



## Cases of discrimination in education

- 1. January. Granada. Discrimination in Education.** Three female students at a secondary school in Granada told how at the beginning of the school year they used to sit in the front row and how the Social Sciences teacher moved them to the back of the class. She also started to give them different homework assignments and when they asked her why she told them that they did not know enough to do the same work as the rest of the class. One of the students even told how the teacher only addressed her in the form of written notes. It is important to point out that they were the only Roma students in the class and their grades from earlier years were good. At the end of the year they had an average grade of 4.5 (5 being passing) and the teacher told them that if they turned in a set of maps they would pass but she did not keep her promise and this meant that they had to earn their secondary education degree through the adult education class the following year. We believe that this is a case of covert direct discrimination based on ethnic origin because, although the teacher never openly admitted the reason for her obviously differential treatment, it was clear that only the Roma students were treated in this manner.
- 2. January. Linares (Jaen). Discrimination in Education.** A mediator involved in the Project to Foster Employability working with families to prevent school absenteeism, went to visit the local school to present a set of activities designed to work with the Parents Association. The mediator introduced herself as an FSG worker and when she explained the reason for her visit several mothers told her that they were sick and tired of taking part in activities for Roma and stated that the school also had non-Roma children. This complaint about acknowledging differences was made solely to question the positive action which could be taken with Roma children. Focusing on differences without acknowledging the difficulties endured by a particular group such as the Roma community in exercising its rights is discriminatory, as is failure to promote equality by eliminating barriers which is what these activities which led to the protest were designed to do.
- 3. March. Granada. Discrimination in Education.** A 15-year-old Roma student wanted to register at a school to do a block of studies in what is known as the Initial Professional Qualification Programme (PCPI). His counsellor accompanied him to the school to fill out the application. When the school official saw that the student was Roma she said that classes were full and he would be wasting his time filling out an application. In the end she let him fill out the application because the boy's counsellor told her that the courses could not be filled already because the application period had not even ended yet and that she could not deny anyone the right to apply for the course. The problem here is that if the boy had gone on his own or with a family member he probably would not have been allowed to fill out an application.
- 4. April. Granada. Discrimination in Education.** The FSG organised an activity at the local kindergarten and primary school to celebrate the 8th of April (International Roma Day). During the activity when something was said about the Catholic Monarchs, the tutor interrupted to make the following comment: "The Catholic Monarchs made a big mistake when they cast the Jews from Spain instead of those people because at least the Jews are hard workers and not like these people who are lazy troublemakers." This comment was made in front of the whole class, including several Roma students. Comments like this which are full of negative prejudices and stereotypes towards the Roma community are unfair and dangerous when spoken by anyone but are far more damaging when they are spoken by a teacher in class acting as a role model for young impressionable students.

- 5. May. Asturias. Discrimination in Education.** A secondary school student and her sister told an FSG worker about a problem that occurred in the young girl's school. She explained how a classmate was bullying her constantly and going on about her being a "gypsy" and using the term in an insulting manner. The girl reported the incident to her teachers just as she was relating it to the FSG worker who then contacted the school to talk about the incident and to find out what measures had been taken. The school mediated and solved the problem between the two students.
- 6. May. Asturias. Discrimination in Education.** A 14-year-old high school student told an FSG social action worker about the following incident: one of his classmates was bullying and making fun of him for being a "gypsy" and used the term in a disrespectful way. The situation came to a head and the student couldn't take it any longer and pushed the classmate who was taunting him. The FSG worker contacted the school to talk about the situation and find out what was going to be done about it. A mediation meeting was held with the two students and both were punished, one for taunting and the other for fighting.
- 7. October. Malaga. Discrimination in Education.** An FSG worker registered in educational studies was attending his science, technology and education classes. During the class the teacher expressed a series of prejudiced and stereotyped opinions about several groups including the Roma community (supposedly rooted in her knowledge of anthropology). The teacher claimed that "anthropologically speaking" the Roma people do not include "potaje" (stew) among their culinary preferences but rather "anthropologically" have a carbohydrate-rich diet, in other words they eat nothing but sandwiches. The student then recommended that the teacher read a book published by the FSG entitled "Potajes para compartir" (stews to share) but she was totally un-phased by his comment and continued on in the same vein. When the student interrupted her discourse again and said that her comments were prejudiced and inaccurate and not at all scientific, she concluded by saying that "she didn't know the Roma people and had no desire to". The student then decided to get up and leave the class. This is an example of how even in a scientific environment, prejudices and stereotypes against the Roma community prevail over any real data and of how people harbouring these prejudices refuse to accept these data and continue with their stereotyped discourse.
- 8. November. Asturias. Discrimination in Education.** A boy's parents went to the local FSG office to discuss what was happening to their son who was in an Initial Professional Qualification Programme (PCPI) at a local high school. According to the parents, some of the boy's classmates used the term "gypsy" in an insulting manner to taunt him and also bullied him in other ways. The FSG worker mediated in the situation by informing the school counsellor who quickly intervened and resolved the problem by speaking with the two boys and their families.

### Classification

These **8 cases** account for **6.10% of the total 131 cases of discrimination** collected by the FSG in 2009.

When it comes to victims of discrimination in education, it is not only the students who are not permitted to register for courses or who are treated differently from the rest, it is also their families and ultimately, the entire society.

The low number of cases of discrimination recorded in this area does not coincide with the experiences narrated by the victims and the educational personnel working at the schools. The problem we find is that this sort of subtle discrimination which is hard to identify as such by the victims themselves or by school personnel, together with a high degree of tolerance for these situations, clearly de-motivates students giving rise to a high school dropout rate.