimed at mitigating economic inequality, addressing concerns related to immigration, and advocating Euroscepticism.

The backdrop of Italy's political landscape has been further shaped by defiant challenges, particularly in managing migration. As a significant gateway for migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea, Italy deals with the complex dynamics of immigration, navigating the delicate balance between humanitarian considerations and the need to address the associated socio-economic and political implications. These multifaceted issues have become focal points in the national discourse, reflecting the intricate interplay of global and domestic factors shaping Italy's contemporary political landscape.

In this scenario, it's essential to acknowledge that despite the principle of non-discrimination, in law, and respect for the dignity of every individual constitute the core of Italy's international action in support of the protection and promotion of human rights, the stark reality presents a contrasting picture. The upcoming section on statistics will shed light on the significant disparity between legal frameworks and daily life experiences. Unfortunately, discrimination and violent crimes based on factors such as race, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, and religion persist as distressingly prevalent occurrences in Italy.

Moreover, according to Callahan and Loscocco, Italy has a homophobic problem (18). Even if Italy has witnessed notable strides in LGBTQ+ rights, exemplified by the 2016 legislation allowing civil unions for same-sex couples, as well as the proposal of the Zan bill in 2020, aiming to criminalize violence against LGBTQ+ individuals, the presence of swift and staunch oppositions from right-wing politicians and the Catholic Church, cast uncertainty on whether the Italian Senate will ultimately endorse the law. This nuanced landscape reflects the ongoing dialogue and tension surrounding LGBTQ+ rights in Italy, highlighting the need for continued advocacy and societal transformation.



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It is clear that in the day-to-day lives of individuals, the harsh truth reveals a disconcerting pattern where marginalized groups often find themselves subjected to discrimination and targeted violence. This stark incongruity emphasizes the urgent need for a more effective implementation of anti-discrimination measures and a thorough examination of societal attitudes to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment in Italy.

1.4. Romania

In Romanian law, discrimination means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference on the basis of the criteria laid down by the legislation in force. The criteria established by Romanian law are: race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, social category, beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, chronic non-contagious disease, HIV infection, belonging to a disadvantaged category, as well as any other criterion that has the purpose or effect of restricting, eliminating the recognition, use or exercise, on equal terms, of human rights and fundamental freedoms or rights recognized by law, in the political, economic, social and cultural fields or in any other field of public life.

According to Article 16 of the Constitution, citizens are equal before the law and public authorities, without privileges and without discrimination. Article 30 of the fundamental law forbids the incitement to discrimination. Art 44 of the Romanian Constitution prohibits nationalization or any other measures of forced passage into property on the basis of social, ethnic or religious affiliation, political or other discriminatory nature of the holders.

Government Ordinance No 137/2000 on the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination (republished) the legal framework establishing the sanctioning regime for all forms of discrimination. Subjects of discrimination can address to the National Council for Combating Discrimination of Discrimination (CNCD) for 1 year from the date of the offense or from the date on which it would have become aware of it (Art. 20(1)), but the Council may investigate the facts or acts of discrimination (Art. 21). The Council (more specifically, the College Board - Art. 20 para. 2), following an investigation which takes place shall issue a decision establishing, where appropriate, the existence of discrimination and may, at the request of the victim, order the removal of the consequences and restore the situation prior to the discrimination (Article 20(3)). Also, **The Council has the power to impose a fine** in the amount provided for in Art. 26 and the possibility to oblige the discriminating party to publish in the media a summary of the decision finding discrimination (Art. 26(2)). The sanctions also apply to legal persons (Art. 26(3)).

As can be seen, the decision-making prerogatives of the NCCD in petitions or self-reporting **are limited** to the establishment of the act of discrimination, ordering measures to remove the consequences of the facts and restore the situation the previous decision, ordering the author to publish the decision and imposing a fine; therefore, these powers do not include the granting of moral or material damages. These may be claimed separately,



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in Court based on the Article 27 of the Ordinance.

Law No 202/2002 on equal opportunities and between women and men regulates measures to promote equality and treatment between women and men, with a view to eliminating all forms of discrimination based on sex in all spheres of public life in Romania. This means that the Romanian State, through its competent public authorities, shall develop and implement policies and programmes with a view to achieving and guaranteeing equality of opportunity and between women and men and the elimination of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex.

Domain-specific terms such as: equal opportunities between women and men, gender discrimination, direct/indirect discrimination/sexual harassment/harassment, equal pay for work of equal value, positive action, and multiple discrimination are defined. The law subsumes separate chapters for measures to respect equal opportunities and treatment between women and men in the labor market, participation in decision-making, education, culture and information, elimination of gender roles and stereotypes.

The detection and sanctioning of the contraventions (minimum fine RON 3000-approximately 600 EUR) provided by the law are carried out by the Labor Inspectorate, respectively the labor inspectors of the territorial labor inspectorates, for the field of employment and by the National Council for Combating Discrimination, for the other fields. It's crucial to note that focus group research is not comparable to mathematical research; it is an observational and interpretative study. As a result, each group will generate its own report. We will then discuss together after collecting all the individual reports to create the final report/publication.

According to the UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (19), **discrimination against women and Roma people, human trafficking and the lack of sex education** are among Romania's problems in the view of other United Nations Human Rights Council member countries. In the first three months of 2023, 13,307 criminal acts of domestic violence were registered by the Romanian Police, almost 1,000 more cases than in 2022.

However, Romania does poorly in collecting data on violence against women. Apart from domestic violence, police reports do not cover other kinds of discriminatory assaults. Moreover, the state has conducted very few surveys on perceptions and experiences of violence. **Due to lack of data, the European Gender Equality Index does not include Romania.** Romania ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2016, a mechanism designed to prevent violence against women. One of the main obligations is to monitor cases of violence.

Romania has serious problems regarding reproductive health and sexual education. Filia Center (20), a women's rights NGO in the first half of 2022 says that in 13 Romanian counties there were no abortions on demand. Romania does not provide consistent sex education and effective access to contraception and abortion.

Roma people continue to face extreme poverty, social exclusion and discrimination in terms of their rights to education, health, housing and work. The majority of Roma live in

overcrowded conditions, attend segregated schools, drop out of education at a young age and experience discrimination in the workplace according to a report by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (21).

2. Statistics

2.1. Slovenia

Research, carried out in 2005 (22), shows that intolerance towards migrants and their descendants has increased after the independence of Slovenia. A Eurobarometer (23) on discrimination from 2019 focuses on people's perceptions, attitudes and opinions on discrimination based on ethnic origin, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, or beliefs. 3 % of people believed that discrimination due to skin color and ethnicity does not exist in Slovenia, while 4 % had this belief about gender discrimination. On the other spectrum, 32 % believed that discrimination due to skin color is widespread, 38 % due to ethnicity and 26 % due to gender.

37 % of interviewed persons would not want a Roma to hold high political position in Slovenia, 20 % would not want to see a person of different ethnicity in this position, 17% a person with a different than white skin color, and 3% a woman. When it comes to discrimination at the workplace, 21% of people expressed that they would not want to work with a Roma person, 9% with a Black person, 11% with a person of Asian origins. 32% of persons interviewed stated that they would feel unpleasant if their child were in a relationship with a person of the same sex, 39% with a Roma person, 21% with a Black person, 21% with a person of Asian descent and 3% with a White person.

When asked what personal circumstances would lead to unequal treatment when searching for a job, 57% answered that being Roma would lead to this discrimination, 31% said the skin color would cause this, 29% stated it would be the candidate's ethnicity, 35% named gender, 29 % gender identity and 30% sexual orientation.

When asked about the efforts to fight discrimination at the national level, 3% of the respondents felt that they do not exist at all, a 5% drop compared to 2015, while 28% were of the opinion that they are efficient, a 7% rise compared to 2015. 79% of people believed that more information should be provided in schools and textbooks regarding diversity from the point of view of ethnicity and skin color, 73% about Roma culture and history, and 71 % about gender identity.

In 2023, according to official statistics, there were 9,3% of foreigners residing in Slovenia, but there is no separate data about migrants and their descendants. Data on race- based discrimination is scarce, but in 2015 a report by FRA shows that 7% of migrants that recently arrived felt discriminated against based on the color of their skin, ethnicity, or religion (24).

The Peace Institute carried out research about discrimination based on ethnicity,



citizenship, skin color and religion in Slovenia, as part of a project entitled “Reducing and eliminating discrimination based on ethnicity, race, nationality and / or religion” (25). The aim of the research was to obtain transparent, disaggregated and quality data. 814 persons took part in the survey and 84 % of them stated that they have been discriminated against. Among them, 40% stated that they were discriminated based on their gender, 18% stated that nationality and citizenship were the cause, and 3 % stated that skin color was the reason for the discrimination. Among the second group, slightly less than 30% faced discrimination at the workplace, around 25 % when searching for work, and a bit above 20% in the public or on the internet. Among the second group, they felt discrimination most often at the workplace, while about half of them felt the discrimination while searching for work and in police procedures. The latter finding is especially relevant, as it does not occupy such a high ranking with discrimination due to any other personal circumstances.

The project showed that discrimination is most often experienced by persons that are perceived as foreigners, may it be at the institutional and legislative levels, and by the population. Asylum seekers and refugees are among the groups that face discrimination most often and they also report experiences of ethnic profiling by the police. Persons are stopped and legitimized solely due to their appearance, which in practical terms means due to their skin color. They are also victims of negative public remarks and hate speech, especially online.

The research showed that prejudices play an important role in unequal treatment. In fact, it is not only persons that are foreign citizens that are facing this problem, this is the case also for persons that were born in Slovenia that are discriminated based on their last name, language, skin color, ethnicity, and religion. Discrimination based on skin color, language and religion are often strongly associated with discrimination based on ethnicity and citizenship, which then leads to intersectional discrimination.

A yearly report on discrimination by the Advocate in 2017 (26) showed that 75% of those that believed they were discriminated against over the previous 12 months did not turn to any formal proceedings to protect their rights. More than half of them expressed as the reason for this decision their mistrust that anything would have changed had they filed a report. Another reason for their inaction is the normalization of discrimination, which has become an integral part of their daily lives.

A research paper on intersectional discrimination from 2022 (27) reviewed literature on discrimination, discriminatory practices and inequalities in Slovenia in the years between 1991 and 2018. The review revealed that the majority of the work focuses on a single dimension of discrimination. Some elements of intersectional research can be noted with regards to gender and ethnicity, gender and migration status and gender and economic and social class.

The research paper talks about the more comprehensive research carried out in



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Slovenia on intersectionality. The first one was carried out in 2009 (28). Among others it also addresses the Intersection of gender and ethnicity. "As a woman, I have had to prove myself more and more in the field of work as a man. [...] As a member of an ethnic minority, I felt different, unwelcome at work and at school." (Zdenka, 25).

A typical example of intersectional discrimination, which affects women of Slovenian and non-Slovenian ethnicity differently, is the case of Milka, who, when looking for a job, was put at a disadvantage not only because she was a woman, but also because of her nationality, which have affected her identity as a woman.

"My employers told me that one day I would have children because I was a woman, but because I am also Bosnian, I was supposed to have even more. Because of this, they refused to hire me. [...] I was offended, and I told them I could sign that I will only have two children." (Milka, 41). Female respondents with non-Slovenian nationality often mentioned cultural differences in attitudes towards both sexes within their own group or family community. In doing so, they pointed to the conflict arising from different attitudes towards gender in the wider social environment or in their own ethnic community. They generally defined Slovenian society as more "democratic", while they said that they experience unequal treatment within their own community in comparison with the wider society. This is, of course, a treatment that stems from a patriarchal system, which cannot be said to be no longer present in Slovenian society.

"In the family environment, my identity as a woman is most affected. As a man you have more advantages and privileges, but as a woman you have to clean and do the housekeeping. Women are more oppressed in our community. In our southern society, women are automatically inferior in some way, you don't have as many rights as a man. [...] My brother never had to clean, cook or wash. [...] Also my mother advocated this attitude because that's the way they are brought up." (Zdenka, 25). "As a woman, I am better off in Slovenia. Croatians are still quite traditional, patriarchal in this. It's normal for a woman to be submissive." (Tanja, 32).

Such stereotyped images also have an impact in wider society and manifest themselves in gendered attitudes towards members of different minority ethnic groups. For example, Sanja mentioned that the intersection of male gender and minority ethnicity in some ways through cultural representations brings out a greater discriminatory treatment of male members of ethnic minority groups. "I think there is a strong stigma about Montenegrin men in general. Either they are criminals, or they are this and that. I think it is actually harder for them. I know how much trouble my father had because of that. He was an honest man, an honest worker at Litostroj factory ... When we bought a bigger flat that we could afford because my both parents were both hard workers [...], it even happened once that my father had to go to the police because someone denounced us, saying that my father was involved in illegal business. I know it was a big shock for us at the time. It even went to the extent that my mother wanted to move to Montenegro, even though she



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had lived in Slovenia much longer than she had in Montenegro." (Sanja, 27)

The intersectionality of gender and ethnicity can be rounded off with one more example of intersectionality, which has shown in a very plastic way that intersectional discrimination is not the sum of individual types of discrimination but establishes a new content and requires special treatment. A respondent working in a shelter for women victims of violence, mentioned that a Roma woman had once come to their shelter and, in addition to the violence at home, she had then been discriminated against within the shelter (discrimination within the group of women victims of violence). For the counselors, all this meant special treatment for this woman and additional work with her. In this case, it became clear how the model of work that had been probably oriented towards a woman, a victim of violence, who is a middle-class Slovene, did not work in the case of the Roma woman, even though she shared the same or similar experience of violence.

"We really worked with her every day for a couple of hours, because you knew what the risk was if she would go back. [...] [Other women in the shelter asked us:] 'Why does she have to be next to us? Put her out, she's different from us! Why doesn't she go, I don't know, to a psychiatric hospital? Why do we have to put up with her? Why don't you say to her what she should wear? This is the pattern of society that these women bring with them. And they feel that they are less worthy if they are with someone who does not meet their criteria. Imaginary, of course. The ones that society has created in the course of their lives.'" (Mateja, ST).

Experts in the field of mental health problems that participated in focus groups highlighted how migrants are often at a health disadvantage when faced with a mental health problem. Because of their unregulated situation - employers employ them illegally - they do not even have the opportunity to visit a psychiatrist.

The research showed that even those experiencing intersectional discrimination do not always perceive it as such, but rather as one-dimensional discrimination or a sum of all discriminations and not as a new reality that puts them in a very specific position due to the intersection they find themselves in. The participants in the research often stressed one identity as the dominant one, which overrode all their other identities. In most cases this was the most visible one.

The second research was carried out in 2011 (29) and unlike the first one, which focused on the everyday lives of persons with intersectional discrimination, this one analyzed structural and political intersectionality. The research focused on three levels: at the micro level, it analyzed individual experiences of older women, migrant and Roma women, on the mezzo level it dealt with institutions that were through the social services supposed to mitigate the inequalities of those women, and at the macro level they researched how policies are shaped with regards to intersectionality. The research concludes that intersectionality in most cases does not feature in policies, but sometimes dimensions of discrimination are added, yet not perceived as complex statuses of

inequality.

As already mentioned, intersectional discrimination was until the adoption of PADA non-existent in Slovene legislation, but it is still not present in any other policy documents dealing with discrimination. The research concludes that the intersectional dimension is marginalized both in the political and media discourse. In case it does feature, it is not actively analyzed or dealt with, but its existence is merely mentioned.

Probably one of the most comprehensive papers that deals with the concept of intersectional discrimination with regards to race and gender, is a master's thesis entitled "Experiencing Racism Among Slovene Women of Color" (30). The aim of the thesis is to show how discrimination based on skin color impacts the lives of Black women in Slovenia. The 9 women, aged between 12 and 49 years of age, that participated in the research were born in Slovenia or moved there before the age of 3. They are situated in different areas in Slovenia and live both in the cities and in the countryside.

With regards to their ethnicity, most of them stated that either the environment has difficulties accepting their Slovene part of their identity or they ascribe them another identity, mostly Roma or foreign. They believe that there is more intolerance towards other ethnicities, such as Roma or Albanians (their migration to Slovene has been on the increase in the past years), and that there is more violence based on sexual orientation than skin color.

All of them faced being insulted, excluded, ridiculed, having fingers pointed at them, being stared at, avoided, called names, such as *black shit*, *Nigger*, *black woman* (in Slovene not politically correct). They were all victims of racism by security and/or police, such as interrogation at the border, being followed by security guards in schools, having their bags checked in shops due to suspicion of theft, as well as being legitimized by police for no obvious reasons. They were also victims of racism due to the fact that they were thought of as Roma. A third said that they were excluded or isolated from society. 4 of them were regularly made fun of in elementary school and called *black / look at how black she is*. A third were told where they came from, and they were denied health care. A third were charged with theft they did not commit, one of them had eggs thrown at her, many of them were victims of verbal violence. Interpersonal racism was actually the most common form of racism that they faced. This kind of racism is reproduced with micro aggression, it can be manifested in the form of sudden, shocking, or unpleasant events that shape the everyday life of Black women, which can occur consciously or unconsciously. As such it is the most difficult to claim that they occur due to racist beliefs. Two of them believe there is structural racism taking place in Slovenia, which occurs mainly in their professional lives. A third of them are self-employed, which they believe is a consequence of their exclusion. They also think that fairytales reconstruct racist behavior.

Four out of nine women stated that they are experiencing intersectional discrimination, as the racism they are facing is different from the one that Black men are facing. In many



cases they are perceived to have a different attitude towards sex than White women, they are perceived as very sexual and nymphomaniacs. At the same time, they are related to prostitution and striptease, they are also perceived as slaves. 2 said that Black women are sexualized, 1 of them said that the same goes for Black men. 2 of them believe that all women, regardless of their skin color, are facing the same kind of sexism. 2 out of 9 women stated that there is no gender-specific racism. A third said that they often feel as if they are being treated like sex objects.

Two thirds of the women were suffering from internalized racism, especially in the forms of White expression, mental colonization, defense of diversity and attempts at “improving their race”. A third showed signs of colorism. A third were not satisfied with their looks and were ashamed of themselves and spoke about the issues that they had with their hair as children. 4 of them wanted to look different, White.

As a consequence of ever-present racism, 2 women spoke about trauma and 1 about depression. 1 said that she did not have any real problems due to racism. In order to avoid discrimination, they behave well and dress up. They are constantly vigilant and have learnt how to predict potential accusations so that they can avoid them before they happen. With age they learnt how to ignore the constant stares and negative opinions of persons, which are actually coping mechanisms to deal with discrimination.

Even though some of the participants stated that they have never faced racism they discovered through the discussion in the focus groups that this was actually not the case. They realized that racist events are often not recognized as such and are also not documented or addressed. They do recognize that they are being discriminated against, but often downplay the events, also by not calling them racism, as this is a very strong word, and they address it as ignorance or curiosity. Nearly half of them said that racism in Slovenia is unintentional and by doing so they normalized it. Only 1 of the women actually reported a racist event, which is in line with the conclusions of the European Network Against Racism from 2018 that in Slovenia there are very few reports about racism to the authorities.

When it comes to intersectional discrimination, about half of the women stated that they are not facing it, even though what they spoke about proved this was not the case. The reason for this misperception is the lack of understanding of the term “gender-specific racism”, yet they spoke about feeling as objectified sexual objects, in line with findings of Black feminists. They noted a historical pattern in which Black women's sexuality has been described as “over the top” and “deviant”, and the bodies of Black women have been the object of exotic and racial fascination.

Both FRA Europa's Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey from 2017 (31) and a Master's Thesis examining racism of Black Slovene women (32) confirmed that the anti-discrimination laws in place in Slovenia, which also forbid discrimination on the basis of race, are functioning. The women that were included in the research stated



that they more often face violence based on their sexual orientation than based on their race.

The thesis concludes that it is not true that racism does not exist in Slovenia, but rather that both the victims and the perpetrators do not recognize the acts as racist. Racism in Slovenia towards Black women is very subtle, as they have actually not been racially profiled, which happens more often to men, but they have been followed by security guards or have witnessed excessive controls at border crossings, most often in a respectful manner.

In 2009, Peace institut implemented research on intersectional discrimination in Slovenia. They involved 21 respondents with different identities. Only a few respondents pointed out the intersection of identities for themselves, but most of them thought about their identities additively. Even after direct questions about intersectionality, some of them still tended to think separately about one and the other identity, with one of the two identities usually being dominant and somehow overlapping the other identity(s).

In a semi-structured interview, respondents were asked to explain what it means to have a particular identity in the social space they live in, what they experience as a result of that identity, and what they think other people around them experience with that identity. They asked them about concrete examples of discrimination they themselves or people they know with the same identity have experienced. They wanted to know how they reacted to discrimination, how discrimination made them feel and what "preventive measures" they used to avoid discrimination on the basis of a particular identity or personal circumstance. They asked them specifically about discrimination at work, at school, in offices, in family and friends' environments.

All questions were asked separately for one identity first, then for the other and the third identity respectively. In the third, "intersectional part", they asked them about their experiences of exclusion and discrimination because of both (or more) identities at the same time. In doing so, they were mostly met with silence, as there were not many cases of this kind. However, additional questions revealed that this type of discrimination does occur, but that it is often "hidden" behind just one personal circumstance. In fact, they helped the respondents to think by putting them in a hypothetical situation. They asked them to think about what it would be like for their life, especially in the context of discrimination, if they did not have one of the identities or if they did not have both identities at the same time. This question turned out to be a good one, because they put the respondents in a situation where they had to think about the intersection of identities and what they experience as a result of both identities, although of course they were usually only getting 'hypothetical answers'.

In some cases, however, only this helped to bring back memories of some discriminatory episode that was the result of intersectionality. In the fourth part, they specifically asked them about their situation within their minority groups. They were



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interested in what they experienced in one of the minority groups because of having another identity at the same time. With the exception of gender, it turned out that in Slovenia, there is a lack of a critical mass that would enable the "institutionalization" of intersectional positions; while we know associations and NGOs that, for example, bring together Roma women, lesbians, etc., we do not know of any associations in Slovenia of homosexual disabled/with disabilities people, or Muslims who are disabled / with disabilities, gay and lesbian Roma associations, etc.

They also asked respondents about potentially discriminatory policies they are aware of that do not address their specific positions. This means, for example, that they only address one of their identities and are not sensitive enough to intersectionality. Unfortunately, it turns out most of the respondents do not think about such policies or are not aware of them at all.

Following is the summary of the key findings of the public opinion research (Advocate of the principle of equality research)

The findings of the public opinion research from 2017 (33) show that respondents most often perceive discrimination as unequal treatment on the grounds of skin color or race (19%), as unequal treatment in general (16%) and as unequal treatment based on religion (15%).

Respondents chose as the most common reason for discrimination: ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and social status. At the same time, approximately a quarter of respondents believe that Roma people are the most frequent targets of discrimination in Slovenia, followed by homosexuals, refugees and people from lower social classes. Discrimination is most widespread in the areas of work and employment, justice, police procedures, followed by social and health security.

More than a third of respondents (36%) think that the situation of inequality and discrimination in the country has worsened in past years. Among those who think they have been targets of discrimination in the last 12 months, the proportion is higher at 45 per cent. In addition, a fifth of respondents (22%) consider discrimination to be one of the more widespread problems in the country. A good third of respondents (38 per cent) consider discrimination to be as much of a problem as other problems in the country. Almost 40% of the population is interested in information on inequality and discrimination in Slovenia.

The results showed that around two thirds of respondents did not know a single legal act aimed at preventing and eliminating discrimination, and almost two thirds of the respondents do not know of a single body promoting equality and protection against discrimination.

Respondents' answers to the question how the fight against inequality and the

prevention of discrimination is addressed show a worrying picture, with more than a third (36%) believing that the fight against inequality is not adequately (or not at all) addressed. Those who feel that the fight against inequality and discrimination is not adequately addressed, when asked how the existing situation could be improved, they suggested the following: more emphasis should be placed on raising people's awareness, strengthening relations between people, improving statutory and legal regulations, and improving education.

Around a fifth of the population would definitely report discrimination if they witnessed it or became aware of it. If they or someone close to them had experienced discrimination, the first place they would turn for help would be to family members, followed by the Ombudsman, friends and colleagues, and fewer would go to personal lawyer, police and inspectors.

Summary of key responses with alleged personal experience of discrimination

Around a fifth of respondents (17%) say they have been the target of discrimination in the last 12 months; 11% have experienced discrimination several times in the last 12 months; 6% have defined discrimination as a one-off event. Of these, almost half have been discriminated against at work followed by healthcare, public administration procedures and education. The most common personal circumstances of discrimination were age, social status, health status and education.

It is worrying that 75% of those who consider themselves to have been discriminated against in the last 12 months did not use any procedures for protection of their rights. A good half of those who did not use any procedures cited as a reason for their decision a lack of confidence that this would make any difference.

Respondents who felt they had been discriminated against in the last 12 months were asked to describe an experience that they felt had been discriminatory. Analysis of their answers showed that as many as 70% of the cases could meet the definition of discrimination as defined by the ZVarD, while the remaining cases were mostly other inappropriate treatment or injustice.

Summary of findings on tolerance and attitudes towards discrimination (Advocate of the Principle of Equality Research)

The findings of the public opinion research show that people in Slovenia expressed relatively negative attitudes towards foreigners and persons of other nationalities. The majority (70.2%) agree that many foreigners in Slovenia exploit social assistance. Slightly more than half of the Slovenian population (53%) disagreed with the statement that foreigners are taking jobs away from Slovenians. The majority of Slovenians (57%) agree with the statement that it is not right that the state takes better care of Ukrainian refugees than of other refugees, for example, from Africa or the Middle East. A majority of Slovenians (74.6%) would support their child if they wanted to marry a person of another

nationality.

The attitude of Slovenes towards Roma people is mixed. Almost half of the population of Slovenia (48%) agree with the statement that most Roma people do not want to work. About one fifth (20.4%) disagree with this statement. Just over half of the Slovenian population (52.4%) would have no reservations about employing a Romani man or woman in their own company. Two thirds of the population (66.3%) would have no problem renting an apartment or house to a person of another skin color. The majority of Slovenians (67.9 per cent) would not mind if their child had a Romani classmate.

Summary of findings on perceptions and experiences of discrimination

People living in Slovenia most often perceive discrimination as unequal treatment discrimination on the grounds of gender (28%), skin color (21%) or unequal treatment in general (20%). This is followed by unequal treatment based on religion (18%), intolerance and incomprehension (17%) and humiliation and underestimation (16%).

Approximately the same proportion of people in Slovenia believe that the prevalence of discrimination in Slovenia is equal (37%) or lower (33%) than other problems in the country. Approximately one fifth (21%) consider discrimination to be among the more widespread problems in the country.

The majority of Slovenians (67%) consider discrimination to be the most widespread in the areas of work and employment. This is followed by social protection (32%), police procedures (31%) and real estate rentals (31%), and the area of justice (30%). The majority of Slovenians believe that foreigners are the most frequent targets of discrimination in Slovenia (26%) and the poor (26%). This is followed by women (23%), homosexuals (22%), elderly (15%), the religious (14%) and people with different disabilities (13%).

Most people in Slovenia think that the most common reasons for discrimination in Slovenia are personal characteristics of nationality, race or ethnic origin (39%), sexual orientation (28%) and religion (17%). This is followed by social status (16%), disability (16-15%), age (15%) and third-country nationality (15%). Most people in Slovenia (43%) believe that discrimination is most often perpetrated by individuals. This is followed by private sector employers (27%), politicians (26%) and supervisors or bosses (25%).

In the last 12 months, almost a quarter of the population of Slovenia (23%) has been the target of discrimination, unequal treatment, or disadvantaged by a person or organization because of a personal characteristic or circumstance. The majority of the population (70%) have not been subjected to such treatment in the last 12 months. Most people in Slovenia (46%) have been discriminated against in the area of work and employment. This is followed by health care (24%), social welfare (13%) and public administration procedures (11%). The highest percentage of Slovenians (24%) were discriminated against on the basis of a personal characteristic or a circumstance of their social status. This was followed by education (18%), health (17%) and religion or belief



(16%). The majority of Slovenes (86%) have not used procedures to protect their rights. Around one in seven Slovenians (14%) have used a procedure to protect their rights. The majority of Slovenians (56%) who have not used a procedure to protect their rights have not done so because they believe that nothing would change. More than a fifth did not do so for fear of making matters worse. Slightly fewer (19%) thought the procedure was too complicated, time-consuming and expensive.

Around one in ten (11%) people in Slovenia had been harassed in the last 12 months. The majority (85%) had not been harassed in the last 12 months. The majority of people in Slovenia (28%) who experienced harassment in the last 12 months were harassed because of a personal characteristic or a circumstance of their social position. This was followed by political opinion (20%), religion or belief (19%) and health (16%). Most people in Slovenia (36%) who experienced harassment in the last 12 months were harassed in the area of work and employment. This is followed by social networks (25%), trade and other service activities (14%), media (11%) and healthcare (11%). The majority of Slovenians (75%) who experienced harassment in the last 12 months did not take any action. A quarter of Slovenians (25%) took action. The majority of Slovenians (64%) who did not take action after experiencing harassment did not do so because they felt that nothing would change. Almost a quarter of the population (23%) feared that doing so would make the matter worse, while slightly fewer (20%) felt that there was no need to take action.

The majority of Slovenians (45%) would turn to the police if they or their loved ones were discriminated against. This is followed by family members (42%), the Ombudsman (31%) and friends and colleagues (28%). Almost one tenth of the population of Slovenia would turn to the Advocate of the Principle of Equality (9%).

How much does youth learn about discrimination? “I am not your mulatto” (32) is a manual for counselors, educators and all that are interested in understanding the biracial population in Slovenia and the related racism. It is an appeal for changed attitudes and an end to discrimination, both in interpersonal relations and through existing colonial messages in textbooks. The first part of the book aims at explaining the everyday micro-racism that biracial and Black persons are facing.

- Among them are constant reminders of not belonging, such as “You speak Slovene so well” or “Where are you from?”. Another form of expressing the belief that biracial or Black persons are not Slovene is by addressing them in English.
- Children are often stereotypically identified as good artists, in line with the colonialist mentality that Africans are childish and only have fun or exist for entertainment, or as good in sports or dance. In both cases they are defined as persons that use their body, while White persons use their mind. This kind of categorization is not only racist, but it can also lead to mental problems of youth that are forming their identity.
- Inappropriate communication with parents: Black parents are often



characterized as non-Slovene and less “civilized”, while White parents are often asked if the child is “their”.

- Coping mechanisms: youth often develop coping mechanisms to survive microaggressions, among them is also making fun of themselves in a manner that others do. Others perceive the jokes as innocent, but in reality, they are racist.
- Addressing biracial persons as mulattos is still acceptable in Slovenia.

The author identifies coping mechanisms that children assume in order to fit in with the majority population, as all human beings want to belong, yet they are constantly reminded that they are outsiders. The coping mechanisms unfortunately lead to a denial of their own worth: They do not wish to excel academically, so they intentionally lower their performance in school.

In sports they assume the defense and not offense positions, as they do not want to be called aggressive or called names. Biracial children come home, hurt, crying, saying that they have been called names, told that they were ugly or dirty, or excluded. Consequently, they start witnessing their exterior as a challenge, an obstacle, which separates them from others. Those successful at sports accept the explanation that their excellence comes from their skin color. Imitation of the majority population in order to obtain approval, a consequence of not being accepted as they are and due to feelings of low self-worth. It is, of course, possible that biracial youth are accepted in their local environment, but once they leave this smaller circle, this might change.

Individualism or self-isolation might occur when individuals realize that mimicry or any other ways of trying to obtain approval have been successful. They isolate themselves and search for a group to belong to. This can expose them to negative online practices or predators. Autoexotication, especially in teenage years, can happen as a consequence of intentional stereotyping of their own identity, related to their Black identity, such as wearing ethnic jewelry, excessive connection to the tribes to which their ancestors came from, getting tribal tattoos etc.

The author makes a strong distinction between migrants from African countries or other Black migrants that moved to Slovenia and biracial Slovenes. She states that the latter have a Slovene identity, while migrants might have integrated into it. In Slovenia, there is a very high percentage of persons that are biracial or Black and live with no Black racial mirror, much higher than in other European or especially Western European countries.

The manual speaks about the sexualization of biracial and Black Slovenes, considering them to have excessive sexual drive and excess promiscuity. A judge asked a biracial girl, a victim of a multiple rape, who lived with her biological White mother and White stepfather and knew no other country than Slovenia, whether it is typical for her culture to have multiple partners.

The author’s appeal to educators who are faced with racism to openly denounce it.



This will give the biracial or Black person a feeling of safety and security, will improve their self-worth, and will make them understand that their skin color is not problematic.

She also calls for an end to making distinctions between us and them, even though they are believed to be positive discrimination, in the sense of “you are such good dancers / singers / sports persons”, “you have such strong bodies” or “we admire you”. What children will hear is that “they” are not part of the majority “us”. In the worse us and them division the comparison can go in the direction of “you are good at sports, we are good at mental jobs” or “we are smart, you are stupid”.

She calls onto educators to be watchful about the existence of discrimination when there are biracial or Black persons present in the classroom / community. They will be very careful about reporting cases of racism, as they might fear reprisal from those perpetrating discrimination. It is equally important to be careful about the messages and way of speaking that educators use when dealing with youth, which means that they need to be vigilant about their conscious and unconscious biases.

The author proposes that schools adopt a strategy of conduct in case of discriminatory events, which should include topics on how to react in given situations, what kind of strategies to adopt to get an insight into the distress that the child is facing without using stereotypical or unconsciously racist perceptions, and how to raise awareness among the parents of all pupils about racism and discrimination, keeping in mind that a color-blind approach is inappropriate. Schools should also carry out communication workshops aimed at teaching pupils how to communicate in an inclusive manner and with respect towards all.

As part of the project “Citizenship and discrimination: the intersectional approach towards researching social exclusion” (34) a Manual for teachers on intersectional discrimination was created. Based on the work of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, official statistics and existing research it has been concluded that the Slovene public is not sufficiently aware of the system against discrimination in Slovenia and that vulnerable groups have a difficult time deciding to report discrimination, while decision makers are at the same time not sufficiently aware of all the consequences and extent of discrimination in Slovenia. As the youth are one of the more vulnerable groups with regards to discrimination, it was deemed important to provide them information on intersectional discrimination, with the assistance of teachers. The manual describes the kinds of existing discriminations and explains what intersectional discrimination is, and how to fight against it. At the end there is a brief exercise that teachers can carry out in the classroom to make their pupils understand how life changes due to personal circumstances.

How do the media deal with the topic?

The research on intersectional discrimination and inequalities from 2022 (35) showed that the media rarely report about discrimination. Public media are slightly more sensitized

about the topic compared to private media. In general, the media legitimized and reproduced the realpolitik perceptions of political parties about discrimination, which led to the normalization of discrimination in Slovenia.

National TV reported about an expert event, organized by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in December 2023, on the violence faced by migrant women (36). The State Secretary of the Ministry stated that they are victims of intersectional discrimination, as they are not only facing violence due to smugglers, human traffickers and institutions, but once in Slovenia they also face lack of information about potential assistance, abuse at work, and care responsibilities in the household. In his view the debate was identified.

2.2. Italy

In Italy, a distressing reality persists where millions of individuals face discrimination on various grounds, including sexual orientation, race, religion, as well as physical and social conditions. Discrimination manifests in multifaceted ways, encompassing verbal abuse, mistreatment, the unjust denial of access to fundamental services, social ostracization, and, regrettably, incidents of outright violence.

Even though all explicit references to "race" were eradicated from official discourse after WWII, racism persists as a deeply ingrained issue within continental European society. It intertwines with anti-immigrant sentiment, shaping societal norms, policies, and everyday interactions. A survey conducted by SWG Italy in 2017 on racial discrimination exposed a deeply rooted intolerance toward immigrants, with 55% of participants believing that certain forms of racism could be justified (37). A more recent survey in 2022, conducted by Demos & Pi, revealed that 40% of Italian citizens express concerns about immigrants (38). Additionally, a 2020 publication by Statist indicates that Italian adults rank sexual orientation, racism, and religion—in that order—as the most significant reasons for discrimination and prejudices (39).

Official data, provided by the ODIHR/OSCE Observatory, disaggregated based on three categories of motives: xenophobia/racism, sexual orientation and gender identity, and disability, reveals a distinct prevalence of racist and xenophobic crimes, with the number increasing from 194 reported cases in 2013, constituting 41.1% of the total, to 726 recorded cases in 2019, comprising 74.9% of the total (40). A report conducted by Lunaria, a nonprofit association for social promotion, identified 366 instances of verbal abuse, physical violence, property damage, and documented discrimination with xenophobic and racist characteristics during the period of 2021-2022 (41).

Regarding gender violence, it's unfortunate that data may not precisely reflect the actual extent of violence due to various factors. Despite statistical data indicating a world decline in the number of female victims of homicide and the gender pay gap, women in Italy still grapple with the enduring presence of male chauvinism, facing harmful



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stereotypes, discrimination, as well as physical and psychological violence. The number of female homicide victims in Italy, for example, has consistently remained above 110 per year for the past two decades. These challenges affect women and girls of all ages and social backgrounds, as evidenced by data on unemployment, the pay gap, educational attainment, political participation, access to health services, and equal treatment in general (42).

Concerning gender equality, Italy has an index of 68.2 points out of 100, which is 2.0 points below the EU average, placing it 13th in the EU rankings. Notably, since 2010, Italy's score has surged by 14.9 points, marking the most substantial increase among all Member States and resulting in an impressive eight-place climb in the rankings. On the flip side, Italy's progress has hit a standstill in the financial domain for women, with a slight decline of 0.2 points since 2020 (43).

According to the Rainbow Europe organization, despite legislation ostensibly prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation, there are still instances of discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in various sectors, including health, work, family and education (44). The report also highlights a troubling trend of increasing hate speech, particularly targeting trans people. Politicians and state representatives in Italy have been reported engaging in hate speech, with a notable surge following the September elections.

For instance, in September, Federico Mollicone, the cultural spokesperson for Fratelli Italia, asserted that "homosexual couples are not legal, are not allowed" in Italy, and he expressed that same-sex parenting was not considered "normal." In November, Lucio Malan of Brothers of Italy claimed that the Bible deems same-sex relations an "abomination." These instances underscore the persistence of discriminatory attitudes and rhetoric, emphasizing the need for continued efforts to combat prejudice and promote inclusivity in Italy.

The pervasive nature of discrimination underscores the pressing need for concerted efforts to address and rectify these systemic issues. It requires a comprehensive approach that not only acknowledges the existence of these challenges but actively seeks to dismantle the barriers that perpetuate discrimination. Creating a society that values diversity, fosters inclusivity, and safeguards the rights of every individual remains a crucial imperative in Italy's ongoing pursuit of social justice and equality.

2.3. Romania

National mass-media insufficiently reports about the multiple discrimination cases. In general, the journalists don't use the concept of *multiple discrimination* although it exists in the Romanian legislation. In public places, and regarding access to public services (education, health services, relation with authorities, the most vulnerable groups in the face of the discrimination are Roma women, older women, pregnant women and poor women.

Among these areas, the most strongly perceived discrimination at the collective level, is the discrimination that takes place in hospitals and health systems.

"I can't no longer breathe (I don't have air)" (45), were among the last words Alexandra texted to her family – the words have become the motto of protests that began in Botoșani after her death in August 2023. On social media, the protest was even more numerous, with thousands of people posting indignantly about Alexandra's death; some have posted the motto "I have no air" on their profiles, others have called for the resignation of those responsible. In her case, we find the following facts with potential for multiple discrimination: woman, young, pregnant, with modest material possibilities and coming from the least economically developed region of Romania - Moldova.

According to the UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (46), discrimination against women and Roma people, human trafficking and the lack of sex education are among Romania's problems in the view of other United Nations Human Rights Council member countries.

In the first three months of 2023, 13,307 criminal acts of domestic violence were registered by the Romanian Police, almost 1,000 more cases than in 2022. However, Romania does poorly in collecting data on violence against women. Apart from domestic violence, police reports do not cover other kinds of discriminatory assaults. Moreover, the state has conducted very few surveys on perceptions and experiences of violence. Due to lack of data, the European Gender Equality Index does not include Romania.

Romania ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2016, a mechanism designed to prevent violence against women. One of the main obligations is to monitor cases of violence. Romania has serious problems regarding reproductive health and sexual education. Filia Center (47), a women's rights NGO in the first half of 2022 says that in 13 Romanian counties there were no abortions on demand. Romania does not provide consistent sex education and effective access to contraception and abortion.

Romania's Roma continue to face extreme poverty, social exclusion and discrimination in terms of their rights to education, health, housing and work.

The majority of Roma in Romania live in overcrowded conditions, attend segregated schools, drop out of education at a young age and experience discrimination in the workplace according to a report by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (48).

2.4 Good practices in the participating countries and in the EU more broadly

The European Union prioritizes the advancement of social justice and equality for all individuals within its member states. Through strategic funding and initiatives, the EU actively addresses various forms of discrimination, including those that intersect and affect young people, acknowledging the complexity of societal biases. By investing in such projects, the EU aims to foster a more inclusive and equitable society where every



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individual, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds, can fully participate and thrive in the European community.

Over the past decade, the Erasmus+ program has funded over 10,000 projects aimed at addressing discrimination, with just 51 specifically targeting intersectional discrimination and 19 involving youth and/or youth workers across 41 countries, regardless of their European Union membership status. Among these initiatives, Germany leads the list with 12 projects, followed by Spain, Italy, Belgium, and Sweden. Notably, 868 of these projects were labeled as good practice, emphasizing inclusion, promoting gender equality, and combating racism and discrimination, with 127 involving youth and youth worker participation. The majority of these projects focused on themes related to gender, including issues affecting migrant women, and LGBTQIA+ discrimination.

In these projects, both qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted to critically examine the implications of social categories and challenge the acceptance of unjust societal structures, which holds immense significance. Through quantitative research, the aim is to unveil an objective reality and achieve broad applicability across populations. Qualitative research, on the other hand, typically employs various approaches such as narrative methods and mapping tools, which are frequently utilized in participatory research. This is because qualitative methods involve analyzing the stories individuals share about their lives, allowing for a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

A significant portion of these projects offered "train-the-trainer" courses for youth workers who interact with marginalized groups, such as LGBTQIA+ individuals, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, aiming to promote an innovative and inclusive educational approach rooted in the principle of intersectionality. Additionally, these projects sought to enhance the responsiveness of education and training systems, as well as youth policies, promoting social inclusion of young people to address contemporary challenges including civic and intercultural competences, intercultural dialogue, democratic values, fundamental rights, social inclusion, and non-discrimination.

Furthermore, several handbooks and toolkits were developed and tested for youth workers and youth organizations, with the aim of promoting an anti-discrimination stance rooted in an intersectional approach. A project that particularly drew our interest was "**Youth Connections**", led by *The Old Secondary Education Centre*, a UK-based organization, in collaboration with organizations from France, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom. The primary aim of this initiative was to devise new approaches and methodologies for youth workers and professionals engaging with multicultural groups of young people. The project successfully introduced an innovative and impactful approach to youth work within multicultural communities, fostering collaboration among asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and EU youth through peer learning. Furthermore, it empowered young individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to take on active roles as agents of change.



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As a result of workshops and activities organized by partners in collaboration with local young people and migrants, a storytelling book was published and translated into five languages. The book comprises a collection of stories depicting the personal experiences of participants as they navigate the processes of inclusion and adaptation in their new country. The storytelling featured in this booklet has been categorized into topics including Cultural Shock, Personal Development, Challenges Experiences, Discrimination, Migration, Dignity, Tolerance, Inclusion, and Covid-19. This approach, which involves youth in the creation process of a tangible product like a book, serves as a source of motivation. It enables them to feel empowered and valued, as their voices and perspectives are acknowledged and considered. Additionally, when youth engage in the design and implementation of projects, they cultivate a sense of ownership over the outcomes, fostering increased engagement and commitment. Lastly, sharing personal experiences serves as a potent tool for learning and personal growth. Through this exchange, youth can glean insights from each other's experiences, gaining a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and challenges.

We selected three additional ERASMUS+ projects that we deemed to have an interesting methodological approach. These projects have developed compelling handbooks, manuals, or guidelines to equip youth workers and young people with the knowledge, tools, and methods necessary for initiating bottom-up campaigns against pressing issues such as discrimination, hate speech, racism, bullying, cyberbullying, violence, and their impact on young people:

1. ***RAISE! - Raising Awareness for Inclusive Societies Expression, 2022.*** This project aimed to empower youth by fostering higher levels of self-confidence and affirming their identities through collaborative efforts with youth workers and educational institutions. By providing them with tools for self-empowerment, the project aimed to not only strengthen the resilience of youth but also enhance the effectiveness of professionals working with marginalized groups. (Project Reference: 2019-1-FR02-KA205-015865).

2. ***HateBusters: Youth Against Hate, 2022.*** The project aimed to contribute to the achievement of these goals, and through the implementation of its results, the project partners have significantly enhanced the learning experiences of young people, youth workers, teachers, and NGOs. (Project Reference: 2019-3-AT02-KA205-002565).

3. ***Diversity & Inclusion: Building Strengths Together, 2022.*** In this project, the partners prioritized the exchange of non-formal education practices to promote the social inclusion of marginalized young people. As a result, they developed an appealing toolkit centered around non-formal education, emphasizing inclusion and diversity. The toolkit was designed to be user-friendly and durable, comprising three types of work-forms: energizers, activities, and reflection methods. It was translated into four languages and made available in a digital format, which was distributed to youth workers, teachers, career counselors, trainers, volunteers, and specialists in youth affairs. (Project Reference:

2020-1-LV02-KA205-003015).

Furthermore, in our review process, we came across a specific project that captured our interest, despite not being explicitly focused on youth or the involvement of youth workers. This project pertaining to discrimination, entitled "***How much freedom of speech can a democracy tolerate***", was undertaken by three non-governmental associations from Germany, Ireland, and Slovenia. This project resulted in the creation of a handbook and an app called "Decontamination". The handbook aims to equip individuals with the tools and knowledge needed to recognize the power we possess to envision an alternative perspective for public spaces. This perspective emphasizes the protection of human rights, international cooperation, intercultural coexistence, and respect for differences and diversity, all while rejecting the promotion of hate. The app, on the other hand, allows for the monitoring of public hate speech against marginalized groups in the streets and serves as a concrete starting point for resisting such hatred. Additionally, an online map of ***Decontamination*** was created, showcasing the location and description of each reported instance of public hate speech for anyone to access and examine (49).

This approach, characterized by informative handbooks for quick reading and the use of cellphone apps, could serve as an effective instrument for conducting programs and initiatives among youth. These methods have the potential to captivate their attention by addressing issues that directly impact their lives and the world they inhabit. Youth are often at the forefront of social change and are passionate about promoting inclusivity, equality, and justice. By engaging with projects that tackle discrimination and promote human rights, young people can develop a deeper understanding of societal issues and their role in effecting positive change. Moreover, these projects empower youth by equipping them with tools and resources to identify and confront discrimination within their communities, thereby fostering a sense of agency and activism. This empowerment is particularly crucial for youth workers, as it enables them to effectively support and guide young people in addressing social injustices and advocating for positive change. By serving as a catalyst for youth engagement and activism, such initiatives play a pivotal role in shaping the next generation of leaders and promoting a more inclusive and equitable society.

CHAPTER II – METHODOLOGY

We believe that language serves as more than a mere conduit for information; it actively constructs our realities. Within this paradigm, language becomes a dynamic tool in a relational process, fostering collaborative meaning-making and comprehension. By adopting a constructivist approach, we acknowledge the inherently constructive nature of human interaction. This perspective emphasizes the co-creation of meaning and understanding through collaborative endeavors. When engaging with diverse perspectives, our focus shifts towards understanding the collective actions and their resultant creations,

potentially leading to goals or outcomes that diverge from our initial intentions. Embracing this approach, we refrain from preconceived notions of right or wrong outcomes, opting instead to analyze and appreciate the relational aspects inherent in the meaning constructed during the process.

Hence, we had proposed a constructivist methodology that provides a framework for open discussions among youth and youth workers. Within this approach, youth and youth workers were invited to share their knowledge and lived experiences related to intersectional discrimination in a judgment-free environment. By performing this methodology, we aimed to foster a nuanced exploration of diverse perspectives and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play.

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUP

This study involved 5 groups of young people and youth workers hailing from Slovenia, Romania, and Italy, with a special focus on individuals from underprivileged regions where gender, racial, and other stereotypes are more pronounced. Additionally, we will prioritize those who possess personal experiences reflecting intersectional identities.

Recruitment was scheduled to occur between October and December 2023, with an anticipated total of 60 participants who meet the inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria encompassed the following requirements for youth workers:

1. **Age eligibility:** Applicants must be between 15-29 years old for young people and 23-45 for youth workers at the time of recruitment.
2. **Gender balance:** We aimed for an equal gender distribution, with a 50% representation of both females and males.
3. **Employed in any occupation:** Candidates from all employment backgrounds were welcome to apply.
4. **Comprehend at least a linguistic A2** proficiency level in the language employed for facilitating the focus group.

In the initial stage, participants were introduced to the study's objectives by the moderator. If they expressed an interest in participating, a more comprehensive explanation and discussion of further study details was provided. Consent was secured through the completion of a written consent form prior to any intervention.

To perform the focus group activities, we used a mix of three qualitative data analysis techniques:

1. **Interview:** starting a focus group with an interview is a valuable step in the research process as it helps set the stage for productive and insightful group discussions by providing context, building rapport, and tailoring the session to the specific needs of the participants. Moreover, interviews provide an opportunity to gather personal insights,

anecdotes, and stories that might not emerge in a group setting. This qualitative data can enrich the overall findings of the focus group.

2. **Keywords-in-context:** consists of using keywords that are considered central to the development of the theme by analyzing words that appear before and after each keyword, leading to an analysis of how the word is used within the focus group's culture.

3. **Discourse analysis:** permits us to examine words and phrases to ascertain how individuals take accountability for their interpretations of experiences, events, locations, and the like.

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTION AND GROUP FAMILIARIZATION

This initial phase allows participants to acquaint themselves with each other and the facilitator, helping to create a safe and non-judgmental environment. Such an atmosphere encourages open and honest dialogue, as participants feel more at ease sharing their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives. Group familiarization in a focus group study plays a pivotal role in establishing a foundation of trust, comfort, and rapport among participants. Moreover, group familiarization can uncover shared experiences or common ground, potentially leading to more in-depth discussions and valuable insights. By establishing a sense of belonging and connection within the group, participants are more likely to engage actively in the focus group discussions, contributing to the overall success and richness of the research findings.

Interview Schedule

Firstly, I would like to thank you for taking part in this service evaluation. As this is a new training project and we are always looking at ways we can improve, we would like to find out about your experiences in intersectional discrimination.

We aim to gain insight into your experiences as a youth worker, with a particular focus on your coping strategies and individual perspectives. Whether you've directly encountered situations or have observed them from a third-person perspective, we are equally interested in the experiences you've encountered.

We are keen to hear your views and there are no right or wrong answers. Your answers will be anonymized and will not affect the care you are receiving from the services. The interview typically lasts around 45 minutes.

We will commence with a movie presentation that will introduce you to the topics we will explore during this journey. (We recommend that each country locates the translated video in the language used for the focus group).

VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2hvibGdg4w&t=100s>

Intersectional identities and discrimination

1. What does intersectional identities and discrimination mean to you?



2. Could you please describe the identities you associate with? In other words, tell me about your multiple identities, how you perceive yourself, and what identities you believe you possess?

3. How would you describe your experience with intersectional identities and discrimination?

Contact with Intersectional identities and discrimination

4. Have you had any experiences of housing/migration/work change that led to encounters with discriminatory situations?

5. Have you ever been in contact with someone that suffers any kind of discrimination? How do you feel about that?

6. When did you first encounter a discrimination situation?

7. Was any form of support provided to these individuals?

8. Did you feel the provided support met the needs of your individual or personal situation?

9. Are you currently in contact with persons that suffer some kind of discrimination? How do you feel about that?

Mental health (minority stress disorder detection*)

10. Could you share any challenges you encountered during or after experiencing a discriminatory situation?

11. Are there self-help strategies you employ to manage these challenges?

12. Which strategies have you found helpful/less helpful?

13. Do you have any suggestions for strategies you believe might be effective for persons which are victims of any kind of discrimination? Is there anything you personally would have appreciated being offered?

PHASE 2: KEYWORDS-IN-CONTEXT AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

By using both approaches, it is possible to pose open-ended questions to the participants in the focus group, encouraging them to engage in group discussions and reflections on the topic, thereby reducing the likelihood of guided answers. To collect and analyze focus group data, we will adhere to the qualitative framework for the model stipulated by Onwuegbuzie AJ *et al* 2009 (50), by using the matrix for assessing the level of consensus in the focus groups (figure 1).



Focus Group question	Member 1	Member 2	Member 3	Member 4
Discrimination exists among youth workers				
Stereotyping can negatively impact people's access to work opportunities				
Sexual orientation can hinder individuals' access to employment opportunities				
Race can pose barriers to people's access to employment opportunities				
Gender can present obstacles to individuals' access to employment opportunities				

The following notations can be entered in the cells:

A = Indicated agreement (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)

D = Indicated dissent (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)

SE = Provided significant statement or example suggesting agreement

SD = Provided significant statement or example suggesting dissent

NR = Did not indicate agreement or dissent (i.e., nonresponse)

Figure 1: Adapted from - Matrix for assessing level of consensus in focus group suggested by Onwuegbuzie AJ *et al* 2009 (50).

Here are some suggestions for keywords that could be introduce to participants:

Intersectionality

Diversity

Sexual orientation

Discrimination

Prejudice

Socioeconomic status

Equality

Stereotype

Ableism

Social justice

Empowerment

Cultural competence

Identity

Equity

Systemic oppression

Marginalization

Inequality

Allyship

Inclusivity

Race

Bias

Gender

In the second stage of the conversation analysis process, transcripts undergo a thorough examination aimed at identifying and validating claims and structural elements. This step also includes an important part called “checking for accuracy.” It means looking closely at the data, finding typical examples, double-checking information, and using other sources to make the findings stronger. In simple terms, it’s about making sure the data is easy to access, reliable by using real examples, and represents what we’re studying.

Introducing a standardized training program for mentors in the focus group of each participating country is necessary. In the realm of research, particularly when conducting



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focus groups across diverse geographical and cultural boundaries, consistency and uniformity in methodology and approach are of prime importance. By implementing a structured training program for individuals assuming the role of mentors in our different countries, we can ensure a common standard of excellence in research facilitation and analysis. A standardized approach to mentorship, indeed, helps in maintaining the integrity and reliability of research findings, making cross-cultural comparisons more accurate and meaningful.

PHASE 3: TRAINING PHASE

Building upon the data acquired on phases one and two, we had implemented a training program aimed at addressing intersectional discrimination and fostering a heightened awareness, openness, and critical perspective concerning issues related to gender, racism, ethnicity, and the intricate interactions among these factors within the context of youth work. A total of 20 youth workers received training as trainers with the purpose of disseminating this knowledge within their respective countries. Within the training program, partners from the participating countries ensured the active involvement of 7 youth workers from each country. Particular emphasis was placed on selecting candidates from less developed regions where gender, racial, and other stereotypes are more pervasive. Preference was also given to individuals with personal experience in navigating intersectional identities.

By enhancing their competencies through such initiatives and affording them the opportunity to share their multifaceted identities, we aimed to bolster their employability, including those who may currently be unemployed. This empowers them to fully channel their efforts toward improving the circumstances and well-being of young people in their communities.

The primary objective of this phase was to equip youth workers with the tools to actively combat any form of discrimination that might impede job opportunities for young people. We believe that precisely because of their youth, they can serve as a key catalyst in achieving the Agenda 2030 objectives by promoting the right values among their colleagues, friends, and within the community.

CHAPTER III – FOCUS GROUP METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative hypotheses and theories evolve during the study, alongside data collection and analysis. To reinforce the credibility of this approach, the researcher facilitating the group sessions also engaged in data analysis.

The association's focus group sessions involved 60 participants from the three involved countries, including both youth and youth workers. Each transcript underwent independent analysis, with the researcher identifying recurring words, patterns, and themes. Subsequently, they prepared for the 'charting' process, a methodical and streamlined

approach to organizing the data. Specific contents were then extracted from the manuscripts, compiled, summarized and organized into categories. The category set was revised on a number of occasions in order to exclude extraneous or non-relevant material. Thematic analysis from each group was compared and cross-referenced between groups.

Around 86% of the participants were, or recognized themselves as female. The age range for young people spanned from 15 to 29 years old, while for youth workers, it ranged from 23 to 45 years old. Slovenia conducted focused groups/interviews with 12 individuals, with all but one (Russian nationality) being Slovenian citizens with mixed ethnic backgrounds, particularly among the youth. In Romania, the participants comprised 22 Romanians, one Egyptian, one Turkish, and one Roma individual. However, in line with the association's objectives, the Italian groups showcased a diverse makeup. Out of 25 participants, only seven were Italian, with the rest representing a multitude of nationalities, including Mexico, Tunisia, Brazil, Peru, El Salvador, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Pakistan, and Morocco.

Consequently, we anticipated different outcomes regarding discrimination among these countries. In one focus group from Slovenia and Romania, gender discrimination was notably more pronounced. Meanwhile, racial discrimination, primarily based on skin color, was predominant in Italy and in the second focus group from Slovenia, which had a more diverse set of participants. Following closely were instances of gender, religious, and sexual orientation discrimination."

Several intriguing insights surfaced during the conduct of the focus groups, particularly when we compared the reports from each association. Notably, participants tended to define their identities primarily by gender, followed by ethnicity and work positions. Interestingly, in the Italian focus groups, sexual orientation was sometimes exposed immediately after gender.

Across all focus groups from different associations was the recurring unfamiliarity with the term 'intersectional identities and discriminations.' However, through reflection, participants grasped its essence, realizing that it encapsulates the notion that each individual possesses multiple characteristics that define them, and at the intersection of these characteristics lies their identity. Furthermore, they recognized that these intersecting characteristics can serve as triggers for discrimination depending on the situation.

1. Slovenia

Two focus groups were conducted in Slovenia, both in January 2024, one consisting of 4 youth workers and 1 youth, the other one of 8 participants (4 youth workers and 4 youth) of different ethnic backgrounds actively engaged in the intercultural field of the NGO sector. In addition, two smaller focus groups were conducted in January, each including 2 youth, and 3 interviews, focusing on 2 youth workers and 1 young person. The larger focus groups lasted around 120 minutes, the smaller one about 90 minutes, while the interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. The age range among youth was 15 to 29, while among youth



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workers it was 23 to 43. The majority of participants were Slovenian, with only one participant from Russia. All youth workers were women, as in Slovenia the majority of youth workers are female, while among the youth, there were 2 men and 3 women. In the second focus group there were 7 participants, 2 men in 5 women, in the age range of 20 to 50.

At the beginning of the first focus group discussion, many participants were unfamiliar with the concept of 'intersectional identities and discrimination, and some had not even heard these terms before. However, as they reflected on the concept, some participants came to realize that we all have various identities that intersect and collectively define who we are. On the contrary, in the second focus group participants were in majority familiar with this concept, and they defined it as discriminatory behavior connected to different identities. They further highlighted that it is difficult to identify which identity is discriminatory behavior connected to, it could be to just one identity, or even just to the fact that the person is “different”. They further commented that the concept of intersectionality is great in identifying the problem, but that in the terms of concrete actions, it divides the discriminated groups each fighting their own fights instead of being united in the broad topics such as, for example, poverty.

When questioned about their various identities, the participants in the first group initially described their gender, work positions, and family situations. Some of them also talked about their ethnicity, while some referred to cases of discrimination that youth of non-Slovene ethnicities were facing.. In the second group participants similarly referred to their gender, family role (“mother”), work position, ethnic background, and some of them also to their social status as “migrant”.

When questioned about experiences of intersectional discrimination they had encountered, most participants in the first focus group indicated that they had not personally experienced such discrimination but had witnessed instances of it in various situations. However, several participants recounted specific discriminatory experiences, including mockery for speaking in dialect, gender discrimination in workplaces (to a larger extent directed against women, but in the specific case of the feminized profession of youth workers affecting also men), and one participant shared an incident of facing discrimination due to her ethnicity (Russian) when attempting to open a bank account. In addition to the discussions mentioned, youth workers also addressed the rising issue of discrimination faced by young people relocating to Slovenia with their families, particularly in educational settings. Furthermore, the youths themselves shared their encounters with peers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In one instance, they recounted instances of racism and xenophobia, highlighting the challenges they confronted. Conversely, in another scenario, they expressed a contrasting viewpoint, indicating that ethnicity was deemed insignificant in their interactions

In some cases both youth and youth workers, when first asked to identify any potential discrimination that might have happened to them, said that they never faced such



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difficulties. Only upon continued discussion and by posing more direct questions, related to specific situations, such as change of schools, going to the university, first job or change of jobs, transfer, they realized that they were in fact victims of discrimination. Especially when it comes to gender discrimination they themselves noted that they either internalized it, as it is part of their daily lives, or they did not know how to deal with it. In the second focus group the majority of participants encountered intersectional discrimination (or discrimination in general) themselves or have witnessed such behavior. Among their own experiences were difficulty in finding housing or adequate medical support because of their ethnic origin, being verbally discriminated against in elementary school, and being verbally threatened because of their spouse's racial origin. They listed they have witnessed discriminatory behavior at schools and in kindergartens. As a good practice of the support provided for the victims of discriminatory behavior they identified intercultural mediating, psychosocial support, affirmative racial mirror methods, promoting movies and books with intercultural content, and the awareness that the action of discrimination is, in fact, not connected to their identities but rather to the limited capacities of the person discriminating. Interestingly, some participants held the perspective that people should recognize that others might not have harmful intentions when they make remarks that could be interpreted as offensive. They believe that it's important to understand that these comments are not intended to cause harm or offense. Essentially, it emphasizes the importance of giving people the benefit of the doubt and considering their intentions before assuming malice behind their words. They suggested that taking such comments lightly and humorously can often help diffuse the situation. In the second group a similar issue was raised, however, the participants expressed their annoyance when people said after discriminatory comments that they did not mean it, as the harm was already done.

Acknowledging the potential impact of discriminatory incidents on mental health, participants who had experienced discrimination admitted that it had led to feelings of depression and anxiety.

2. Italy

In December 2023 and January 2024, we conducted two focus groups involving a total of 25 participants, including 15 young people and 10 youth workers. These sessions were held at two of our offices, situated in Florence and Fucecchio, Italy. The facilitation of the focus groups was carried out by two of our skilled social workers. Prior to the sessions, all participants or their guardians signed a privacy guarantee document, ensuring the confidentiality and protection of their data.

Each group interview lasted approximately 150 minutes and was meticulously audio recorded, allowing the researcher to capture the discussions with precision. This method not only facilitated accurate data collection but also bolstered the potential validity of the subsequent data analysis. Importantly, all participants provided consent for this recording



method during the interviews.

Through the interview administration, a strong awareness of the meaning of discrimination emerged, closely linked with the concept of "diversity". Many participants argue that discrimination stems from the failure to accept the diverse characteristics of individuals. They identify gender, culture, origin, possession of material goods, and profession as the primary bases for discrimination. Some participants perceive discrimination as a violation of their freedom, particularly when they feel scrutinized from head to toe. Several shared experiences of feeling disheartened during work/internship interviews, encountering individuals disappointed or perplexed by their skin color, leading to a sense of personal devaluation. Additionally, a youth worker highlighted a prevailing sense of discouragement among young people of foreign origin, who often contemplate dropping out of school due to a perceived lack of future prospects as foreigners living in Italy. We observed that some participants were visibly shaken as they recounted instances of discrimination they had either experienced firsthand or witnessed.

An intriguing testimony came from a youth worker specializing in unaccompanied foreign minors. She highlights that even within this group, which shares a heavy migratory background and resides together, facing similar journeys, significant hierarchies based on skin color are observed. Despite their shared experiences, they establish and perpetuate distinct social structures based on skin color.

However, the level of self-awareness regarding personal experiences of discrimination varied greatly among the participants in the focus group. Italian female participants appeared to be the least aware: one of the Italian youth workers even stated that she had never experienced discrimination, only to recount an episode shortly after in which she acknowledged being discriminated against as a woman. We had observed that her level of awareness increased through the exchange with other participants and the questions posed during the meeting.

In one of the focus groups, an insightful definition emerged: *"Every person is composed of many 'parts.' Often, we tend to see a person through a single category, when in fact there are many pieces that make up that person's identity sphere."* The young participant also makes a relevant connection to intersectional feminism, which aims to amplify the voices of women not only as women but also as individuals who belong to other categories (such as origin, sexual orientation, faith). And she concludes with: *"However, this intersectionality leads to encounters with various levels of discrimination/oppression"*. This reflection prompted all participants to contemplate their intersectional identities and the aspects they personally identify with. As a result, many of them were inspired to share their experiences with intersectional identities and discrimination within the group.

One of the most noteworthy observations was that individuals with a history of involvement in activism activities, whether in our association or other ones, both young people and youth workers, demonstrated a greater ability to articulate discriminatory

situations, understand their rights, and identify supportive mechanisms to defend themselves and the others against such situations.

The second part of the focus group, the 'key words game', brought to light intriguing emergent correlations. Below we list the main ones:

- **Discrimination:** feeling excluded, not being part of society.
- **Diversity:** Discrimination arises from the failure to understand the diversities that distinguish us. Even if not understood, diversities should be accepted. Diversity enriches and should not be subject to discrimination.
- **Identity:** Discrimination makes us feel that our identity is violated. Thus, the importance of cultural representation: being represented means being appreciated and listened to.
- **Injustice:** What we feel when we experience discrimination.
- **Value:** Our value feels undermined in cases of discrimination.

A summary conclusion reached at the end of both group activities was the recognition that confronting discrimination can be a strategy. Additionally, there was an emphasis on the necessity for family and school education, alongside adaptation, highlighting the fundamental role of empathy in understanding others' perspectives.

Considering the methodology of conducting the focus group, we observed that when the participants were seated in circles, there was greater interactivity as they felt more connected to the group. In contrast, when participants were arranged in a 'classroom style' with the moderator and note-taker positioned in front of them, the participants displayed a noticeably more passive approach, completely relying on the facilitator to lead the discussion.

At the conclusion of the activities, participants were encouraged to share their impressions and reflections on the focus group sessions. Many expressed satisfaction and introspection, as they had come to understand that they had experienced more discrimination than they had previously realized. Additionally, they recognized that, at least once in their life, they had inadvertently engaged in some kind of discriminatory action against others. Some participants suggested forming discussion groups with the goal of regularly conducting similar activities, fostering reflections on other important topics.

Our conclusions were that discrimination cannot always be readily identified by individuals, as some discriminatory behaviors have deep roots in society. Additionally, it became clear that gender and skin color discrimination are the most prevalent. However, all forms of discrimination were perceived as offensive and a constraint on personal freedom.

3. Romania

We performed two focus groups during December 2023 and January 2024 in physical format at the headquarters of the Pro Democratia Association in Mareșal Al. Averescu nr.



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17, Pavilion F, et.3, Sector 1, Bucharest and at the Faculty of Education Sciences, Communication Sciences and International Relations, Titu Maiorescu University, Bucharest.

A total of 24 participants attended the session, comprising 14 youth and 10 youth workers. Among them, 21 were Romanian, while 3 belonged to different ethnicities: 1 Roma, 1 Egyptian, and 1 Turkish. The age range varied from 17 to 22 among youth and from 20 to 40 among youth workers.

To further our focus group, we aimed to gather valuable insights from participants to shape the development of an inclusive curriculum for both online and physical courses addressing the critical issue of intersectionality, encompassing multiple forms of discrimination. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the formulation of recommendations for decision-makers in the respective countries. The moderator underscored the significance of participant opinions, emphasizing their role as crucial inputs for the curriculum's refinement and the creation of a document with actionable recommendations.

The moderator pointed out that the opinions of the subjects are essential for the study and that they will be an input to the development of the curriculum for the online and physical course that will address the issue of intersectionality (multiple discrimination), as well as to the drafting of a document with recommendations to be submitted to decision-makers in the three countries.

The duration of the group interviews was about 120 minutes and was audio recorded. Afterwards, the data was filtered through qualitative interpretation. The participants actively engaged in the discussion, offering valuable contributions. Particularly lively discussions emerged around the detrimental effects of stereotyping on individuals' access to employment opportunities. Additionally, participants highlighted how sexual orientation, ethnicity, and gender can act as barriers to accessing employment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The project, which unfolded in geographical and cultural contexts where the involvement of individuals with a migratory background varies significantly in terms of timing and historical progression, afforded us a comprehensive comparative analysis on the subject. In Italy, where the presence of migrants from diverse origins is notably higher compared to other partner countries, there is a noticeable inclination among individual associations and professionals working in the youth education sector to engage in reflective processes regarding this issue. However, this reflection remains highly intricate due to the myriad, distinct interconnections between various complex discriminatory factors and their territorial ramifications, both within the native population at large and with the institutions of the host countries. The levels of complexity are manifold, necessitating ongoing and nuanced reflection to foster the collective growth of the entire community, including native



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residents and newcomers alike.

We firmly believe that genuine progress towards a more just and inclusive future necessitates the acknowledgment and proactive addressing of intersectional discrimination, alongside the cultivation of critical attitudes within young people. By adopting a critical perspective, we not only scrutinize the overt manifestations of discrimination but also the subtle, systemic biases entrenched within our institutions and cultures. Critical attitudes serve as catalysts for societal transformation, empowering us to question and challenge prevailing norms and ideologies that perpetuate inequality and oppression. They prompt a reevaluation of entrenched beliefs and practices, fostering a space for meaningful dialogue and transformative change. This critical examination represents a crucial step towards dismantling discriminatory systems and nurturing a more inclusive, just, and equitable world.

The insights gained from our project underscored the importance of recognizing and respecting individual identities. It became evident that when personal identities are disregarded, discrimination often ensues. Many youths shared their experiences of enduring significant mental health repercussions when faced with discriminatory situations, even when disguised as jokes 'without intention to offend.' These experiences, whether related to gender, ethnicity, or accent, can precipitate mental and social challenges such as depression, anxiety, and a loss of hope for a brighter future. Our findings validated the hypothesis that exposure to diverse realities fosters empathy towards others and heightens awareness of both experienced and perpetuated discrimination.

After meticulously analyzing responses from all participant groups, we concluded that effectively addressing issues of discrimination demands a multifaceted approach. This approach encompasses the incorporation of intercultural mediation in educational settings and youth events, provision of psychosocial support, implementation of affirmative racial mirror methods, promotion of movies and literature featuring intercultural content, and the cultivation of awareness regarding the origins of discriminatory actions. Emphasizing that discrimination stems from the limitations of the discriminator rather than the identities of those discriminated against is paramount.

Furthermore, we advocate for professionals working with youth and children to engage them in collaborative activities, such as group discussions and reflections, on topics pertinent to social, mental, and physical well-being. By fostering innovative and collaborative solutions, we endeavor to proactively address uncomfortable situations and mitigate issues such as bullying and discrimination within school environments, based on factors including gender, ethnicity, religion, and others.



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