



The first step to combating multiple discrimination: let's talk about it!

By Mara Georgescu Videos by Marlies Pöschl



Multiple discrimination is like a public secret: many people would agree that this kind of discrimination can and does exist, and many have even experienced it themselves. However, acknowledging this problem publicly and finding proper answers to it in any public sphere, from education to antidiscrimination policies and legal remedies, are for the moment beyond our reach.

I am a young Roma woman from a poor neighbourhood. I wear traditional Roma clothes.

I went to a job interview and was not even allowed to be interviewed, because the moment they saw me, they said the job was already taken

So, how do we start dealing with this?

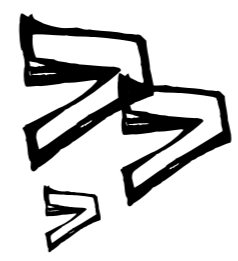
This article demonstrates how we can start raising awareness of the issue of multiple discrimination. Hopefully, this can serve as inspiration for future steps!

Step 1: The Council of Europe's youth sector organised, in 2011, a Roma youth conference to discuss the agenda for its activities for and with Roma young people for the coming years. Multiple discrimination was seen as a priority area, in terms of giving visibility and restoring dignity to the "minorities within the Roma minority".

Caught in between expectations from their families and communities and the stigmatisation from majority groups, Roma young people have a hard time asserting their rights, their identity and belonging, their lives. The situation can be dire for Roma girls and young women and for invisible groups among Roma youth like, as discussed in the conference, young people with disabilities, LGBT, migrants and undocumented young people.

From the input of the participants in the Roma Youth Conference, 2011

Step 2: In 2013, the Council of Europe started the exploration of this topic with young people's life stories, in the context of a research project, which led to a publication. In 2014, the publication *Barabaripen* was launched during a three-day conference in June 2014.



To watch the entire "Voxpop" video please see:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmnt9QlTm11emzB_FoL7ipA



Barabaripen/Equality: young Roma speak about multiple discrimination

Barabaripen is the result of this project that included several interviews and meetings with Roma young people in eight countries: Albania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom. We interviewed young Roma women, young Roma migrants and young gay and lesbian Roma people. We analysed, through the life stories of these young people, how they live their lives within and outside the Roma communities, what they have to deal with and what strategies they have to counter multiple discrimination.

We invite you to read all the stories at www.coe.int/youth/roma!

Marcy (a young Slovak Roma woman) – I was dealing with a private landlord and when I came to view the property, he asked me what my nationality was. I told him I was Slovak, which has a very negative connotation in Glasgow as most of the locals think that Slovak equals Roma. Although he had originally sounded positive, he ended up not offering me the flat due to an unknown reason. I feel I was treated less favourably because he saw me as Slovak, Roma and an east European migrant. Also, I feel he would have acted differently if I were a man. I can only speculate as to why he did not let the flat to me but I feel that his assumptions about my ethnicity played a key role in this respect.

Freju (a young Roma gay man from Albania) – My partner's brothers, whom we live with in the same house, beat my partner and me in 2011. When we went to the police to report the case they laughed at us. Instead of taking on our complaint, they held us in the police station overnight, for 10 hours. They undressed us and beat us. All night long they came to our cell to mock us because we told them we loved each other and lived together. We reported the case at the Internal Audit Service, the police department that deals with complaints against police misconduct. There was no follow-up of the case or punishment of the perpetrators.

The United for Dignity conference

In June 2014, the United for Dignity conference was organised by the Council of Europe as a forum to discuss and find solutions to situations of multiple discrimination affecting young Roma. Some 60 participants, activists for causes such as Roma rights, LGBT rights, women's rights, migrants' rights or simply human rights, took part in the conference. As the conference was really a space for understanding, we had sessions about the topic of multiple discrimination and about life stories, so we could connect to the real lives of young people. It was also a space to discuss topics that are rarely touched upon: what is it really like to be a young LGBT Roma, or a young Roma woman or migrant – what are the issues?

Working group on young Roma women, from the list of specific problems affecting young Roma girls

When a Roma girl enters an early marriage she is in a relationship where the man has more power than she does. She risks becoming a victim of domestic violence. She also risks dropping out of school. And as a Roma, she has already little chance to enter employment because of discrimination in employment against the Roma. For example, Roma young women are often not hired because they are thought to have lots of babies, one after the other.

Finally, there is a network of participants which is of precious value for the Council of Europe. They set up contacts with activists from "worlds" that are possibly different than theirs, but with whom they intersect, either because they work for the same people or fight for the same cause of human dignity! Participants also came up with proposals for the Council of Europe and themselves on what to do next.

Just a few examples from the list of conference proposals

- Build cross-community and intersectional coalitions, alliances, networks and partnerships among organisations and community groups of Roma, Roma women, youth, LGBTIQ people, migrants, disabled people, etc. within civil society, in order to:
 - a) develop awareness of barriers and challenges confronting each of these groups;
 - b) overcome potential internal prejudices based on misunderstanding within, and lack of information about, each of them;
 - c) carry out ad-hoc initiatives on young Roma LGBTIQ, including campaigns, letters of concern, petitions, etc.
- Include modules on multiple discrimination within human rights education programmes.
- Fund initiatives by civil society aimed at identifying, combating and providing recourse for multiple discrimination, including in accessing health care and mental health services.

Learn more here: www.airecentre.org/pages/briefing-roma-united-for-dignity-conference-strasbourg.html



What next? Some messages

1. If people start to take into account multiple discrimination, we hope they will then improve their work when addressing discrimination and have a more in-depth understanding of situations of vulnerability and discrimination. We need to see people as people, with multiple, fluctuating identities!
2. Education is important! For everyone, but also for the diversity across professional fields (mediators, lawyers, youth workers, educators, youth leaders)!
3. Legislation needs to be changed in order to consider situations of discrimination through more than one ground of discrimination!
4. Victims should receive proper compensation, support and services!



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"Come here – who am I, what am I? / An ordinary gypsy, /
Come here - who am I, what am I?
Enough of this!
It doesn't mean I am a Rom, / So work won't come to me /
It doesn't mean I'm a gypsy so I'll be on the dole.
I don't know why everyone believes that / If they don't believe us,
they'll find out for themselves.
We are ordinary people, nothing more / We just want you to meet us halfway."

From the lyrics of the song "Racism" of the De la Negra rap group, from the Czech Republic

