

3. Conclusions

Discrimination especially affects young people

63% of the victims identified in the cases of discrimination collected by the FSG in 2009 were between the ages of 16 and 30. One way of interpreting these data is that this is the age at which young people are finishing with school and beginning to autonomously exercise their rights as citizens. This is apparently even more the case with male victims where nearly 80% are in that age bracket while in the case of women there is a slight tendency for discrimination to expand to all age brackets.

This can be interpreted in two different ways: it could be due to the fact that Roma youth “mix” more with the majority society and make greater use of public spaces and resources therefore increasing the likelihood of problems of co-existence degenerating into situations of discrimination. Another possibility is that Roma youth are better educated and, precisely due to this greater use of public spaces and resources, are more aware of their right to not be discriminated against and have the skills needed to report these incidents.

Another thing to be considered is that there were no cases of discrimination where the victim was over the age of 65.

Specific focus on discrimination against Roma women

We should start by pointing out that of the 79 victims identified, 40 are women and 39 are men. This difference is negligible and it is therefore safe to say that discrimination affects Roma men and women to the same degree although differences can be observed if we combine different variables, as we will see presently, in gaining access to goods and services or if we combine the sex and age of victims given that most discrimination against men is focused on the 16-30 age bracket while discrimination against women tends to extend over all age brackets.

Data in cases of discrimination in gaining access to goods and services clearly show the roles played by men and women (both in the Roma

community and the majority society) and their differing perception of discriminating agents. It is striking to find that all of the cases of discrimination in this area affecting men in the same age bracket (16-30) occur in the context of entertainment (getting into discotheques or sporting events) while only women were denied access to other types of goods and services such as markets, public transport, repair services, etc. Apparently, Roma women are mostly responsible for accessing goods and services needed to run the household and to care for others and have very little time for entertainment activities. Therefore, situations of discrimination may arise in a number of different services and affect all age groups.

On the other hand, men have greater spending power as from age 30 which could account for a higher degree of social acceptance and hence a reduction in discriminatory practices against men as from age 30 in gaining access to goods and services because they are valued higher and more accepted than Roma women.

Rising discrimination in the area of housing

Rising poverty, unemployment and evictions leads to a breakdown of economic and social rights, including access to housing. The crisis has a greater impact on the poorest and most marginalised communities whose living standard is lowered even further and, in areas such as housing, they are being evicted for failure to keep up with rent payments. This means that many people need to find a new place to live and we believe that the fact that there are more home seekers could be one of the factors accounting for the rise in housing discrimination, now the second most pervasive form of discrimination.

High degree of public tolerance of racist incidents and aggressive and reactionary racist discourse

As the economic crisis worsened, so did the situation of civil and political rights, while a wave of xenophobia and discrimination threatened the rights of immigrants and minorities all over Europe. It is not unusual to come across opinion



articles in newspapers and commentaries on the news where racist and xenophobic slurs are applauded by many people who adopt them as their own rather than reject them. Delving deeper into this we saw how this year there were many newspapers and news commentaries fostering racist thinking accompanied by a reactionary and aggressive attitude towards the people who are combating discrimination. These people defend their theories with alleged personal experiences which are then generalised to the rest of the community in an attempt to create alarm and fear among the majority population and criminalise those of us who are combating racism and discrimination. We must not overlook external reinforcement given to this perverse idea. On the one hand we have the media which tolerate these types of articles or commentaries and, on the other, we have propagandistic, populist and opportunistic messages from some political parties which openly maintain this sort of discourse.

It is important to realise that human rights, such as the right to equality, is a high-priority right which cannot be overlooked under any circum-

stance, not even during times of crisis where solutions to the latter should put equality at the centre.

For all of the foregoing, we believe that it is essential to carry out measures to:

- Continue raising the awareness of victims as to their right to equal treatment and the steps they can take when faced with situations of discrimination.
- Bolster anti-discrimination law by establishing effective punitive measures against the different perpetrators of discrimination.
- Make progress in the collection of data on cases of discrimination in order to have a more global and complete idea as to the dimension of discrimination.
- Encourage public authorities to take a firmer stance in defence of human rights and intolerance of discriminatory situations by implementing swift reaction mechanisms.