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WHEN SCARS (!) BECOME ART

*RESEARCH REPORT ON THE EFFECTS OF
DISCRIMINATION ON THE WELLBEING OF
MARGINALIZED YOUNG PEOPLE*

GERMANY

AMARO FORO E.V.

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Wellbeing and discrimination of marginalized young people in *Germany*.

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0. Executive Summary

This study investigates the mental health, social inclusion, and everyday experiences of marginalized youth in Germany, with a particular focus on Roma and Sinti, refugee, and migrant communities. It aims to understand the impact of discrimination, legal insecurity, and systemic exclusion on wellbeing, and to identify protective factors that can inform better support strategies, at a time when social cohesion and integration are at the center of national debate.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combined quantitative analysis with qualitative interviews involving young people and youth workers across multiple regions. This allowed for both statistical analysis of wellbeing indicators and in-depth exploration of personal experiences, perceptions of inclusion, and institutional trust.

Key Findings

- Discrimination remains a serious and harmful force, with clear links to emotional distress and withdrawal. However, the analysis shows that social inclusion — feeling valued, connected, and able to participate — is an even more powerful predictor of mental wellbeing. This does not diminish the harm of discrimination; rather, it highlights that reducing exclusion is not enough unless young people also experience a sense of belonging.
- While inclusion helps buffer the harm, it cannot replace the **urgent need to dismantle structural antigypsyism and racism** in schools, housing, and institutions. Belonging, participation, and connectedness are not just outcomes of justice — they are pathways to it. Social inclusion is not simply a desirable extra, but a core driver of psychological resilience and recovery.
- **Structural antigypsyism and racism act as primary drivers of psychological distress**, specifically impacting Roma and refugee youth by restricting their access to healthcare, education, and the labor market. Access to mental health services was often limited due to bureaucratic barriers, cultural mismatch, and institutional mistrust.
- A systemic exclusion from the labor market, despite educational attainment, was identified. Many participants had completed formal education but faced structural obstacles in finding meaningful employment, often due to language barriers, unrecognized qualifications, or racialized exclusion.
- Youth workers face high workloads, limited resources, and insufficient training to address the complex structural barriers faced by marginalized youth. Despite this, many young people demonstrate resilience, often relying on informal networks and personal faith or identity, which, while showing strength, should not substitute for equitable state support.

Conclusions

The study concludes that **persistent generational antigypsyism together with other forms of racism remains a structural barrier in Germany**. Because this is a systemic issue, it cannot be solved just by 'integrating' the youth into a biased system; rather, it requires dismantling the discriminatory mechanisms within German institutions themselves. While legal frameworks against discrimination exist (e.g., AGG – General Equal Treatment Act), enforcement is uneven, and many youth still experience everyday racism, xenophobia, and bureaucratic marginalization.

This study underscores that discrimination correlates with distress, but more importantly, it highlights that social inclusion can mitigate its worst effects. This suggests that interventions need to shift from a sole focus on reducing harm (anti-racism training, legal protections) to actively cultivating spaces of belonging and participation — in schools, neighborhoods, youth programs, and digital spaces.

As the most powerful insight of the study, social inclusion — the experience of being seen, valued, and able to participate — is not a secondary benefit but a central driver of mental health. In the German context, this finding resonates deeply with ongoing policy debates around *Teilhabe* (participation) and *Integration*. While these terms are widely used in political and administrative discourse, they often remain abstract or symbolic rather than being realized in young people's daily lives.

The research shows that without *real, lived* inclusion — in schools, communities, health systems, and labor markets — the psychological and social integration of marginalized youth will remain fragile. Efforts to reduce discrimination, while necessary, are insufficient if not accompanied by **structural measures** that actively foster belonging and participation.

While Germany maintains a comprehensive healthcare system, **institutional barriers and systemic exclusion** prevent Roma, Sinti, and refugee youth from accessing appropriate mental health support. These include language mismatches, bureaucratic complexity, lack of cultural sensitivity, and a justified institutional mistrust.

Marginalized youth frequently demonstrate resilience through informal networks, cultural identity, and personal resources. However, relying on individual strength without addressing systemic barriers risks placing the burden of adaptation on those already disadvantaged.

Effective support for marginalized youth requires coordinated action across health, education, employment, and justice systems. Social inclusion should be treated as a strategic objective — embedded in institutional practice, supported by policy, and measured as an indicator of success.

Inclusion must move from principle to practice — as the cornerstone of youth mental health, equity, and democratic participation.

Implications for Stakeholders and Policymakers

- Social policy must prioritize inclusion as a strategic goal, alongside structural reforms in healthcare, education, and the legal system.
- Youth services should be long-term, culturally competent, and rooted in the lived experiences of those they serve. Safe spaces, peer mentoring, and psychosocial support must be embedded in everyday community environments.
- Education systems should promote anti-discrimination training, inclusive curricula, and emotional wellbeing alongside academic achievement.
- Community organizations and NGOs play a key role in bridging trust and access — their work must be recognized, resourced, and integrated into broader support structures.

Ultimately, fostering inclusion is not only a matter of equity — it is essential for mental health, stability, and future participation of marginalized youth in German society.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and context

This study was conducted amidst growing social inequalities and heightened public discourse, including press reports and political debates, regarding the integration, social participation, and mental health of marginalised groups in Germany. Recent policy reports have repeatedly highlighted the challenges faced by disadvantaged young people. This includes Sinti and Roma—a recognized national minority with a centuries-long history in Germany—who, despite their status as full citizens, continue to encounter pervasive structural antigypsyism. It also includes migrant and refugee youth, who are often subjected to different but intersecting forms of structural discrimination, social exclusion, and psychological stress related to displacement or residence status. These factors significantly limit their educational and labor market opportunities, ultimately obstructing their right to equal participation and diminishing their quality of life.

A previous policy report has already indicated that experiences of discrimination, insecure residence status and lack of access to social services profoundly impact these young people's quality of life and future prospects. However, that report noted a crucial gap: a lack of detailed empirical data on mental health, specific individual and structural barriers, and their direct needs. This study directly addresses this gap, offering a comprehensive analysis of the lived realities of

these groups — acknowledging the distinction between domestic minorities and those with histories of migration — to inform targeted measures that dismantle barriers and give concrete policy recommendations.

1.2. Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in its vital contribution to a better understanding of the psychological, social and economic challenges faced by disadvantaged young people. While many political and integration discourses focus primarily on economic aspects, mental health often remains a neglected factor. This study demonstrates that structural antigypsyism, racism, discrimination, social isolation, and insufficient access to mental health services can have profound and lasting impacts on wellbeing and quality of life of the affected youth.

Furthermore, the study offers concrete, actionable recommendations for policymakers, social workers, educators, and organisations working with young Roma and Sinti, migrants, and refugees/asylum seekers. It helps illuminate pervasive structural barriers—ranging from generational antigypsyism and racism to bureaucratic hurdles in the asylum system—and to develop effective strategies for enhancing both social participation and mental health.

By incorporating the authentic voices of young people themselves, alongside the valuable perspectives of youth workers, the study offers a nuanced analysis of existing problems and identifies essential measures for fostering positive, long-term change.

2. Methodology

2.1. Purpose and design

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of discrimination and inclusion on the wellbeing of disadvantaged youth. This research specifically focuses on the experiences of Sinti and Roma—a recognized national minority in Germany—as well as youth from migrant and refugee backgrounds. In recognition of the historical misuse of Roma and Sinti data in Germany and the resulting mistrust toward research institutions, this study was designed in close cooperation with trusted Roma partners and community organizations. This approach ensured ethical participation, transparency, and respect, and sought to avoid reproducing extractive research practices by emphasizing informed consent, voluntary engagement, and reciprocal communication with participants. By distinguishing between the systemic, generational exclusion faced by the national minority and the legal hurdles faced by displaced populations, the design avoids the common pitfall of conflating these distinct groups under a single "outsider" narrative.

We used a mix-methods design, involving:

- A quantitative cross-sectional study of the effects of discrimination on the wellbeing of youngsters. This component involved the application of a questionnaire on a sample of youngsters from disadvantaged groups (Roma, migrants, and refugees/asylum seekers);
- A qualitative investigation regarding the type of support needed by the youngsters from disadvantaged groups and the youth workers to improve the quality and efficacy of the support services. This component involved conducting a series of in-depth interviews with youth workers and youngsters from disadvantaged groups.

The main and secondary variables included in the questionnaire:

1. Discrimination: Forms of discrimination encountered, Self-reported ethnicity, Perceived Ethnic Discrimination
2. Image of the World: Benevolence of the world, Benevolence of people, Justice, Controllability
3. Place in the world: Social connectedness, Internalization of Discrimination, Self-worth, Self-controllability
4. Wellbeing: General (Satisfaction with life, Mental health), Specific (Depression, Anxiety, Trauma Symptoms of Discrimination)

The main themes of the interviews:

- a. Impact of discrimination on youngsters wellbeing
- b. Barriers in disadvantaged youngsters access to adequate support
- c. Support measures needed by youngsters to overcome the negative effects of discrimination
- d. Support measures needed by youth workers to provide adequate services to disadvantaged youngsters

2.2. Participants

Participant recruitment

Participants for both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews were recruited through a voluntary sampling approach. To ensure a diverse and representative sample, we partnered with trusted individuals and community-based organizations that have established access to our target groups: Roma and Sinti, as well as migrants and refugees/asylum seekers. These collaborators were instrumental in disseminating the quantitative questionnaire and facilitating introductions for qualitative interviews.

While the majority of participants from this group self-identified themselves as Roma—including both those with long-term German residency and those who arrived recently as refugees from Ukraine—the study framework and outreach intentionally included Sinti youth. This choice recognizes their specific historical and social context as a national minority in Germany and their shared experience of structural antigypsyism, which is distinct from the challenges of migration. Participation in both components was entirely voluntary. Individuals were invited to either complete the quantitative questionnaire or participate in qualitative interviews. All potential participants received comprehensive information about the study's purpose, their rights, and assurances of confidentiality before providing informed consent. This method allowed us to reach young people within these specific communities effectively, gathering a sample that captures the nuance of being both a domestic minority and a displaced population, avoiding the conflation of Roma identity with "outsider" status.

Sample of the quantitative analysis

The quantitative sample consisted of 118 young people aged between 18 and 35 years (mean age: 23.9 years). It comprised 45 women (38%) and 73 men (62%). A majority of participants (78%) did not hold German citizenship, and the sample included self-identified Roma (19%), Migrants (32%), and Refugees/Asylum Seekers (49%). Further detailed demographic characteristics, including educational background, employment status, and specific citizenship distributions, are presented in Section 3.1. Due to the non-probabilistic sampling method, the findings should be interpreted with caution and may not be generalizable to the entire populations of Roma, migrants, and refugees/asylum seekers in Germany. However, they provide valuable insights into their specific situations and experiences.

Sample of the qualitative analysis

The qualitative component of the study involved interviews with two distinct groups of participants: young people and youth workers.

2.2.1. Youth Overview

A total of 11 young people (5 males, 6 females) aged between 18 and 26 were interviewed as part of the qualitative research. The participants came from three distinct social groups: Migrants, Refugees, and Roma. Specifically, the breakdown is as follows:

- 3 participants identified as Migrants.
- 3 participants identified as Refugees.
- 5 participants identified as Roma, with one participant also categorizing as a Refugee based on their circumstances.

Citizenship

- 4 participants held Pakistani, Syrian, Ukrainian, and Jordanian citizenship.
- 3 participants held German citizenship (including 2 with dual nationality, such as German-Syrian).
- 4 participants had uncertain or non-German citizenship, with some still in the process of acquiring German citizenship or holding temporary legal status (e.g., Duldung, refugee status).

Educational Background and Employment Status

The participants had varying educational levels and employment statuses, reflecting the diverse nature of the target groups:

- *Higher Education:* Several participants have obtained Bachelor's degrees or are currently pursuing them. Some are enrolled in Master's programs, while others are pursuing education in specialized fields (e.g., Vocational Training or Abitur).
- *Secondary and Primary Education:* A few participants have high school diplomas (e.g., Abitur, Realschulabschluss) or are still completing their education. Some have only completed primary school or lower secondary education.
- *Employment:* A portion of the participants hold part-time jobs, while others are currently unemployed, either due to their status as students or refugees. The employment rates vary widely, with some actively searching for jobs while others are engaged in work training or internships.

2.2.2. Youth Workers Overview

A total of 10 youth workers were interviewed as part of the qualitative research, with a mix of male (3) and female (7) participants aged between 23 and 36 years. The interviewees come from diverse professional backgrounds, including social workers, education officers, and those in leadership positions within youth organizations. Their work encompasses various aspects, such as direct support, political advocacy, educational work, and providing psychological and social support to marginalized young people, particularly from Roma and Sinti communities, migrant, and refugee backgrounds.

Demographic Information

- *Age:* The participants' ages ranged from 23 to 36 years, with a mix of early-career youth workers and those with over a decade of experience in the field.
Gender: The group was predominantly female (7 out of 10), with 3 male participants.
- *Educational Attainment:*

- Most of the participants held an academic degree, with several possessing Master's degrees in various fields, such as cultural studies, international law, and neuroscience.
- A few participants had completed vocational training or obtained a Bachelor's degree.

Employment Status and Position

- The participants work in a variety of positions, ranging from direct youth support in youth centers to leadership roles in larger organizations and networks.
 - Many hold senior positions such as directors or project leaders.
 - Some work in private organizations or NGOs, while others are employed in public institutions.
 - The participants have different levels of experience in youth work, with some having worked for several years (up to 14 years), while others are in the early stages of their careers, with between 2 to 6 years of experience.

Target Groups

The youth workers focus on different marginalized groups, with a particular emphasis on:

- *Roma and Sinti youth:* Several participants specifically work with Roma and Sinti communities, either in Germany or in other European countries.
- *Migrant youth:* A significant portion of the participants work with migrants from various regions, including Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.
- *Refugee youth:* A notable number of youth workers support refugees, particularly from Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan.

Professional Experience

- The participants have varying lengths of experience in youth work, with some being relatively new to the field, while others have been working for over 10 years.
- Their work spans different types of activities, including:
 - Direct support through youth centers, community projects, and mentoring programs.
 - Educational work with training programs and non-formal education (NFE) activities.
Advocacy work for disadvantaged youth, including political lobbying for better services and funding.

- Psychological and social support, particularly for refugee youth who have experienced trauma or displacement.

Institutions and Services

The youth workers are employed in various organizational contexts, ranging from small local initiatives to large international networks. Their organizations provide services that include:

- Youth mentorship programs that help young people from marginalized groups navigate their lives and access opportunities.
- Capacity-building initiatives for other youth professionals.
- Leisure activities designed to provide social engagement, such as workshops, creative arts (dance, theatre, etc.), and sports programs.
- Support with educational and employment opportunities, including skills development and career counseling.

2.3. Tools and measures

The questionnaire comprised 139 items, as follows:

- Social and demographic profile of the participants - 11 items;
- Forms of discrimination encountered - 6 items;
- Self-reported ethnicity - 1 item;
- Ethnicity-related stress scale (ERS) (Contrada et al., 2001), Perceived Ethnic Discrimination subscale - 17 items;
- Structure of the World Assumption Scale (WAS) (Bulman, 1989), subscales Benevolence of the world, Benevolence of people, Justice, Controllability, Self-worth, Self-controllability - 32 items;
- Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R) (Lee, 2001) - 20 items;
- Internalization of Discrimination Scale (Rodriguez, 2024) - 7 items;
- The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS-5) (Diener et al., 1985) - 5 items;
- The Mental Health Inventory (MHI-5) (Ware & Sherbourne, 1992 apud. Have et al, 2024) - 5 items;
- Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS21) (Antony et al., 1998) - subscales Depression and Anxiety - 14 items;
- Trauma Symptoms of Discrimination Scale (TSDS) (Williams, 2018) - 21 items.

The interview with the disadvantaged youngsters comprised 7 close-ended questions (regarding their social and demographic profile) and 11 open-ended questions about their experiences with discrimination, the effects felt and the support they accessed or needed to overcome the situation.

The interview with the youth workers comprised 9 close-ended questions (regarding their social and demographic profile) and 11 open-ended questions about their clients experiences with discrimination, the effects felt and the support they accessed or needed to overcome the situation, as well as the resources needed by the youth workers themselves to provide adequate support to their clients.

As the study includes both quantitative and qualitative methods, a mixed-methods approach is ideal for obtaining a comprehensive picture of the target group's reality of life. Quantitative data helps to reveal hard facts and trends. Qualitative data provides the 'why' behind the numbers by shedding light on political, social and cultural factors. A combination of both methods provides the most in-depth insights and enables a holistic analysis.

Methods used in data analysis

Quantitative Research Analysis Methods

- Descriptive statistics: Calculation of mean values, standard deviations and frequencies for key variables such as mental health, social integration and experiences of discrimination in order to identify key trends in the data. Visualisation of percentages. Use of Excel.
- Correlation analysis: Investigation of correlations between factors such as mental stress, discrimination and social integration.
- Comparative analyses: Group comparisons between Roma, Migrants and Refugees or Asylum seekers to identify differences, but also similar experiences.
- Regression analysis: Determining which factors have the strongest influence on social inclusion or mental health.

Qualitative Research Analysis Methods

Text analysis of the two interview groups initially focused on analysing the specific content. Systematic examination of the reports in order to identify key themes, patterns and recurring arguments and to compare the individual interviews. The texts were also categorised according to central themes (e.g. discrimination, education, mental health). Identifying and summarising the individual important wishes, needs and solutions, initially without evaluating them.

- Thematic analysis
- Identification of recurring patterns and key themes (e.g. experiences of discrimination, coping mechanisms).
- Categorisation to systematise the statements. (e.g. social isolation, institutional barriers).
- Interpretation of the results
- Comparative analysis: Identification of differences in the challenges for different youth groups and derivation of practical implications

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative component

The final sample consisted of 118 participants. The initial questions in the survey were designed to gather essential demographic information and assess whether the participants' basic needs were being met at the time of the study. Specifically, data was collected on age, gender, educational background, current employment status, citizenship, and, when relevant, the country of origin (in cases where it differed from the country of residence). Additionally, participants were asked to identify whether they belonged to any of the following social groups: Roma, migrants, or refugees/asylum seekers. A total of 118 young people aged between 18 and 35 years participated in the survey, consisting of 45 women (38%) and 73 men (62%). The participants were diverse in terms of citizenship, ethnicity, education, and social status, reflecting the varied nature of the target groups.

Citizenship

An analysis of the participants' citizenship revealed that 25 out of the 118 participants (21%) officially held citizenship of the country in which they currently reside, namely Germany. The majority of participants, 92 (78%), did not have the nationality of their country of residence, while 1 participant indicated an "other situation" regarding citizenship.

Of the 92 participants who did not hold citizenship in their country of residence, 86 provided specific details about their country of origin, while 6 participants did not disclose this information. The largest groups were individuals with Pakistani and Syrian citizenship, each comprising 23 participants, followed by 25 Ukrainian citizens. Additionally, 12 participants identified as having German nationality, and 2 participants reported holding dual German-Syrian citizenship.

It is notable that 12 participants reported German citizenship despite the question aiming to identify non-German citizenships. This may be attributed to factors such as multiple citizenships, participant confusion, or uncertainty regarding their citizenship status, especially for those in naturalization processes or those with strong ties to other nationalities.

No Information	6
Bulgarian	4
Croatian	1

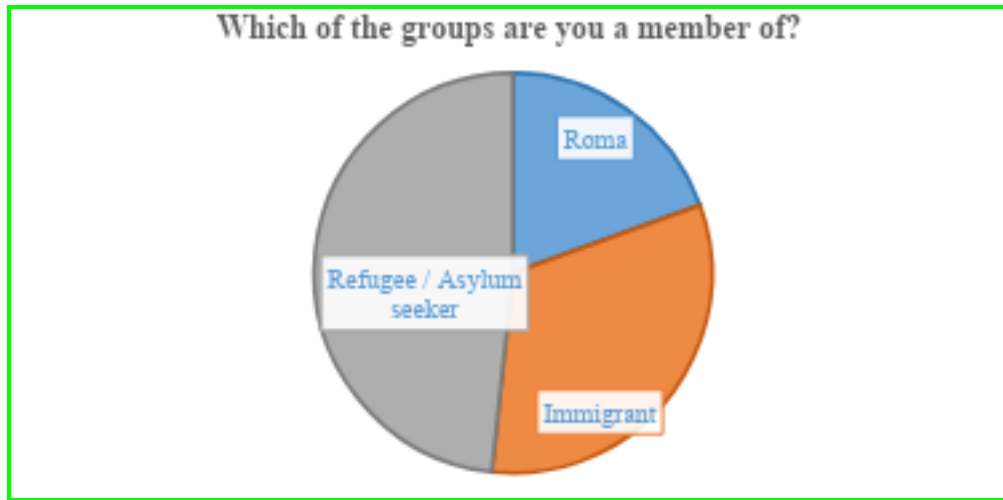
Egyptian	1
German	12
German/Syrian	2
Indian	1
Kosovo	1
Nepalese	2
North Macedonian	5
Pakistani	23
Palestinian	2
Polish	1
Romanian	1
Serbian	3
Stateless	2
Sudanese	2
Syrian	23
Turkish	1
Ukrainian	25

Table 1. Information on the nationality of participants

Ethnic and Social Group Identity

- **19%** (23 participants) identified as **Roma**.
- **32%** (38 participants) identified as **migrants**.
- **49%** (57 participants) identified as **refugees** or **asylum seekers**.

The sample distinguishes between domestic and displaced identities to better understand the specific mechanisms of exclusion. While the majority of participants identified as migrants (32%) or refugees (48%), **19% identified as Roma**, a group that includes both German citizens and those with histories of migration, all of whom share the burden of structural antigypsyism.



Education and Employment Status

There was a wide spread in terms of educational qualifications. Five people stated that they had no schooling, while one person had only completed primary school (grades 1-4). Six respondents had attended secondary school (grades 5-8), while the majority, namely 57 people (48%), had completed High school (grades 8-12). 26 participants had a university degree, while 23 had a master degree. Current employment status was also surveyed. The majority of respondents, 68 people (58%), were employed. 37 were currently unemployed but actively looking for a job. While, 13 people were unemployed.

This could indicate that, despite formal qualifications, there are difficulties in accessing the labour market - possibly due to structural exclusion, language barriers, personal situations, legal hurdles or a lack of recognition of qualifications. This suggests that targeted measures to promote labour market integration and the recognition of foreign educational qualifications may be necessary. At the same time, the fact that nearly half of participants have completed higher education, including university and master's degrees, reflects notable resilience and a commitment to self-development despite structural barriers.

Basic Needs Fulfillment

The question about the current fulfilment of needs shows that most participants consider their basic needs to be largely met.

Food and water: 112 people stated that they had sufficient food and water, while only 6 people said they did not.

Heated shelter: Heated accommodation is also available to the vast majority (109 people), although 9 people reported that they did not have this.

Financial security: With regard to financial security, the picture is less positive: 93 people feel financially secure, but 25 participants stated that this does not apply to them.

Social affiliation: While 94 people feel that they belong to a social group, 24 feel excluded. However, only 82 respondents feel that they belong to society in general, while 36 people do not feel sufficiently integrated.

Knowledge and education: They are considered to be fulfilled by 107 people, which indicates a high level of educational aspiration and access.

Culture and religion: The opportunity to practise culture and religion is seen as a given by 91 people, while 27 feel otherwise..

Perception of social recognition: The perception of social recognition shows mixed results: 86 people feel respected in society, but 32 do not. A similarly divided picture emerges when it comes to the feeling of being useful in society: 93 respondents consider themselves useful, while 25 do not share this feeling.

These results make it clear that despite the extensive fulfilment of basic needs, there are uncertainties - particularly with regard to financial security, social belonging and recognition. These aspects could be decisive for the wellbeing and integration of the respondents.

The question about the fulfillment of needs gives the following picture:

Which of the following needs are currently fulfilled for you? 0. no / 1. yes			
Item no.	Need	Yes	No
1	Food and water	112	6
2	Heated shelter	109	9
3	Financial security	93	25
4	Feeling part of a social group	94	24
5	Feeling part of the society	82	36
6	Knowledge and education	107	11
7	Culture and religion	91	27
8	Feeling respected in society	86	32

9	Feeling useful in society	93	25
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Economic Perception

When asked how their monthly income compared to the general population in their country of residence, 73 people (19 ‘much lower’ and 54 ‘somewhat lower’) stated that they considered themselves to be below average. 44 respondents rated their income as ‘about the same’. Only one person rated their income as ‘much higher’, while no one stated that they had a ‘somewhat higher’ income. These figures show that the vast majority of respondents feel financially disadvantaged, which correlates with the previously reported insecurities regarding financial security. Despite feeling economically disadvantaged, many participants continue to pursue education, employment, and community participation, demonstrating adaptive strategies and determination to navigate structural constraints.

Skin Tone and Appearance

Respondents were asked how they perceived their skin tone compared to the general population of the country they live in. 67 people (57%) stated that their skin tone was perceived as darker (5 ‘much darker’, 62 ‘somewhat darker’), while 43 stated that it was ‘about the same’. 8 respondents rated it as somewhat lighter, but none as ‘much lighter’.

In terms of appearance and style, 25 people stated that their appearance is clearly different from that of the majority of society. 58 people see some differences, but not easily observable, while 34 do not differ visually from the majority population. These results suggest that a significant proportion of respondents differ visually from the majority society in their country of residence. This could have an influence on social perception, integration and personal experiences of social acceptance. At the same time, participants’ diverse appearances and identities can be a source of cultural richness and personal pride, reflecting the unique contributions these young people bring to their communities.

Key variables and findings

Question 1: Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

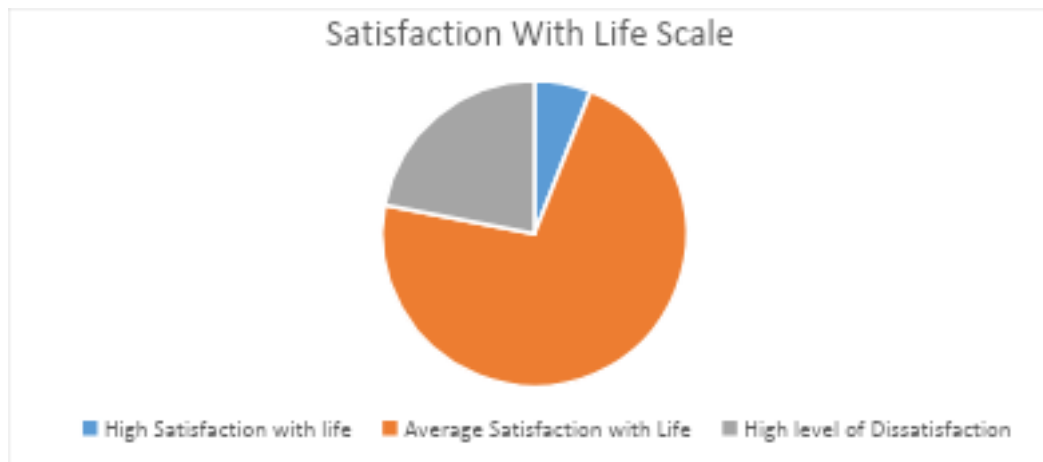
The first scale (The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)) measures general life satisfaction. The SWLS is one of the most commonly used life satisfaction scales. The study emphasises that life satisfaction is an individual assessment and does not depend on external standards. The five items are rated on a seven-point response scale (1 = ‘strongly disagree’ to 7 = ‘strongly agree’) and are assigned to the main variable of wellbeing. In the overall assessment, 5 to 35 points are possible, with a high score indicating a high level of life satisfaction. In the survey that has now

been carried out, everything between the minimum and maximum value could be determined in the overall assessment.

Key findings

While the maximum value (31-35 points), which indicates a very high level of satisfaction with life, was achieved relatively rarely, seven times (6%), the minimum value (5-14 points), which indicates a high level of dissatisfaction, was achieved 26 (22%) times. The remaining respondents scored between 15 and 30 points, with average values predominating.

The low number of people with very high satisfaction with life indicates that the majority do not perceive their lives as ideal. The high number of people with low SWLS values (26 people) indicates significant dissatisfaction.



It is striking that in the most direct question on general satisfaction, the question on ‘I am satisfied with my life’, 22 fully agree and 32 agree, while only 4 do not agree at all. This high level of agreement (54 people (46%)) shows that the majority feel generally satisfied with their lives.

And when asked ‘If I could start my life over, I would change almost nothing.’ with 27 not agreeing at all and 21 not agreeing. This strong rejection (48 people (41%)) shows that a considerable proportion of respondents are dissatisfied with their current life and would like to see significant changes.

Group-Specific Differences in Life Satisfaction

The average SWLS values per group show certain differences between the groups. In the analysis, the affiliation of the above-mentioned group of refugees from Ukraine with a Roma background to both groups (Refugees and Roma) was taken into account.

Group	Average SWLS value
Roma (48)	16,4
Refugees or Asylum Seekers (57)	17,2
Migrants (38)	21,7

Migrants have the highest life satisfaction compared to the other groups. Roma report the lowest life satisfaction, which reflects the persistence of structural antigypsyism in education, housing, and labor markets rather than individual or cultural deficits. Refugees or Asylum Seekers are slightly above the Roma, but far below the Migrants.

The original study ‘The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)’ (Diener et al., 1985) shows that

- High SWLS scores correlate with high self-esteem and low neuroticism (emotion control)
- People with higher life satisfaction show fewer depressive symptoms and general psychological burden.
- The SWLS measures life satisfaction independently of feelings of happiness or emotional states.
- It focuses on conscious judgements about life and not on short-term emotions.

Key Insights

The descriptive findings regarding life satisfaction suggest important patterns within the sample. The observed proportion of participants reporting high overall dissatisfaction (22% in the 5-14 point range) and the strong disagreement (41%) with the statement "If I could start my life over, I would change almost nothing" indicate a significant segment of the sample experiencing profound discontent with their life circumstances. This is particularly relevant as the SWLS, while measuring conscious judgment, has been consistently linked to broader psychological wellbeing. According to the original study by Diener et al. (1985), high SWLS scores correlate with high self-esteem and low neuroticism, and individuals with higher life satisfaction tend to show fewer depressive symptoms and a lower general psychological burden.

The distinct average SWLS values across the groups—with Migrants reporting the highest satisfaction, followed by Refugees/Asylum Seekers, and Roma reporting the lowest—highlight varying degrees of wellbeing. This pattern aligns with psychological research suggesting a correlation between lower life satisfaction and higher levels of depression and anxiety. The particularly low life satisfaction among Roma youth may reflect higher psychological distress, potentially linked to specific experiences of discrimination, and persistent social exclusion, and economic hardship unique to this community. For the Roma community, these results are

indicative of long-standing systemic marginalization, institutional discrimination that persists across generations, regardless of individual effort or aspiration, all contributing to psychological burdens.

Similarly, the position of Refugees/Asylum Seekers, while above Roma, still significantly below Migrants, may be influenced by unique challenges such as ongoing uncertainty regarding residency status, language barriers, and the psychological impact of displacement or past trauma, which can exacerbate mental health concerns.

The nature of the SWLS, focusing on an individual's conscious, cognitive judgment of life satisfaction, underscores that these group differences likely reflect not just individual feelings but also the cumulative impact of structural inequalities and societal barriers.

These findings suggest the importance of considering how broader social policies, economic conditions, and cultural factors may contribute to these disparities in life satisfaction. For example, economic insecurity, limited access to quality education, and discriminatory practices in the labor market or healthcare system can severely hinder the life satisfaction of marginalized communities. The data, therefore, points towards a need for interventions that go beyond individual support to address these systemic factors.

Question 2: Depression, Anxiety, and Stress (DASS21)

The second scale (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS21)) is an instrument for measuring depression, anxiety and stress (the stress factors were not explicitly measured in this survey). It is also assigned to the main variable of wellbeing. Although anxiety and depression are generally regarded as different states, they often occur together.

The scale contains 14 statements that were rated according to the question “Thinking about how you have behaved and felt in the past 7 days” on a rating scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = never happened to me and 4 = happened to me very often.

Key findings

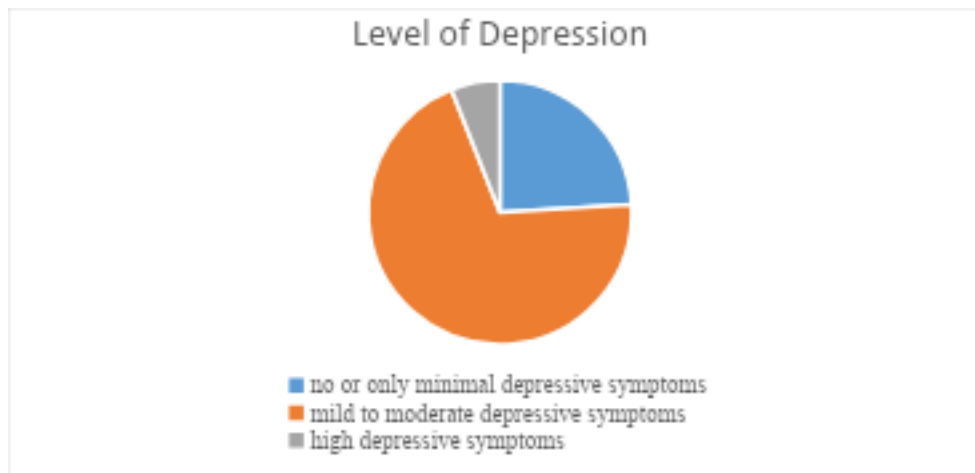
Depression

The **DASS21** depression subscale consists of statements related to feelings such as worthlessness, hopelessness, and a lack of enthusiasm. In this survey, participants rated 7 items related to depression on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = never, 4 = very often). Scores were calculated by adding the points for items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13. A **high score indicates higher levels of depression**.

The **severity of depression** was classified as follows:

- **Low values (7-9 points)** indicate **no or minimal depressive symptoms** (28 participants, 24%).
- **Mild to moderate values (10-20 points)** suggest **mild depressive symptoms** (83 participants, 70%).
- **High values (>21 points)** represent **severe depression** (7 participants, 6%).

The majority of participants (70%) reported experiencing **mild to moderate depressive symptoms**, which indicates **psychological distress** but not to an extreme level. Only **6%** of participants experienced **severe depressive symptoms**, indicating a **significant psychological burden** for a smaller portion of the sample. Meanwhile, **24%** of respondents indicated **no or minimal depressive symptoms**, suggesting that a **minority of participants** felt emotionally stable and did not report significant depressive experiences.



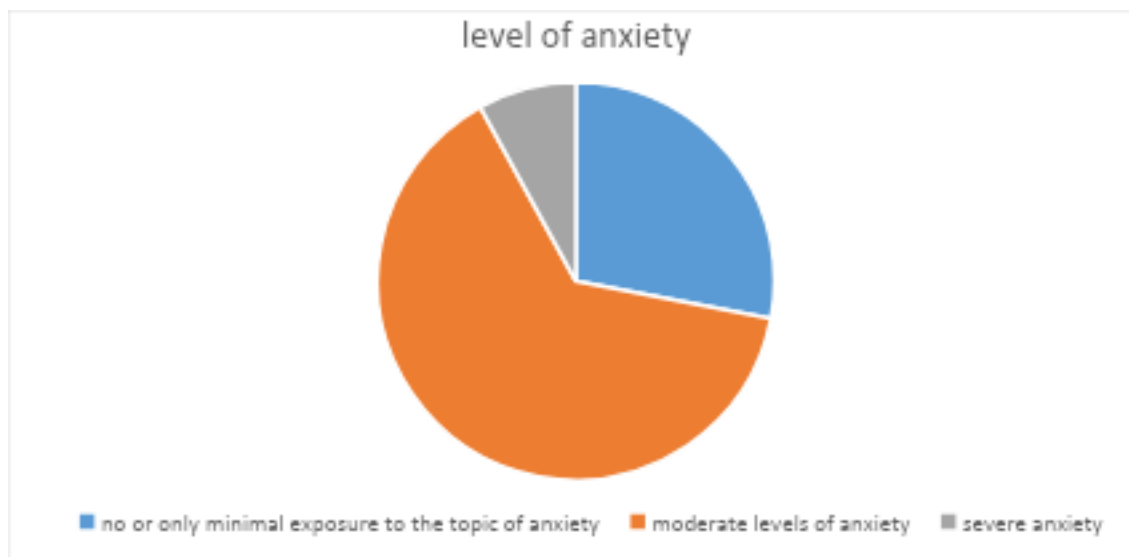
Anxiety

The **DASS21** anxiety subscale assesses feelings of nervousness, fear, and anxiety in social or other situations. The responses for anxiety were evaluated based on items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 14. A **higher score indicates higher levels of anxiety**.

The severity of anxiety was classified as follows:

- **Low values (7-9 points):** No or minimal anxiety (33 participants, 28%).
- **Mild to moderate values (10-20 points):** Moderate anxiety symptoms (75 participants, 64%).
- **High values (>21 points):** Severe anxiety (10 participants, 8%).

The results show that 64% of respondents suffer from moderate levels of anxiety, indicating that anxiety is a common experience among participants. While only a small portion (8%) report severe anxiety, the presence of moderate anxiety in a significant majority points to an ongoing need for support to manage mental health issues within the group.



Key insights

The DASS21 results highlight that depression and anxiety are significant concerns for the majority of respondents, with 70% of participants reporting symptoms of mild to moderate depression and 64% experiencing moderate anxiety. The intersectionality of these conditions suggests a high level of psychological distress within the marginalized youth groups, and both depression and anxiety should be considered as key factors in their mental health support. The high prevalence of moderate symptoms (70% for depression and 64% for anxiety) may reflect the "**minority stress**" caused by navigating a society where one's identity is frequently stigmatized.

Furthermore, these findings underline the urgent need for targeted mental health interventions that provide consistent, long-term support for both depression and anxiety. Interventions should not focus solely on "treating" the individual but also on dismantling the exclusionary mechanisms that produce this distress. Mental health professionals and youth workers should be equipped with appropriate resources to address the mental health burden and help mitigate the effects of discrimination and social exclusion, which contribute to these psychological symptoms. They must move beyond traditional clinical models to include **anti-bias and trauma-informed approaches** that validate the lived experiences of marginalized youth and address the root causes of their psychological burden.

Question 3: Discrimination

The survey asked participants about their experiences with various forms of discrimination they may have encountered throughout their lives. These included racial or ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, and other types of discrimination. Participants were asked to rate the extent of their experiences on a three-point scale (1 - Rarely or not at all, 2 - Moderately, 3 - Very often).

Key findings

1. Racial or Ethnic Discrimination:

- 71% of respondents reported experiencing racial or ethnic discrimination in their lifetime.
- Of these, 53% indicated that they were discriminated against occasionally (moderately), and 18% reported being very frequently discriminated against due to their race or ethnicity.
- This suggests that racial and ethnic discrimination is a pervasive issue for a majority of the respondents, impacting their daily lives.
- Notably, 83% of Roma participants reported ethnic discrimination—the highest among all groups. This underscores that **structural antigypsyism** is not only persistent but remains one of the most entrenched and "normalized" forms of racism in Germany. Unlike other groups whose discrimination may be tied to recent migration, for Roma (including German citizens), this reflects a generational and systemic exclusion.
- The other groups, migrants and refugees/asylum seekers, reported somewhat lower levels of discrimination: 63% of migrants and refugees reported similar experiences of racial or ethnic discrimination.

2. Religious Discrimination:

- 52% of the respondents have experienced religious discrimination, with 37% experiencing it occasionally and 15% experiencing it very often.
- This finding highlights that religious prejudice is also a significant issue, particularly for migrant and refugee populations, who may face discrimination based on both their ethnicity and religion.

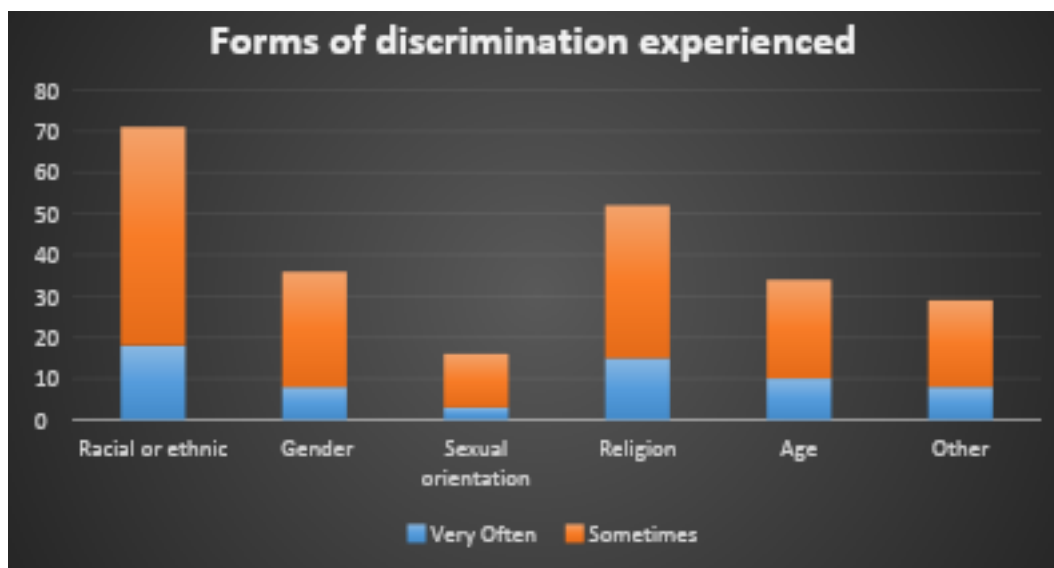
3. Gender-based Discrimination:

- 53% of female respondents reported experiencing moderate to frequent gender-based discrimination, suggesting that gender continues to be a major axis of oppression in the group.
- Interestingly, male participants reported lower levels of gender-based discrimination, pointing to the intersectionality of discrimination—where individuals who belong to

multiple marginalized groups (e.g., women of color, refugees, etc.) may experience compounded forms of discrimination.

Intersectionality of Discrimination

The concept of intersectionality emerges clearly from these results. Many individuals reported experiencing multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. For instance, women from marginalized ethnic backgrounds are likely to experience both gender and racial discrimination, which can compound the negative effects on their mental health and social inclusion.



(In percent of the 118 respondents)

Key Insights

The high rates of racial or ethnic discrimination (particularly among Roma) suggest that prejudices against these groups are deeply embedded in society. The fact that over 70% of respondents report experiencing ethnic discrimination indicates the widespread nature of racial prejudices, which are a significant barrier to social inclusion and equality.

The intersectionality between race/ethnicity and gender is particularly important and produced by intersecting systems of oppression, as women from marginalized ethnic groups face a double burden—ethnic and gender-based discrimination—compounded by potential economic hardships and cultural stigmatization. For example, a Roma woman does not face a "double burden" because of her identity, but because the structures of the labor market, housing, and healthcare are simultaneously biased against both her gender and her ethnicity. This creates a unique

challenge for them in accessing services, participating in social and economic activities, and improving their quality of life.

The findings on religious discrimination also point to the challenges faced by individuals from minority religious backgrounds. These experiences can contribute to a sense of alienation, exclusion, and disempowerment, especially for young people who may already face challenges related to their ethnicity and migration status.

The pervasive nature and intersectionality of these discriminatory experiences underscore that they are not merely isolated incidents but rather systemic barriers to accessing services, participating in social and economic activities, and ultimately improving the quality of life for marginalized youth. For young people, these experiences are not merely "hurdles" to overcome through individual resilience; they are **institutional failures** that contribute to the psychological distress (depression and anxiety) identified in the previous sections. Addressing these findings requires more than "tolerance" initiatives; it necessitates **dismantling the specific antigypsyist and racist mechanisms** that prevent these youth from feeling safe, respected, and useful in society.

Question 4: Self-Reported Ethnicity (Main Variable: Social Inclusion)

Respondents were asked to self-report their ethnicity to understand their **ethnic identity** and its possible relation to experiences of **discrimination**.

Key findings

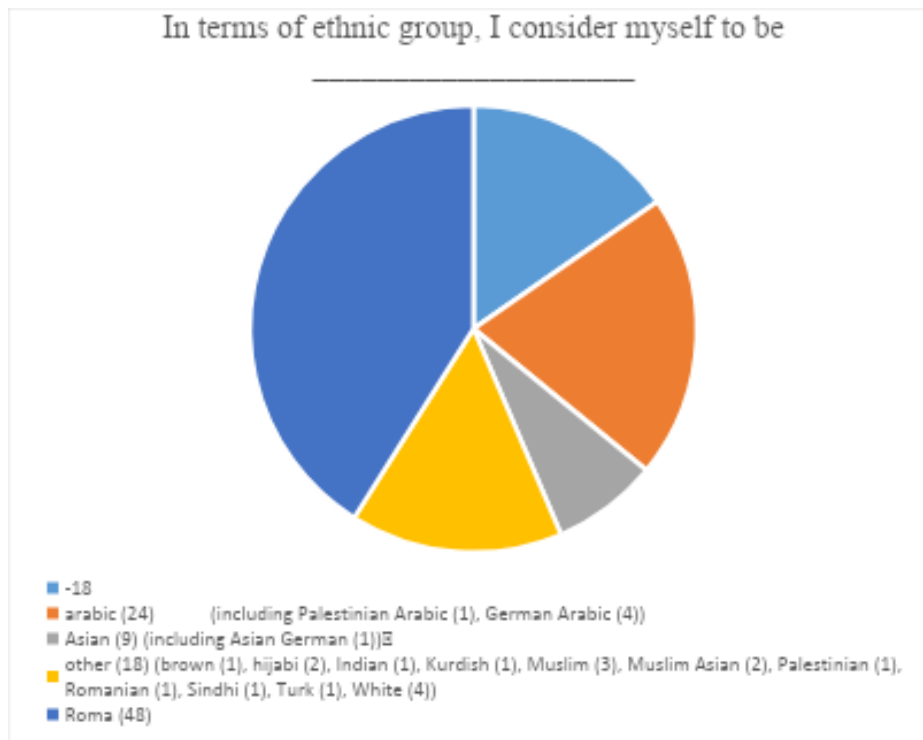
The results reveal a diverse ethnic makeup, with participants reporting the following:

18	No information
19	Arabic
1	Arabic Palestinian
4	Arabic German
8	Asian
1	Asian German
1	Brown
2	Hijabi
1	Indian
1	Kurdish
3	Muslim
2	Muslim Asian

1	Palestinian
48	Roma
1	Romanian
1	Sindhi
1	Turk
4	White

Note: It is important to note here that the group of 48 Roma has increased in terms of classification compared to Question I7, in which only 23 identified themselves as Roma. This can be explained by the fact that these "additional" 25 people classified themselves as refugees in Question I7, as they all fled from Ukraine, as can be determined from Question I6. These are therefore Roma refugees from Ukraine. This reveals a significant sub-group within the sample:

Roma refugees, who navigate the intersection of being a displaced population and a targeted ethnic minority.



Key Insights

Self-reported ethnicity helps contextualize how ethnic identity can shape the experience of discrimination. Roma refugees from Ukraine are subject to **transnational antigypsyism**, where the historical prejudices against Roma in Europe intersect with the current legal and social hurdles faced by refugees. This dual identity does not make the group a "burden," but it does make them targets of multiple, overlapping exclusionary practices in housing, legal aid, and social services.

The data shows that "Roma" is not a monolithic category in Germany; it includes domestic citizens, long-term residents, and newly arrived refugees. Regardless of their specific background, the common thread is the encounter with **structural antigypsyism**, which shapes their social inclusion and overall wellbeing.

Furthermore, individuals from Arabic, Palestinian, and Turkish backgrounds may face different forms of exclusion based on cultural, ethnic, and religious factors.

Question 5: The Trauma Symptoms of Discrimination Scale (TSDS)

This scale was used to assess the psychological impact of discrimination on participants. The scale consists of 21 items grouped into four main dimensions: **Uncontrollable distress and hyperarousal**, **Alienation from others**, **Worry about safety and the future**, and **Being keyed up and on guard**. Each item is rated on a 1 to 4 scale, where **1** means "never" and **4** means "often."

Key findings

1. Uncontrollable Distress and Hyperarousal

<i>Burden Level</i>	<i>Score Range</i>	<i>Participants (n)</i>	<i>% of Sample</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Low	8 – 14	58	49%	Low burden; possibly infrequent discrimination experiences or effective coping.
Medium	15 – 22	40	34%	Recurring distress and hyperarousal linked to discrimination.

High	23 – 32	20	17%	High psychological burden; may lead to anxiety, sleep issues, or long-term health effects.
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Nearly half of the respondents (49%) reported experiencing a **low level of distress** related to discrimination, which could indicate either that discrimination occurs less frequently in their lives or that they have effective coping strategies in place. However, **34%** reported **medium distress**, suggesting that they experience **recurring stress** linked to discrimination.

Most concerning is the **17%** who reported **high levels of distress**, which could have long-term mental health implications such as sleep problems, anxiety, or stress-related disorders. This group’s high levels of distress reflect a pressing need for mental health support and resources.

2. Alienation from Others

Alienation Level	Score Range	Participants (n)	% of Sample	Interpretation
Low	≤ 10	43	36%	Low sense of alienation; socially connected.
Medium	11 – 17	54	46%	Occasional feelings of exclusion or marginalization.
High	≥ 18	21	18%	High alienation; social exclusion likely, with potential mental health risks.

When it comes to the level of alienation, 64% (46% medium, 18% high) feel a sense of alienation from others, which is concerning, as it suggests they may feel excluded from society. This is a critical indicator of how structural exclusion effectively severs the social ties between these youth and the broader society. This heightened alienation can exacerbate psychological distress, as it can contribute to social isolation, a key risk factor for mental health issues.

3. Worry about Safety and Future

Worry Level	Score Range	Participants (n)	% of Sample	Interpretation
Low	≤ 8	29	25%	Few safety or future-related concerns.
Medium	9 – 14	65	55%	Moderate worries; safety concerns present but not overwhelming.
High	≥ 15	24	20%	High worries; may avoid situations or exhibit excessive caution.

Over half (55%) of participants report moderate worry about their safety and the future due to discrimination, indicating that these concerns are pervasive and might affect their daily lives. A significant 20% report high levels of worry, which can lead to behaviors such as avoiding social situations or taking excessive precautions, contributing to social withdrawal and further increasing psychological burden. 75% of respondents live with persistent worry about their safety. This highlights that for marginalized youth, the "public sphere" is often perceived as a space of risk rather than protection. These high levels of anxiety related to safety should be addressed in mental health interventions.

4. *Being keyed up and on guard*

Vigilance Level	Score Range	Participants (n)	% of Sample	Interpretation
Low	≤ 4	67	57%	Low hypervigilance; generally feel safe.
Medium	5 – 7	47	40%	Some hypervigilance; cautious in certain situations.
High	≥ 8	4	3%	Constant state of alert; risk of chronic stress or mental health issues.

The majority (57%) report low vigilance, indicating that they do not feel constantly on guard or in danger. However, 40% report medium vigilance, meaning that they are cautious or tense in certain situations due to the threat of discrimination. Only a small group (3%) experience high vigilance, which can indicate a constant state of alert, leading to potential mental health problems such as anxiety disorders and sleep disturbances over time.

Key Insights

The findings indicate that many respondents are exposed to a persistent but moderate psychological burden resulting from discrimination. A notable subgroup suffers from significant trauma symptoms, including social alienation, safety concerns, and hyperarousal, which may increase the risk of mental health issues such as anxiety disorders or social isolation.

A large proportion of participants experience moderate psychological burden, particularly in safety-related concerns (55%) and social alienation (46%). However, a notable minority experience high levels of distress: 18% report strong alienation, 20% have serious safety concerns, and 17% suffer from hyperarousal and uncontrollable distress. High hypervigilance is rare (3%), though 40% report being cautious in certain situations which demonstrate a **necessary survival strategy**. Being "keyed up" is a rational adaptation to a society where discriminatory

encounters are frequent. Overall, the findings reveal widespread but varying psychological strain linked to discrimination.

Question 6: Mental WellBeing

Participants were asked to rate how frequently they experienced certain emotions over the past four weeks, to assess their mental wellbeing. The survey included five emotional states: **very nervous, so down that nothing could cheer them up, calm and relaxed, depressed and sad, and happy.**

Respondents rated each item on a six-point scale (1 = “all of the time” and 6 = “none of the time”), with a higher overall score indicating a lower level of psychological wellbeing.

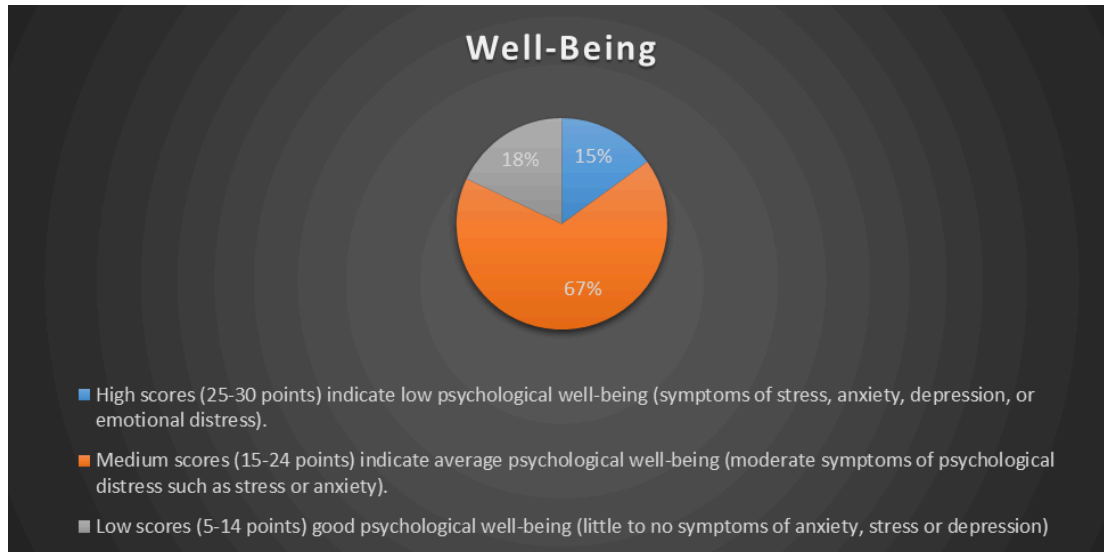
Key findings

- **High values (25-30 points)** highlight **significant psychological burden** with symptoms of stress, anxiety, or depression (18 participants, 15%)
- **Mild to moderate values (15-24 points)** reflect **moderate psychological distress, (79 participants, 67%)**
- **Low values (5-14 points)** indicating **good mental wellbeing** with little to no symptoms (21 participants, 18%)

The majority of participants (67%) fall within the moderate distress category. However, a smaller group (15%) experiences a serious psychological burden. While only a minority (18%) demonstrate good emotional stability and mental health.

Key insights

The majority of participants scoring in the moderate range suggests many experience mild to moderate distress, highlighting the need for regular monitoring and supportive measures. The 15% with high scores represent a smaller but significant group likely requiring targeted psychological intervention or therapeutic support. In contrast, the 18% with low scores indicate a stable, healthy subgroup demonstrating effective coping and emotional resilience. This suggests that, although severe distress is not widespread, mental health services should balance preventive care for the moderate group with intensive support for those at high risk. That 67% of participants live in a state of moderate distress suggests that **marginalization is a chronic condition**, not an occasional event. This baseline of "low wellbeing" corresponds with the findings in Section 3.1 (Basic Needs), where large numbers of participants reported a lack of social recognition and respect.



Question 7: Place in the World (Main Variable: Social Inclusion)

The scale assesses social connectedness of participants through 20 items rated on a scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 6 (“strongly agree”). A higher overall score reflects a higher level of social connectedness.

The scale is divided into two dimensions:

- **C- (Negative Social Distancing):** Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 15, and 18 measure social distancing and feelings of isolation. Higher scores here indicate greater social distancing and isolation.
- **C+ (Positive Social Connectedness):** Items 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, and 20 assess positive social connectedness and a sense of belonging. Higher scores reflect stronger social bonds and inclusion.

Key findings

Social Distancing (C-)

- **Low values (10-25 points)** indicate very low social distancing (3 participants, 3%)
- **Moderate values (26-44 points)** represent considerate social distancing (70 participants, 59%)
- **High values (45-60 points)** record extreme levels of social distancing indicating strong feelings of isolation (45 participants, 38%)

This means **97% of the sample** feels some degree of being pushed to the margins by the majority society.

Social Connectedness (C+)

- **Low values (10-25 points)** present very low social connectedness (15 participants, 13%)
- **Moderate values (26-44 points)** highlight medium levels of social connectedness (68 participants, 58%)
- **High values (45-60 points)** depict the existence of high social connectedness, indicating a strong sense of belonging (35 participants, 30%)

Despite the high distancing, 30% of participants maintain high levels of connectedness, and 58% maintain moderate levels.

Key insights

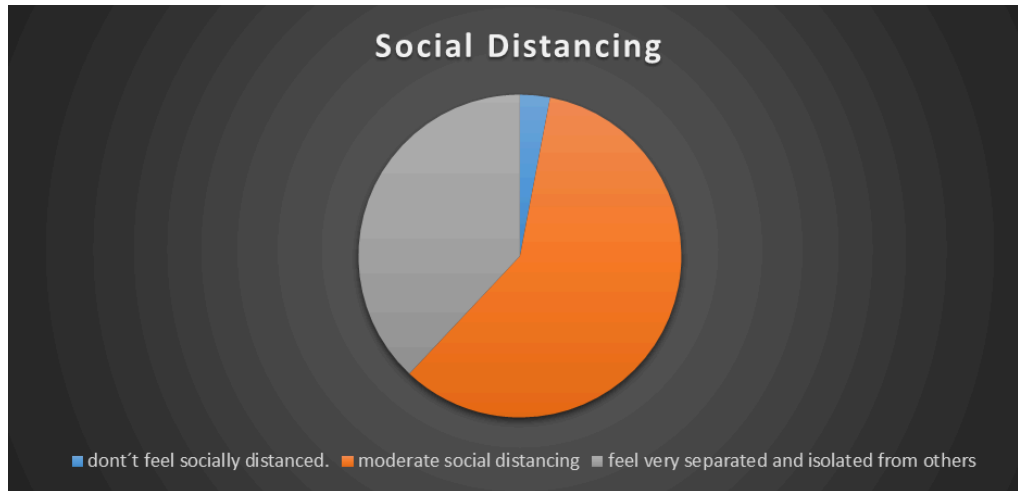
Despite the fact that **97% of participants report feeling marginalized by the majority society**, the majority maintain **moderate to high levels of social connectedness**. Specifically, 30% sustain high levels of connectedness, and 58% sustain moderate levels. This indicates that experiences of exclusion coexist with ongoing social ties, suggesting the presence of **resilience, adaptive coping, and supportive networks** within this population.

However, a subset of participants—approximately 13%—exhibit very low social connectedness, which may increase their vulnerability to social isolation and social exclusion. The remainder, while moderately connected, may experience **context-dependent or selective belonging**, feeling integrated in some environments but disconnected in others.

These findings highlight the importance of interventions that:

1. **Address structural and societal marginalization**, reducing barriers that push individuals to the margins.
2. **Support and strengthen existing social networks**, building on the resilience and connectedness already present in the community.
3. Pay attention to the **most socially isolated individuals**, ensuring they have access to consistent social support and opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Overall, the data suggest a population that, while widely marginalized, demonstrates **substantial social resilience**, emphasizing the need for interventions that combine anti-oppressive practice with community-based strengthening of social ties.



Question 8: Ethnic Discrimination

Participants were asked to rate how frequently they encountered 17 different **discriminatory situations** over the past three months (1= "never" to 7 = "very often").

These situations were grouped into five subscales for analysis: **Devaluing Action, Threat, Aggression, Verbal Rejection, and Avoidance**

Key findings

1. Devaluing Action

Score Range	Level	Participants (n)	Percentage (%)	Description
6–18	Low	101	86	Rarely experience discrimination
19–30	Medium	14	12	Occasional discrimination impacting wellbeing
31–42	High	3	3	Frequent derogatory experiences causing stress

Most participants report low perceived social devaluation, indicating they generally feel accepted in their society, rarely experiencing **negative stereotypes**. A smaller group experiences

discrimination, which could impact mental wellbeing. While, a small minority faces frequent **social devaluation**, likely affecting their well-being significantly.

2. Threat

Score Range	Level	Participants (n)	Percentage (%)	Description
2–6	Low	100	85	Rarely or never feel threatened
7–10	Medium	17	14	Occasionally feel unsafe or threatened
11–14	High	1	1	Frequently feel threatened

The majority of the respondents largely feel safe in everyday life and are not treated with **hostility**. Around 14% occasionally feel **unsafe**, which might cause occasional anxiety within them. Only one participant experiences **frequent threats**. This can trigger considerable anxiety or stress and may require protective measures.

3. Aggression

Score Range	Level	Participants (n)	Percentage (%)	Description
3–9	Low	102	86	Rarely experience aggression
10–15	Medium	14	12	Occasional aggression experiences
16–21	High	2	2	Frequent harassment or threats

Most participants report low levels of aggression, suggesting a generally safe environment. A moderate group occasionally experiences aggression. There are situations in which they feel **unsafe or attacked**, but this is not always the case. A small minority faces **frequent harassment**, triggering considerable anxiety reactions or social restrictions.

4. Verbal Rejection

Score Range	Level	Participants (n)	Percentage (%)	Description
3–9	Low	88	75	Little or no verbal discrimination
10–15	Medium	14	12	Occasional verbal attacks
16–21	High	16	14	Frequent verbal attacks and insults

A majority feels respected with minimal verbal discrimination. They had experienced little or no **verbal discrimination or insulting remarks**. About 12% occasionally face verbal attacks, causing some stress. A notable 14% participants experience frequent **insults or derogatory comments about their ethnicity** and are therefore exposed to a high level of burden.

5. Avoidance

Score Range	Level	Participants (n)	Percentage (%)	Description
3–9	Low	95	81	Rarely experience social exclusion
10–15	Medium	18	15	Occasional social exclusion or avoidance
16–21	High	5	4	Frequent social exclusion or distancing, feeling they do not belong

Most respondents feel accepted in social interactions and do not experience any conscious distancing by others. A moderate number occasionally have the feeling that **others avoid contact with them**. This can occasionally trigger feelings of **insecurity**, but is not consistently problematic. While, a small group faces **frequent exclusion**, risking impacts on self esteem.

Key insights

Most participants reported low levels of perceived ethnic discrimination, suggesting that overt discriminatory incidents are relatively infrequent. However, this does not necessarily mean that participants feel completely safe. As indicated by TSDS results, many remain **situationally vigilant or on guard**, reflecting the mental effort required to anticipate and avoid potential discrimination. While experiences of social devaluation, threat, and aggression were uncommon for the majority, **verbal rejection occurred more frequently for a notable minority (14%)**, and a smaller group experienced social avoidance or exclusion (4% high, 15% medium), which may contribute to feelings of isolation. These findings indicate that, although widespread discrimination is limited, certain forms—particularly **verbal attacks and social exclusion**—continue to affect a meaningful subset of participants and can have psychological consequences even when direct threats are rare.

Question 9: World Assumption Scale / Image of the World / Place in the World (Main variable: Social Inclusion)

The survey asked respondents to express their agreement with 24 statements using a scale, (1 = “strongly agree” and 6 = “strongly disagree”), indicating how they perceive the world around them.

The evaluation is divided into 6 subcategories:

Key findings

1. *Benevolence of the World (BW)*

- Low values (4-10 points): 31 participants (26%) view the world positively, with a strong basic trust and belief that it is friendly and fair, believing that positive events predominate.
- Moderate values (11-17 points): Majority (77 participants, 65%) have a balanced view, recognizing both positive and negative aspects of the world.
- High values (18-24 points): 10 participants (8%) perceive the world as hostile or unfair, possibly linked to mistrust or negative experiences.

2. *Benevolence of People (BP)*

- Low values (4-10 points): 20 participants (17%) have a positive view of people, seeing them as helpful and supportive. This may be linked to a high level of basic trust in social relationships.
- Medium values (11-17 points): Majority (92 participants, 78%) have mixed views, acknowledging both friendly and unfriendly behaviors, could be media influenced.

- High values (18-24 points): 6 participants (5%) perceive people as unfriendly or hostile, likely due to negative social experiences and feelings of insecurity.
3. *Justice (J)*
- Low values: 37 participants (31%) believe in a fair world where people get what they deserve. They may have a greater acceptance of social structures and rules.
 - Moderate values: Majority (66 participants, 56%) see justice as mixed, partly fair, partly unfair.
 - High values: 15 participants (13%) perceive the world as unjust. They may feel particularly burdened by social grievances or social inequality.
4. *Controllability (C)*
- Low values: 51 participants (43%) feel they have good control over their lives and outcomes. These individuals feel self-determined and believe that their success or failure depends on their own behaviour. They may have a higher level of personal responsibility and resilience.
 - Moderate values: Majority (57 participants, 48%) believe control is partial, they can influence some aspects but not all. They see themselves as partly self-determined, but also recognize external influences.
 - High values: 10 participants (8%) feel helpless or believe that external circumstances strongly influence their lives. They may be more susceptible to stress or feelings of insecurity.
5. *Self-Worth (SW)*
- Low scores (4-10 points): 49 participants (42%) have a strong sense of self-worth and confidence in their abilities.
 - Medium scores (11-17 points): Majority (54 participants, 46%) fluctuate between positive and negative self-views depending on the situation or experiences.
 - High scores (18-24 points): 15 participants (13%) struggle with self-doubt and low self-esteem, linked to increased stress, anxiety or depression.
6. *Self-Controllability (SC)*
- Low scores (4-10 points): 64 participants (54%) feel capable of controlling their behavior and outcomes for good results for themselves.
 - Medium scores (11-17 points): 46 participants (39%) have mixed feelings about their self-control and acknowledge external factors that are beyond their control.
 - High scores (18-24 points): 8 participants (7%) feel little control over their behavior, which may increase vulnerability to stress, low self confidence and self esteem.

Key insights

Most participants hold a balanced and realistic perspective on the world, other people, and themselves, recognizing both positive and negative aspects of life. In terms of the benevolence of the world and people, the majority acknowledge that while helpfulness and fairness exist, there are also instances of selfishness or unfairness, reflecting an adaptive, nuanced understanding rather than naïve optimism. Similarly, most participants perceive justice as partly fair and partly unfair, and report a moderate sense of personal control over their lives, indicating that they feel self-determined and capable while also recognizing external influences. Self-worth and self-controllability are generally positive, with many participants confident in their abilities and able to regulate their behavior effectively. A smaller subgroup (roughly 7–15%) experiences lower confidence, perceives greater hostility or unfairness, or feels less control over outcomes, highlighting areas where targeted support or intervention could be beneficial. Overall, the findings suggest that participants combine realistic appraisal with adaptive self-confidence, demonstrating resilience and social awareness, while also revealing that some individuals face vulnerabilities shaped by personal experiences or social contexts.

Question 10: Internalization of Discrimination

The survey was aimed at internalizing discrimination. Participants indicated their agreement with 7 statements in relation to their **ethnicity**. They used a rating scale, where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”.

A high score represents a high level of **Internalization of Discrimination**.

Key findings

24% of participants show very low internalization of discrimination, indicating little or no perceived negative impact of their ethnicity. While, 48% report low to moderate internalization, with occasional concerns but no persistent negative effects. 23% experience moderate to high internalization, feeling more regularly affected by discrimination in social or professional contexts. They may regularly feel the need to prove themselves or be careful about what they do and say. Additionally, 5% of participants show very high internalization, feeling strongly disadvantaged or insecure due to their ethnicity. Lastly, about 28% of respondents fall in the medium to very high range, indicating a notable group regularly affected by perceived discrimination. They feel unsafe in social or professional contexts because of their ethnicity. This could indicate deeper or ongoing experiences of discrimination.

Key insights

While most participants do not internalize discrimination to a significant extent, a notable subgroup (28%) experiences moderate to very high internalization, feeling regularly disadvantaged, insecure, or compelled to monitor their behavior due to their ethnicity. This group may be at higher risk of psychological strain, reduced self-esteem, and social insecurity. Overall, the findings highlight the resilience of the majority alongside the needs of this vulnerable subgroup, underscoring the importance of targeted support, psychosocial interventions, and inclusion initiatives to mitigate the impact of discrimination and strengthen well-being.

Regression Analysis

The results of the multiple regression analysis provide valuable insights into the relationship between **social inclusion, discrimination, and mental wellbeing**. Specifically, the unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.387$) means that for every one-unit **increase in inclusion, wellbeing increases** by an average of 0.387 units, even after accounting for the effects of discrimination. The standardized coefficient ($Beta = 0.393$) suggests a moderate effect size, highlighting the meaningful contribution of inclusion to mental wellbeing. This relationship is statistically significant ($t = 4.529, p < .001$), confirming that the effect is unlikely due to random chance. This underscores the central role of social inclusion in supporting psychological health, suggesting that feeling connected and accepted in society directly enhances life satisfaction.

The coefficient for discrimination ($B = 0.044$) is small, and the p-value ($p = 0.537$) indicates that this relationship is not statistically significant. This suggests that while discrimination may negatively affect individuals, its direct impact on wellbeing is not evident in this model once levels of inclusion are considered. This does not imply that discrimination has no impact on wellbeing; rather, it suggests that in the presence of inclusion, the direct measurable effect of discrimination on wellbeing is not evident in this model. Discrimination may exert indirect effects, for example by increasing stress, vigilance, or internalized discrimination, which in turn can affect mental health. These findings highlight the potentially **stronger role of social inclusion in enhancing mental wellbeing** compared to reducing discrimination alone.

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	83.271	10.086		8.256	.000
	Inclusion_Final	.387	.086	.393	4.529	.000

	Discrimination_Final	.044	.071	.054	.620	.537
a. Dependent Variable: Wellbeing						

Spearman Analysis

Spearman's rank-order correlation was carried out to explore the relationships between the **independent variables** age, education, employment status, social inclusion, discrimination, and **dependent variable** mental wellbeing. This method is useful for understanding how these factors are connected without assuming a specific type of data distribution.

The most noticeable finding from the analysis is the positive and significant relationship between social inclusion and mental wellbeing ($\rho = .380, p < .001$). This indicates that individuals who feel more **socially included** in their surroundings tend to report **higher levels of mental wellbeing**, in other words, they have better mental health conditions. This finding suggests that feeling **part of a community** is closely linked to how people rate their mental health on a positive scale. The strength of this relationship is accounted for, meaning inclusion is an important factor influencing wellbeing.

There was a positive correlation between age and education ($\rho = .331, p < .001$), showing that older individuals in the sample generally report **higher levels of education**. This could be due to various reasons, such as older individuals may have simply had more time to complete their education. On the other hand, it might also reflect generational differences in access to educational opportunities, which affects inclusion directly and hence **mental wellbeing** among these individuals.

Finally, **employment** status did not show significant relationships with any of the other variables, including **wellbeing, inclusion, or discrimination**. This suggests that whether someone is employed or not does not appear to directly influence these experiences in this sample. It may indicate that other factors, such as ethnic background, social networks, or systemic exclusion, play a more central role in shaping wellbeing.

Taken together, these results highlight how important **social inclusion** is for mental wellbeing, while also suggesting that discrimination's impact may be more complicated in our society among young people. These patterns support the idea that efforts to build more **inclusive environments** could play a key role in **promoting mental wellbeing**.

Correlations						
	Age	Education	Employment	Wellbeing	Inclusion	Discrimination

Spearman's rho	Age	1.000	.331**	.125	.040	-.146	.108	
		.	.000	.178	.666	.115	.245	
		118	118	118	118	118	118	
	Education	.331**	1.000	-.066	.112	.092	.159	
		.000	.	.474	.229	.320	.086	
		118	118	118	118	118	118	
	Employment	.125	-.066	1.000	.041	-.073	-.024	
		.178	.474	.	.656	.431	.796	
		118	118	118	118	118	118	
	Wellbeing	.040	.112	.041	1.000	.380**	.071	
		.666	.229	.656	.	.000	.445	
		118	118	118	118	118	118	
	Social Inclusion	-.146	.092	-.073	.380**	1.000	.148	
		.115	.320	.431	.000	.	.110	
		118	118	118	118	118	118	
	Discrimination	.108	.159	-.024	.071	.148	1.000	
		.245	.086	.796	.445	.110	.	
		118	118	118	118	118	118	
	**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							

Ordinal Logistic Regression

Results from ordinal logistic regression are used to understand how feelings of **social inclusion** and experiences of discrimination relate to different levels of mental wellbeing. Other factors were also taken into consideration like factors of **age, education, and employment status** that were asked by the young people participating in the questionnaire.

The key takeaway from this analysis can be interpreted that social inclusion is strongly linked to better mental wellbeing. The people who feel more included in their social circles or communities are more likely to report higher levels of wellbeing, which is a positive outcome.

This relationship evidently remained significant even after taking age, education, and employment into account, which means inclusion matters a lot on its own as a variable to predict mental wellbeing.

3.2. Qualitative component

The qualitative findings are presented using a thematic analysis method, where each theme is explored separately for both categories of the sample: **young people** and **youth workers**. The analysis is organized as follows for each of the four main themes:

1. **Young People's Perspective:** This section captures the views, experiences, and insights shared by the young participants in the study, highlighting their personal reflections and perceptions. There were 11 young people interviewed.
2. **Youth Workers' Perspective:** Here, we provide the perspectives of youth workers, focusing on their observations, professional experiences, and the challenges they face when working with disadvantaged youth. There were 10 youth workers interviewed.

The four main themes explored in this analysis are as follows:

1. Impact of discrimination on youngsters wellbeing
2. Barriers in disadvantaged youngsters access to adequate support
3. Support measures needed by youngsters to overcome the negative effects of discrimination
4. Support measures needed by youth workers to provide adequate services to disadvantaged youngsters

By examining these themes from both the young people's and youth workers' perspectives, we provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex challenges faced by disadvantaged youth, as well as the critical support they need. This structure ensures clarity and allows for a nuanced interpretation of the data.

„In fact, the exchange. So the exchange is very, very important.“ (Quote translated from Interview #6)

3.2.1. Impact of discrimination on youngsters wellbeing

Discrimination has a profound impact on the wellbeing of young people. The forms of disadvantage experienced range from subtle forms of exclusion to openly hostile behaviour. These experiences not only influence the self-image and mental health of those affected, but also have an impact on their social life, their educational career and their future prospects.

Trigger warning! For people who repeatedly experience discrimination in their lives, the following content may be disturbing. This note is intended to give them the opportunity to decide for themselves whether they want to read the relevant content in this first part, in which the various experiences of discrimination are repeated.

Young People's Perspective

1. Everyday Experiences of Discrimination

Discrimination is an omnipresent issue for the young people interviewed in this study, affecting them in various contexts such as school, work, the housing market, and public spaces. These everyday experiences range from direct hostility to subtle forms of exclusion, preventing them from feeling fully integrated or accepted.

Discrimination based on external characteristics such as skin color, origin, and language skills were frequent, and young people reported being subjected to insults and humiliations. For example, many mentioned the use of the "Z-word" (a derogatory term for Sinti and Roma) as a recurring part of their experience. These acts of discrimination, while often subtle, contributed to feelings of exclusion and frustration.

"I know people applying with their partner's name for apartments or rooms because the partner has a German surname. Or they were not able to get any interviews because obviously their names/surnames are not German." (Quote from Interview #4)

Additionally, experiences of discrimination were not only based on appearance but also on social attributions and assumed stereotypes about people's background or language skills. One participant reflected on the prejudice faced by people from her ethnic group:

"No matter how friendly they seem and how open-minded they think they are, you will always be an insect to them. They could kill you, and nobody would care." (Quote from Interview #4)

At the same time, the speaker demonstrates resilience and agency, highlighting their ability to participate in society, reflect critically on intergenerational experiences, and actively confront oppression as a first step toward empowerment

For some, discrimination started early in life, as shared by one participant:

"Even in primary school as a Romani, I was either not invited to birthdays at all or occasionally invited out of pity. Then I often sat in the corner on my own, the others played with each other but not with me." (Quote translated from Interview #10)

At the same time, other young Roma spoke of strength they found in activism, cultural pride, and peer networks, showing that resilience and agency are central parts of their story too.

2. Emotional and Psychological Burden

Discrimination leads to persistent stress, alienation, fear, and insecurity, making it a significant psychological burden. One of the key impacts of discrimination is on self-esteem. Many of the young people interviewed developed self-doubt and questioned whether they were worth as much as others. This introspection led to feelings of emotional withdrawal and isolation, as they sought to avoid further negative experiences, further reinforcing the feeling of being an outsider.

This constant self-doubt often results in chronic stress, depression, and emotional numbness. Feelings of anger, sadness, crying, or resignation are frequently mentioned by the participants as emotional manifestations of discrimination. Some shared how these emotions persisted over the years and often intensified, making it difficult to maintain a sense of wellbeing.

"I felt less worthy." (Quote translated from Interview #6)

"I used to be much more relaxed and cheerful. I think I've become heavier." (Quote translated from Interview #7)

"When you experience discrimination every day, you start questioning yourself—Am I good enough?" (Quote from Interview #11)

"I think to myself, am I so different from you, am I so 'disgusting'?" (Quote translated from Interview #8)

In the context of Roma youth, transgenerational trauma plays a significant role. Participants spoke about the cumulative impact of historical discrimination, which not only affected individuals but also influenced the community's collective perception of their place in society. This historical context adds layers of complexity to personal identity and wellbeing. At the same time, many young Roma have expressed finding power in self-reclaiming and identity work through education, community support and resilience.

3. Impact on Social Relationships in Everyday Life

Discrimination not only affects personal identity but also significantly impacts social relationships. Many young people described feeling distrustful of others, especially people outside their close social circle. The fear of being misunderstood or dismissed led them to avoid discussing their experiences, as they felt that others might consider them oversensitive.

Adapting to the pressure of discrimination, many young people changed their behavior and appearance to blend in. The fear of being rejected or labeled negatively by others caused them to alter their identities in ways that made them feel less vulnerable.

"You always have to guard up, and you have to be more... you must know it more, do it more, everything." (Quote from Interview #4)

For some, sharing their thoughts with close companions helped alleviate the emotional burden, although it did not fully resolve the underlying issue. One participant shared how difficult it was to carry the weight of discrimination on their own:

"It helped me to share my thoughts, to talk about it, not to remain silent. I talk a lot with my boyfriend, he has similar experiences. If I don't say anything, I take everything home with me and try to construct answers in correct German so that I can answer the person correctly and completely the next day. It's very stressful." (Quote translated from Interview #7)

Others expressed how returning to the comfort of their home provided relief, allowing them to shed the burden of discrimination temporarily:

"When I get home, I can be me again." (Quote translated from Interview #6)

4. Coping Strategies

Over time, many young people developed strategies to cope with the constant experience of discrimination. Some adopted the mindset that discrimination is just a part of life, and they learned not to let it affect them as deeply. Others focused on self-empowerment through education, community support, and speaking out against discrimination.

Some respondents also reported changing their appearance or behavior to conform to societal ideals and avoid drawing attention to their identity. This tendency to "hide" or alter one's identity is a common response to discrimination, with many seeking to present themselves as less of a target.

One participant shared how they had to modify their approach to daily life to avoid discrimination:

"At first, when I was shocked, I thought to myself, ok, you must never say that again [that she is a Romni] and you have to keep it a secret somehow or maybe not tell everyone, just the people you trust." (Quote translated from Interview #6)

Others indicated that constant vigilance was required to anticipate potential discriminatory encounters, which is mentally exhausting and perpetuates the cycle of stress and anxiety. However, positive influences such as supportive teachers, friends, and organizations played a

significant role in helping them build self-confidence and develop strategies for long-term coping.

These coping strategies show that, while many young people learn to navigate discrimination in various ways, there is still a need for stronger support systems and a deeper societal change to reduce the frequency and impact of such experiences.

Youth Workers's Perspective

Discrimination has far-reaching consequences for the lives of young people. In addition to psychological stress and self-doubt, many experience social isolation and a lasting feeling of "not belonging." Prejudices in education, employment, and housing make their future prospects more difficult, while institutional discrimination, for example by authorities or the police, further weakens their trust in society. Youth workers emphasize that discrimination is a daily reality for many young people, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, and this widespread societal issue deeply affects their mental health and integration into society.

Counselors, many of whom share similar experiences due to their own migration background, report that they often find it easier to connect with young people who have faced similar challenges. This shared experience can foster a sense of mutual understanding and trust.

1. Psychological Stress & Self-Doubt

Discrimination is described as a key factor that severely affects the mental wellbeing of young people. It manifests in various forms, such as racism, sexism, and the marginalization of those with a migration background, causing significant negative impacts on mental health. Youth workers highlight that these experiences of rejection lead to heightened stress, anxiety, isolation, sadness, and, in some cases, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or suicidal thoughts.

The long-term psychological effects are evident, with many young people suffering from depression, low self-esteem, and auto-aggressive behavior. These emotional burdens are further compounded when language barriers and traumatic experiences from their past continue to influence their current state of wellbeing. Many of these individuals have internalized self-doubt due to constant rejection, often from an early age.

Youth workers highlight that those facing additional trauma—such as young refugees or those from Roma communities—are particularly vulnerable to these mental health challenges. For example, one youth worker explains that young people from war-torn regions, like Ukrainian refugees, often feel that their traumatic experiences are not recognized or understood by German society, leading to frustration and emotional distress.

"I believe that if we are talking about people who have experienced migration or flight, then this experience alone of leaving the country, with or without family, what happened on the way here, that alone would be enough to destroy the mental health of any person, I would say" (Quote translated from Interview #1)

"(...). It particularly affects people who have fled from war zones and have experienced many traumas. They have come to Germany to find protection and a better life, but here they also experience discrimination" (Quote translated from Interview #2).

"The impact of discrimination on young people's mental health is enormous" (Quote translated from Interview # 5)

2. Social Isolation & Identity Conflicts

Youth workers point out that young people who experience discrimination often find themselves isolated from the broader community. This social exclusion is compounded by a lack of understanding or recognition of their struggles, further exacerbating feelings of alienation and loneliness. Many young people feel torn between the cultural values of their country of origin and the expectations imposed on them by their new environment, which creates significant stress and confusion regarding their identity.

Youth workers observe that some young people cope with this isolation by withdrawing from society, while others try to "adapt" to social expectations, even at the expense of their true selves. The emotional burden of discrimination can lead to a profound sense of powerlessness, especially if the discrimination goes unacknowledged or is brushed aside by others.

A striking issue highlighted by youth workers is the intersectionality of discrimination. For instance, young Roma girls often face not only ethnic discrimination but also gender-based prejudice, which limits their opportunities and increases their emotional distress. These young women are often subjected to assumptions that they will marry early and do not need a school-leaving certificate. Such societal expectations limit their potential and lead to further self-doubt and withdrawal.

"Young people opening up is about building safe spaces, because sometimes they don't even need a solution, they just want some safe space to share." (Quote from Interview #3)

"Overall, most of the organizations working with migrants and refugees deal with structural racism in Germany. So based on the kind of their names or based on their looks, they're discriminated against." (Quote from Interview #4)

"They feel like they must be more cautious, to be less bold." (4).

"So I think already at a very young age, they have to ask themselves questions that, for example, I had never had to ask myself." (Quote from Interview #7)

“They will perceive the dark face of life that we discover later in adulthood. They will discover it very early and they will be dealing with many things that maybe another young person doesn't even have to even think about, right?” (Quote from Interview #10)

3. Discrimination in Education & Employment

Youth workers report that language barriers and lack of adequate school support significantly hinder educational success for many young people from marginalized backgrounds. Discrimination in education is prevalent, with teachers often showing little sensitivity to the particular challenges faced by students with migration backgrounds. The lack of support in schools makes young people feel excluded, and many resort to truancy as a way to escape the negative experiences they face in the classroom.

In the labor market, discrimination based on appearance, name, or ethnic background is also prevalent. Young refugees, especially those with darker skin tones or visible religious symbols, face particularly harsh discrimination. Youth workers observe that Roma children are disproportionately placed in special schools or lower-level classes, a practice rooted in antigypsyist stereotypes rather than actual ability, regardless of their academic potential, which significantly impacts their self-esteem and future opportunities.

Youth workers emphasize that discrimination in education and employment creates a cycle of disadvantage that affects the long-term prospects of these young people, limiting their ability to access better jobs and integrate successfully into society.

“In education, there is simply very little understanding of the different realities of life. We have such a Western understanding of education and that should continue to work like this” (Quote translated from Interview #1)

“These circumstances are extreme, especially in the school sector. The children don't get any recognition at school, their skills are only measured on the basis of their knowledge of German, otherwise they are put into some kind of remedial classes where they have to do their time at school”. (Quote translated from Interview #5)

“There were two girls from our room who told me they are getting targeted by their teachers when it comes to the Middle Eastern conflict, when it comes to Islam and terror or something, they are asked if they would be experts to explain the whole situation. And I see this also as a way of discrimination against them.” (Quote from Interview #8)

4. Institutional & Structural Discrimination

Youth workers observe that bureaucratic challenges significantly exacerbate the problems young people face in their daily lives. The bureaucratic burden—such as securing legal status, obtaining work permits, or navigating the housing market—creates constant anxiety and pressure, preventing young people from focusing on their personal development and wellbeing.

For some young people, the issue of uncertain residence status further exacerbates their stress. Youth workers report that this lack of security makes it difficult for young people to start careers or apprenticeships, thereby restricting their future prospects. Roma families, for example, may face challenges in accessing basic rights like voting or receiving social benefits due to their historical lack of citizenship. This institutionalized discrimination cements unequal opportunities and contributes to deep-seated feelings of injustice.

Youth workers also highlight how institutional discrimination manifests in everyday interactions. For example, Roma communities face widespread prejudice in public spaces and are often treated with suspicion, particularly by the police. Discrimination at this institutional level perpetuates a cycle of exclusion, affecting young people's mental health and sense of belonging.

"They (refugees) get discriminated against because of their appearance, because they have a darker skin color." (Quote from Interview #3).

"For many, discrimination is simply an everyday experience that they have always had, a kind of "normality" ". (Quote translated from Interview #5)

"There were also situations where we were travelling with a group of Roma youths as part of a youth meeting and wanted to visit a pub. Then, although there was enough space for us, we weren't allowed in for some reason that I thought was contrived" (Quote translated from Interview #5).

"Specifically for the Roma communities, antigypsyist prejudices are widespread throughout society. Roma migrants or refugees already experience strong discrimination in their countries of origin and then they come to Germany and are also affected by antigypsyism here". (Quote translated from Interview #5)

3.2.2. Barriers in disadvantaged youngsters access to adequate support

Discrimination is not only a psychological burden for young people, but often also makes access to support and help more difficult. Many of those affected experience institutional barriers, a lack of social awareness and a deep-rooted mistrust of offers of help. These barriers increase the isolation of young people and make it difficult for them to defend themselves against discrimination or develop coping strategies.

Young People's Perspective

1. Structural and Institutional Barriers

Many young people face considerable hurdles when seeking support - be it in the education system, in the healthcare system or on the labour market. Complex bureaucratic procedures, a lack of culturally sensitive services and a lack of information make it difficult for those affected to exercise their rights and defend themselves against discrimination.

1.a. Bureaucratic and Social Hurdles

Access to Healthcare and Social Services:

- *Systemic Difficulties:* Access to the healthcare system was described as very difficult, characterized by long waiting times, staff shortages, and prevalent prejudices within medical and social service fields. These barriers consistently prevent young people from receiving the timely and appropriate help they need.
- *Structural Barriers:* Participants cited complicated bureaucracy and persistent language barriers as significant structural impediments.
- *Distrust in Institutions:* A profound lack of trust in institutions was widely reported, especially among many Roma participants, stemming from repeated negative experiences with authorities, including the police, schools, or social workers. This distrust leads to reluctance among many Roma families and youth to seek necessary help.

Economic and Informational Barriers:

- *Limited Economic Resources:* A lack of economic resources was identified as a critical barrier to gaining access to vital services such as education and psychosocial support. Low-income families often find it challenging to prioritize investments in education, psychological support, or career opportunities.
- *Lack of System Knowledge:* Many affected families demonstrated limited knowledge of the German system, making them unable to effectively guide their children towards adequate support. This is often due to the significant differences between the German system and those in their countries of origin.
- *Specific Challenges for Roma Youth:* Roma young people, in particular, highlighted that their families frequently lack access to crucial resources like education, psychological support, or financial aid.

1.b. Language Barriers and Institutional Ignorance

Language barriers pose a significant challenge. Many young people are expected to speak fluent German, which is not always the case, and institutions lack the patience to assist non-native speakers. The absence of multilingual services makes it difficult for these young people to access medical care, social support, and education.

"I'm also afraid to open up and talk openly about my experiences (of discrimination)." (Quote translated from Interview #7)

1.c. Lack of Culturally Sensitive Support

Many young people expressed a strong desire for culturally relevant support and accessible contact points that acknowledge their specific experiences and backgrounds. They articulated a need for informal discussion spaces where they can connect with individuals who genuinely understand their lived realities.

Participants indicated that even minimally trained individuals from their own communities could provide significant emotional support. This observation points to a notable gap in the provision of culturally sensitive mental health and social services that adequately meet their specific needs.

Specifically, Roma youth consistently reported feeling underrepresented within existing support structures, often perceiving that their needs were not taken seriously. They highlighted that the issue of antigypsyism is frequently overlooked or insufficiently addressed in many institutions and within the general public discourse. This systemic neglect can result in Roma young people not receiving adequate support, or even facing additional prejudices when seeking help. This includes widespread misconceptions about the Roma community and a lack of awareness regarding the historical and ongoing discrimination they endure.

Furthermore, participants noted a scarcity of established networks or university groups specifically catering to certain marginalized groups, which contributes to additional feelings of isolation. While exchanges with other individuals who share similar experiences were perceived as highly beneficial, such supportive offers were often either unknown or not easily accessible to those who could benefit most.

“You can’t expect all the Germans to know anti-gypsyism. I am not expecting them to know anything about us, I am just expecting, or I wish for myself to just have human empathy.” (Quote from Interview #4)

2. Social barriers (normalization of discrimination)

In addition to structural barriers, there are also social factors that make access to support more difficult. A central problem is the normalization of discrimination: many young people receive feedback from those around them that they should simply "accept" discrimination or "be stronger". As a result, many do not report discrimination or do not even try to get support.

2.a. Lack of awareness of discrimination

Participants frequently reported a significant lack of awareness regarding discrimination and its profound effects within their social environments, extending to key institutions such as schools and workplaces. This absence of understanding often translated into a feeling of invisibility, particularly among Roma youth, who noted that antigypsyism is rarely addressed in official educational curricula.

A common experience among those affected was that authority figures, including teachers, employers, and other institutional representatives, often failed to take discrimination seriously or actively ignored it. In some instances, this inaction was perceived as an implicit recommendation for the affected individual to also disregard discriminatory situations. This societal tendency to ignore discrimination or refrain from active intervention intensified feelings of powerlessness and isolation among those experiencing it.

Within families, there was sometimes advice to ignore discriminatory situations. This reaction within the family context was seen to reflect the broader powerlessness that individuals facing discrimination often experience due to a lack of readily available and effective support mechanisms.

Specifically, Roma young people reported that antigypsyism is rarely discussed in public discourse, and teachers are often unprepared to address it, leading to a profound lack of support for them in educational settings. They observed that official school programs to educate about discrimination are scarce, and when the topic is addressed, it frequently remains at a superficial level. Some young people who attempted to share their own experiences of discrimination often found themselves not being taken seriously.

Participants also highlighted that discriminatory language is frequently perceived as "normal" or acceptable, citing instances such as the public use of racist terms, including the "Z-word" (a discriminatory exonym for Sinti and Roma).

Despite the pervasive nature of these challenges, awareness-raising, sensitization, and education were consistently desired by participants in the interviews as crucial means of combating discrimination, even if some expressed skepticism regarding their immediate effectiveness.

"When it comes to discrimination, most people just look the other way." (Quote translated from Interview #8)

2.b. Mental Health Stigma

Participants' narratives revealed a significant issue of mental health stigma prevalent within many communities, which poses a considerable barrier to accessing support. Psychological support is often perceived as a sign of weakness, inhibiting individuals from seeking necessary help.

Specifically, Roma and refugee young people reported that their families frequently express little trust in psychological counseling or state-provided support services. Some individuals conveyed that their parents viewed medical or psychological assistance as superfluous or even as a potential threat.

This pervasive stigma surrounding mental health, evident both within certain communities and the broader societal context, directly prevents individuals from accessing the help they need. Consequently, this exacerbates the psychological impact of discrimination and other stressors. Furthermore, some young people expressed fear of being perceived as weak or "different" if they were to seek support, directly influencing their willingness to engage with available services.

"Sometimes the only thing that helps is to avoid this person." (Quote translated from Interview #9)

3. Social isolation and lack of networks

Participants frequently reported a significant lack of awareness regarding where to turn when experiencing discrimination. Counselling centers were often unknown or difficult to access.

Some individuals noted that they only discovered relevant organizations by chance or at a very late stage. In school settings, there were typically no clear contact persons designated for addressing discrimination or providing psychological support.

Notably, several young people shared that they only began to receive adequate support once they discovered a Roma self-organization. One young person specifically highlighted how such an institution helped her to contextualize her experiences and achieve emotional stability.

"When you're alone, you're afraid to react." (Quote translated from Interview #8)

"I didn't get any help from anyone." (Quote translated from Interview #10)

"We want to be treated as equals, have the same opportunities, and live without fear." (Quote from Interview #11)

4. Lack of legal support, self-help and protection mechanisms

Participants frequently described significant barriers that hindered their ability to report discriminatory experiences or seek appropriate legal and psychological support.

4.a. Fear of negative consequences

Many young people expressed a strong reluctance to report discrimination due to fear of negative consequences or concerns that a direct response could exacerbate the situation. Consequently, some opted to try and resolve issues themselves. In response to perceived threats, some participants chose to partially conceal their identity or withdraw socially, feeling unable to openly discuss their experiences. This fear was particularly pronounced in school or professional contexts, where concerns about a complaint worsening their opportunities were common. While some individuals reported that negative experiences had inadvertently made them stronger or led them to develop a "wall" for psychological protection, others described feeling shocked and

speechless, which made immediate action difficult. This often resulted in withdrawal from certain social situations and an increased mistrust of new social contacts, leading to more guarded interactions.

4.b. Lack of contact points for legal support

Despite a desire to defend themselves against discrimination, many young people reported a lack of access to legal support or effective protection mechanisms. There were notably few low-threshold services available that specifically informed young people about their rights. While some participants were theoretically aware of the existence of complaints offices, they often refrained from contacting them due to a perception that their specific problem was not "big enough" to warrant formal action.

"There was no state support, no protection - just faith and family to rely on." (Quote from Interview #11)

Youth Workers' Perspective

Discrimination not only affects the psychological wellbeing of young people but also significantly hinders their access to vital support services. From bureaucratic barriers to a lack of psychological and social support, these challenges are compounded by mistrust in institutions, language difficulties, and an overall lack of integration measures. These barriers contribute to the increasing isolation of young people, preventing them from accessing the help they need.

1. Bureaucratic & Legal Hurdles

Complicated application procedures were frequently cited as major obstacles to accessing education, social benefits, and securing a stable residence status. The processes for obtaining residence permits or work permits were described as lengthy and opaque, creating considerable uncertainty and stress for young people. Furthermore, many young people residing in refugee accommodation centers reported being without a school place for months or even years, further disrupting their education and integration.

Refugees with an uncertain residence status often faced particularly severe limitations. They reported having no, or only highly complicated, access to crucial psychological care and other vital social and support services. Their precarious status also restricted their access to training opportunities, work permits, language courses, and other fundamental integration measures.

"(...) These are people who have lived here for years, been to school etc. and still can't get citizenship. That annoys people, they naturally feel they are being treated unfairly. They can't participate in society. At least in our federal state, the issue is very complicated" (Quote translated from Interview #2).

Despite the existence of anti-discrimination centers and laws, participants observed that these frameworks were often not consistently enforced. Reports of discrimination cases frequently resulted only in statistical data, with little evidence of concrete measures being taken to address or prevent the issues. A lack of sufficient resources to bring about structural changes within these frameworks was also noted.

A particularly concerning finding was the perceived lack of concrete measures specifically addressing **antigypsyism**, despite it being recognized as one of the most widely accepted forms of racism. This societal acceptance and lack of enforcement meant that discrimination against Roma individuals often remained without consequences, effectively becoming socially normalized.

"(...) at the moment the whole political situation is very difficult, we are all very worried about what the future holds" (Quote translated from Interview #2)

2. Lack of psychological & social support

Existing support structures, even in larger cities, were described as overwhelmed, while in rural regions, they were almost entirely absent. There were notably few direct contact points specifically tailored for young people experiencing discrimination, and despite the traumas many had endured, direct offers of mental health support were scarce. Young people residing in collective accommodation centers, in particular, frequently reported having only minimal access to any form of support services.

Many young people expressed a feeling of invisibility, attributing this partly to their cultural traditions not being adequately recognized in Germany. They reported that many teachers and authority figures lacked understanding of the specific challenges faced by Roma, refugees, and migrants, which contributed to additional burdens on these young individuals.

Furthermore, participants often indicated that they did not fully realize they were being discriminated against, or they lacked knowledge regarding how to defend themselves against such experiences. This internal confusion was compounded by external factors, as the rise of right-wing populist parties and increasingly racist rhetoric was perceived to intensify feelings of insecurity among marginalized youth.

"mental health care is so problematic in this country" (Quote translated from Interview #1)

"As already mentioned, the first very big challenge is to teach young people how to recognise discrimination. And then beyond that, getting them to actively take action against these experiences, for example by going to a counselling or reporting centre and reporting the incident." (Quote translated from Interview #5)

"Another challenge is to convince these young people, so to speak, that they are of equal value in this society, that they can achieve a lot and to break this behavioural pattern of internalising a supposed inferiority". (Quote translated from Interview #5)

3. Language barriers & lack of integration

A fundamental lack of language skills was frequently cited as making access to essential services and critical information exceptionally difficult. This was compounded by a reported lack of awareness regarding where to turn for support, particularly when experiencing discrimination. While the necessity of overcoming these barriers to enable access to necessary support services was emphasized, one interviewee underscored the importance of fostering a broader societal culture of openness and support through increased awareness.

Participants expressed that political debates surrounding migration often reinforced feelings of not being welcome. These sentiments were sometimes exacerbated by public accusations linked to various incidents, further isolating young people. Many young people reported seeking orientation within society but frequently felt they had no stable or "fixed place" within it. Discrimination based on physical appearance and background was also highlighted; for example, while some Ukrainian refugees were perceived as "silent migrants" due to their physical resemblance to Germans, members of other ethnic minorities (e.g., from the Caucasus region) faced additional layers of discrimination. Overall, perceptions characterized by racism, xenophobia, and stereotypes contributed significantly to migrants feeling unwelcome.

Beyond language, practical barriers to integration were evident. Migrants often faced difficulty in securing housing due to landlord prejudices. Furthermore, their employment opportunities were frequently limited, as problems with the recognition of foreign qualifications often compelled highly qualified migrants to accept low-paid jobs, despite their advanced skills and education.

"They just spend so much time on TikTok and Instagram and everything, just to wind off and do something different and not to think about probably all the stuff happening here. (Quote from Interview #9)

"When we are always reminded about our differences, this will appear more in our identity. We will be more aware of this difference in our identity, right, in our perception of our identity. So maybe this will make them feel, identify more with their difference than with the community that they are part of on a daily life, on a daily basis." (Quote from Interview #10)

4. Fear & mistrust of institutions

Negative experiences with entities such as the police, authorities, and schools significantly contributed to this widespread mistrust. Discrimination, in particular, was often perceived as not being taken seriously, which acted as a major deterrent for many young people from seeking support. Furthermore, the scarcity of specialized advice centers specifically for Roma or other marginalized groups led to a general distrust towards other official organizations. Many families, having experienced discrimination themselves, held a strong belief that they would not receive genuine support, a sentiment that extended across various marginalized groups.

Within the education sector, a notable lack of awareness regarding discrimination was reported. Teachers often failed to recognize discriminatory incidents or did not perceive disadvantaged young people as equal pupils, leading to experiences of discrimination not being taken seriously. Some young people, particularly those of Muslim or Arab origin, also reported feeling pressured by teachers when topics such as terrorism or conflicts in the Middle East were discussed, adding to their sense of alienation.

In stark contrast to their experiences with mainstream institutions, many young people described behaving very differently and feeling more at ease within the safe spaces of dedicated counselling centers. These environments fostered a crucial sense of community and belonging that participants often reported lacking outside of these protected settings.

“double standards in addressing migrants coming from different places, like for example, from Ukraine or here. But I think even people who are coming from Ukraine are facing this when it comes to participation in the public sphere.” (Quote from Interview #10)

5. Insufficient financial & structural support

The work of almost all interviewed professionals was reportedly hampered by a profound lack of resources and reliable funding. This included critical shortages of adequate premises, essential materials, and sufficient financial support, which significantly limited the scope and impact of their services. Accessing funding proved challenging even for well-networked organizations. Youth organizations, in particular, were described as chronically underfunded, often operating with too little physical space and heavily dependent on precarious donations.

Although various support services are offered by organizations, there is a consistent lack of financial resources to expand these sufficiently to meet the demand. Funding is often limited, preventing the establishment of long-term, stable structures that could offer reliable and continuous support to the young people concerned.

Many youth workers, including those operating within self-organizations, expressed feeling inadequately prepared to effectively support young people who have experienced severe

discrimination. They noted a significant scarcity of specialized training, particularly in the area of psychological support. While the need for professional training is high, the available offerings remain limited, creating a critical gap in service provision.

"Lack of funding is of course the biggest problem, there is uncertainty about the future of our work". (Quote translated from Interview #2)

- "We cooperate with various organisations and try to support each other. We are very grateful that we receive support from local organisations. For example, we lack our own materials and are sometimes dependent on donations from other organisations" (Quote translated from Interview #2).

3.3.3. Support measures needed by youngsters to overcome the negative effects of discrimination

Young people who experience discrimination require tailored and accessible support measures to cope with the psychological, social, and emotional burdens they face. These measures should be designed to empower, raise awareness, foster community, and provide practical tools to help young people cope with and combat discrimination.

Young People's Perspective

1. Psychosocial support and empowerment

A decisive factor in dealing with discrimination is strengthening self-confidence. Many young people would like support in the form of empowerment programs that help them to deal with psychological burden and develop strategies to stand up to discrimination.

1.a. Access to discussion rooms and support systems

Many young people emphasized the critical importance of discussion spaces where they could exchange ideas and experiences with peers from similar backgrounds. The establishment of university groups or specific youth organizations for marginalized communities was seen as beneficial for fostering a sense of community and mutual support. Participants also highlighted the significant role that culturally sensitive social workers could play in providing emotional support and offering targeted, informed assistance and advice. There was a strong expressed desire for low-threshold, rapid, and, crucially, trustworthy access to psychological help and social services that facilitate peer exchange and can be utilized without fear of stigmatization. Some young people reported finding crucial initial support within existing associations, such as Roma self-organizations.

"Thank you very much for the interview. It was good to be able to talk about it. It was the first time I was able to talk about it." (Quote translated from Interview #7)

"The thing that I would have needed was just a room with conversation or exchange with other people of my background who are trained basically in this regard. Just like to talk, not even highly trained, just people. Actually, anything could have helped me. Just like if I could have spoken up, just the person with my background was open to talk." (Quote from Interview #4)

1.b. Strengthening self-awareness and mental resilience

Participants stressed the importance of promoting self-confidence and the acceptance of one's own identity as a vital protective mechanism against the negative impacts of discrimination. They sought access to mental health programs that could equip them with strategies for processing difficult emotions and developing effective coping mechanisms. While some young people reported advice within their families or communities to temporarily "hide" their identity or conform outwardly to avoid discrimination, a consensus emerged that, in the long term, it is more beneficial to empower young people to confidently embrace their identity and manage their feelings without feeling compelled to conceal themselves. The ability to allow and constructively process emotions such as anger, sadness, or frustration—rather than suppressing them—was underscored as a key element of resilience. Promoting open communication was also identified as an important coping strategy.

"I think it's very important not to deny your own identity, to be open about the fact that you are Roma/Romnja, where you come from." (Quote translated from Interview #10)

1.c. Individual Coping and Sources of Strength

Beyond formal support, some interviewees stated that they did not require additional support, having developed strong self-protective strategies. For these individuals, a positive attitude and mutual respect were considered crucial for their wellbeing. Knowing whom to turn to in the event of future discrimination was also identified as an important component of their resilience. Furthermore, for some, faith in God served as a significant source of support and strength.

"Most important is to connection with God and doing the things you enjoy" (Quote from Interview #1)

2. Educational and awareness-raising offers

Knowledge about discrimination and its mechanisms can help to defend against it and initiate social change in the long term. Educational institutions play a central role in raising awareness and teaching anti-discrimination skills.

2.a. Comprehensive education about forms of discrimination

There was a strong call for the implementation of structural educational programs in schools addressing Antigypsyism and other forms of discrimination. Such curricula, participants believed, would specifically strengthen the self-confidence of Sinti and Roma students. They emphasized that teacher training programs should place a greater focus on the identification and elimination of prejudices. A targeted examination of the history of Roma and Sinti, alongside education on discrimination in general, was seen as crucial for raising awareness of existing discriminatory structures. Furthermore, more in-depth teaching content on the mechanisms of discrimination would enable affected individuals to better understand their experiences, strengthen themselves, and develop effective coping skills. The desirability of greater awareness and support from superiors (in work or academic settings) and society at large was also expressed. Participants specifically desired mediation sessions and workshops with other affected individuals, highlighting the role of education and awareness-raising as fundamental means of promoting respect and acceptance. It was noted that discrimination can often stem from a lack of knowledge, underscoring the importance of educating people about discriminatory terms and their meaning, particularly with younger children, to prevent their use. Early education about one's own origins was also deemed important for strengthening identity and better equipping individuals to deal with discrimination.

2.b. Promoting Communication and Peer Empowerment

Young people emphatically stated that talking to others helps them combat feelings of loneliness. The opportunity to discuss discrimination in a safe environment was viewed as crucial for processing experiences and strengthening self-confidence. The potential for digital platforms or apps to provide additional support, such as sending daily positive messages to boost self-esteem, was also suggested. The general concept of exchange and dialogue was seen as essential. A significant desire was expressed for increased funding for Roma-led youth organizations, enabling Roma young people to independently lead their own empowerment efforts. Participants also expressed a desire for workshops for young people on topics such as self-confidence, stress management, anger management, communication, and personal development. The establishment of university groups to support respective marginalized communities was also highlighted as providing a much-needed platform for cultural exchange and support, especially within higher educational institutions.

"It's very important to talk about it, not to keep it to yourself and swallow it." (Quote translated from Interview #9)

"We need storytelling skill, not to tell a random story but their own story." (Quote from Interview #1)

3. Social environment and peer support

Participants consistently emphasized the critical role of a supportive social environment in navigating discrimination and maintaining emotional wellbeing. This was cited most frequently as the most important point in the interviews. Friends, family, and communities were identified as key sources of emotional stability and encouragement to confront discrimination.

“Growing up as a Roma youth, I went through a lot of pain because of discrimination, loneliness, and the lack of help. In Ukraine, my family faced violence, but there was no one to protect us—no laws, no organizations, no support. The only thing that helped us survive was our faith and staying together as a family. But it shouldn’t be this way. Every young Roma person deserves the same chances as everyone else—to go to school or to Job without fear, to feel safe, and to get the support they need.” (Quote from Interview #11)

3.a. Direct emotional support from friends and family

Many young people reported primarily receiving support from close friends, family members, and other trusted individuals. Caregivers who actively encourage and listen to their experiences were highlighted as particularly important. Sharing experiences of discrimination with other affected individuals proved instrumental in coping and reducing feelings of isolation. This exchange was perceived as vital for relieving pressure, gaining new perspectives, and allowing for direct emotional expression rather than internalizing distress. Participants also identified engagement in positive and healthy activities such as sports (e.g., soccer), creative pursuits (e.g., photography, cooking classes), and social interactions (e.g., joint picnics) as beneficial for wellbeing, underscoring the importance of maintaining a positive attitude.

3.b. Promotion of intercultural exchange

Participants also highlighted the value of broader social connections and collective strategies. They recognized that building networks with people from diverse backgrounds could help break down prejudices and foster greater integration. Young people recommended actively networking outside their immediate communities, specifically suggesting making contact with German friends, to avoid misunderstandings and build broader supportive networks.

The potential of social media as a powerful tool for raising awareness was also emphasized. Videography and storytelling, in particular, were seen as effective methods for individuals to share their narratives and amplify their experiences. The creation of dedicated spaces for sharing experiences of discrimination, including with other affected individuals, was highly desired.

Furthermore, peer mentoring programs were suggested as a means for young people to connect with role models who have successfully navigated similar struggles. The establishment of support groups, such as those for Roma parents in schools, was also proposed. Participants

expressed a strong desire for civil courage within society, believing that active social support from bystanders—individuals around those affected who take action and speak out against discrimination—could make a significant difference. Such interventions were seen as crucial for fostering a sense of solidarity and protection for those experiencing discrimination.

“Safe spaces should be created where Roma youth can express themselves freely without fear of discrimination.” (Quote from Interview #11)

4. Structural and legal assistance

In addition to personal support, it is important that those affected are able to defend themselves legally and have access to protection mechanisms.

4.a. Reporting points and protection mechanisms

Participants emphasized that the ability to officially report discrimination is crucial for raising awareness of the problem and initiating structural changes. Alongside this, they highlighted the importance of developing robust psychological protection mechanisms to prevent individuals from being overwhelmed by negative experiences. There's a strong demand for easier access to legal resources, streamlined bureaucracy, and readily available support. Young people also expressed a desire for programs that help them strengthen their self-confidence and manage the emotional and psychological burdens imposed by discrimination. This includes a clear call for increased psychosocial support through counseling and therapy, alongside the creation of safe spaces for exchange with other affected individuals.

A specific and significant wish was for more Roma-led organizations. These organizations, it was suggested, could provide essential advice, foster community exchange and solidarity, and offer crucial low-threshold contact points. Such spaces would be particularly vital for young people, providing a safe environment where they feel understood and can process their experiences. Furthermore, participants suggested trauma healing programs specifically for Roma communities to address intergenerational discrimination, trauma, and violence, acknowledging the lack of culturally sensitive mental health services available to many Roma youth facing these issues.

4.b. Involvement of affected people in decision-making processes

Participants underscored the importance of greater involvement of young people in social and political decision-making processes as a pathway to sustainable change. They believe that participation in youth councils, university groups, and political initiatives can increase the visibility of marginalized groups and drive long-term improvements. Recommendations also

included promoting equal opportunities in higher education and the labor market through scholarships and internships.

The idea of a new digital platform or app was welcomed, with one suggestion being a feature that sends users daily positive messages to boost self-confidence. Such a platform could also facilitate vital exchange by creating spaces where affected individuals can safely share their experiences, further contributing to their sense of community and empowerment.

“More research should be done to stop discrimination. I think it is never ending but we need more research to see why people do these kinds of stuff so that we can stop them or raise awareness.” (Quote from Interview #1)

Youth Workers’ Perspective

Targeted interventions are essential for mitigating the negative impact of discrimination on young people. These measures range from creating protective spaces to providing psychological and legal support, as well as fostering educational and political empowerment. The need for better funding to ensure the sustainability and expansion of support programs is echoed by nearly all youth workers.

1. Protection Spaces & Mentoring

Youth workers emphasized the fundamental need to create safe spaces and organize events where young people can freely exchange ideas and mutually empower each other. They stressed that marginalized young people particularly require support from individuals who share similar experiences, and that peer groups are crucial for fostering a sense of belonging. The promotion of positive role models – successful individuals from marginalized communities – was also seen as vital for strengthening self-confidence.

“Further structures such as contact points should be created, community work must be further strengthened, more meeting and youth centres for the communities are necessary” (Quote translated from Interview #5)

“It is so important that there are people from the community who have achieved something special in society, who have received social recognition, so that they act as role models for young people from the community” (Quote translated from Interview #5).

2. Psychosocial & legal counselling

Youth workers called for more accessible services for psychological support, regardless of residence status, and advocated for increased resources for organizations actively working with these target groups. They underscored the importance of providing low-threshold, direct

counseling as well as comprehensive psychological and social support, within available capacities. The need for specialized counseling was highlighted to better address the specific experiences of young people who have faced discrimination. Additionally, they recommended training staff in youth centers on psychological issues to enhance their ability to respond effectively. For traumatized young people, particularly upon arrival, immediate psychological support was deemed essential to minimize long-term consequences. Guidance for education and career pathways was also identified as a needed support.

3. Education & empowerment programs

According to youth workers, a significant need exists for comprehensive education and empowerment programs. They stressed that schools, authorities, and German society as a whole must gain a deeper understanding of structural discrimination and intercultural challenges. Teachers, specifically, require education on racism, discrimination, and antigypsyism to actively reduce prejudice in educational institutions. Youth workers suggested that young people should be taught strategies for self-empowerment and how to deal with discrimination, proposing workshops or digital education programs. They also saw social media as a valuable tool for sharing experiences and disseminating knowledge about mental health and coping strategies. Recognizing and actively standing up to discrimination was deemed a key skill. Initiatives such as creating handbooks to guide young people through crisis situations and promote mental health were mentioned. Fostering intercultural encounters through joint activities was seen as a way to break down barriers. They highlighted the importance of both in- and out-of-school educational programs. One interviewee specifically stated that a structural reform of the school system would be absolutely necessary for true inclusion and equitable participation. Furthermore, they advocated for targeted support programs to help disadvantaged young people achieve their educational and professional goals, including more support for scholarship programs and extracurricular educational opportunities. Promoting interests such as hobbies, sports, or music was also identified as a resource for fostering a positive self-image. Finally, youth workers underscored the need for better language and integration courses, advocating for low-threshold programs accessible to everyone from the outset.

"I think there is a big paradox in Germany: on the one hand, a lot is being done to combat discrimination, there are programs and measures etc. and at the same time the existence of discrimination is basically negated or played down, especially when it comes to structural and institutional discrimination!" (Quote translated from Interview #5)

4. Strengthening political participation

Youth workers emphasized the importance of strengthening political participation among marginalized youth. They suggested that youth organizations should be granted more direct

access to political decision-makers. They highlighted that a more transparent and fairer treatment of stateless Roma could solve many of their long-term problems. The crucial role of alliances with the majority society was stressed, underscoring that supporters from society who show solidarity are vital in the fight for rights. Youth workers also called for promoting political participation and co-determination, advocating for refugees and migrants to have a stronger voice in social debates and be more involved in decision-making processes. They also identified a need for political and legal reforms, specifically mentioning faster residency procedures, easier recognition of foreign qualifications, and stronger anti-discrimination laws.

“We have to make migrant voices and the voices of minority groups louder and make it more seen that we are a pluralistic country.” (Quote from Interview #8)

3.2.4. Support measures needed by youth workers to provide adequate services to disadvantaged youngsters

Young People’s Perspective

This question, which was actually irrelevant for the survey of young people, was nevertheless answered by one interviewee.

The result is that the interviewee is of the opinion that youth workers need targeted training, more structural support and stronger networks in order to be able to support disadvantaged young people in the long term. This includes raising awareness of cultural backgrounds, anti-racism and advocacy training as well as training in trauma-informed care in order to treat the psychological wounds caused by discrimination and violence.

At the same time, he believes that youth workers must have access to psychological support to avoid burnout, as working with marginalized young people can be very emotionally draining. Youth workers should be given more funding and resources so that they can develop long-term, sustainable projects for disadvantaged young people. Cooperation with Roma organizations and religious communities can help to build trust and create needs-based services. In addition, political influence is crucial in order to achieve structural improvements for disadvantaged young people.

Youth Workers’s Perspective

Youth workers play a central role in supporting disadvantaged young people. In order to organise their work effectively in the long term, they need better training, regular supervision and stable financial security. Many Interviewees repeatedly state that they do not feel sufficiently qualified to work with such highly discriminated groups of people. In addition, stronger networking with

other social institutions is necessary in order to recognise discrimination at an early stage and counteract it in a targeted manner.

1. Further training & qualifications

Youth workers identified the need for further training in various areas, particularly in discrimination, trauma, and intercultural work. This is crucial for better addressing the complex challenges faced by young people. Training in emotional support and conflict management is particularly essential to effectively respond to the diverse needs of marginalized youth.

There is also a recognized need for psychological support training, including knowledge about trauma, especially considering the experiences of young refugees, Roma youth, and other marginalized groups.

Youth workers expressed the need for legal training to understand the legal rights and frameworks that protect young people from discrimination, which would enable them to better guide their clients and provide informed support.

Targeted training on understanding the specific challenges of young Roma was also highlighted. This includes better sensitization to Roma culture, history, and antigypsyism.

“Last November there was this activity where two Ukrainian participants came and they were like, our city back home is being bombed right now, like showing us Instagram live of their city being bombed. And what do you do in a situation like this? There's nothing you can do. They just want to be alone and, or they don't want, it's so individual how participants or youth react to this and what their needs are. And no one prepares you as a youth worker for a situation like this, where someone shows you a video of their city being bombed, where their families are, their husbands, their children, because those women, they were an older youth, let's say, on a youth exchange. I believe...there would be some preparations on how, maybe not specifically cases, but on how to emotionally support the person. But how much we are getting, I'm not really sure.”

(Quote from Interview #3)

“I feel like we don't have enough resources in our organization, or I'm also not having all the resources I would need as a youth worker to properly support individual young people in their mental health.” *(Quote from Interview #4).*

“Many people in our organization are in positions where they work with young people, but not because they have a specific educational background in psychology or trauma education. But they do encounter these situations often because of their target group and it also increases the level of stress, like youth workers feel like they are not properly equipped.” *(Quote from Interview #4)*

“More training is needed on the specific experiences of discrimination faced by Roma and other marginalized young people. I see how much is being done in the area of anti-Semitism, and

that's exactly what we need in the area of antigypsyism." More knowledge about the structural challenges faced by young people could make support more effective." (Quote translated from Interview #6)

"I feel well prepared, but I know that there is still a lot of room for improvement when it comes to dealing with difficult situations." More training, particularly in trauma and crisis intervention, could help to offer young people more targeted support." (Quote translated from Interview #6)

2. Supervision & self-care

To prevent burnout and emotional exhaustion, youth workers emphasized the importance of supervision, exchange, and reflection programs. Regular opportunities to share experiences, discuss difficult situations, and offer mutual support within teams are critical for maintaining emotional wellbeing and effective practice.

Networking with other organizations and professionals was deemed essential to share best practices and develop collaborative solutions. A greater exchange of experiences with peers working in similar fields will enhance overall effectiveness and understanding.

Many youth workers reported feeling emotionally overwhelmed by the challenges they face. Self-care practices and clear guidelines for when to seek professional psychological support are necessary for the long-term wellbeing of those in the profession. Additionally, youth workers noted that they often struggle to balance their personal wellbeing with the emotional needs of the young people they support.

"A lot really depends on the personal voluntary commitment of colleagues. Of course, this eats up private capacities and free time, you can't always do it in the long term". (Quote translated from Interview #5)

3. Long-term funding & political recognition:

The need for long-term, sustainable funding for youth centers and social projects was a recurring theme. Currently, many programs face temporary, project-based funding, which makes it difficult to provide consistent support to marginalized young people. Youth workers emphasized the importance of structural funding that can ensure continuity and stability in service delivery.

Bureaucratic hurdles associated with funding and recognition often drain valuable resources that could otherwise go into direct service provision. Youth workers call for reduced bureaucracy and streamlined procedures to ensure more efficient and effective use of resources. It is also stated that stricter control of racial profiling and discriminatory police practices would significantly improve the lives of young Roma.

Youth workers expressed the need for greater social recognition of their profession, particularly in the context of working with marginalized youth. Professionals are often expected to

compensate for state deficits, which diminishes the recognition of their role and contribution to society. There is a clear demand for more political recognition of the value of youth work.

"Many people who work in youth work do not feel seen, they are not valued" (Quote translated from Interview #1)

"I'm very worried about the future. I see very few opportunities in the near future. It's more likely that everything will simply be cut and then everyone will be surprised again when things don't work or bad things happen" (Quote translated from Interview #1)

"(...) we need youth centres, we need money, we need fewer hurdles, less political stress too. I have the feeling that many left-wing youth centres, for example, or those that openly speak out against Nazis, are then under general suspicion". (Quote translated from Interview #1)

"Of course we like doing it because we are convinced of the importance of this work, because we want to support the community, the young people. But it is important that our work is also recognised, that it is supported, that we receive structural support and don't always go from project to project." (Quote translated from Interview #5)

4. Better networking & interdisciplinary cooperation

Youth workers emphasized the importance of building stronger partnerships and closer cooperation between educational institutions, social services, and political actors. Better coordination between these sectors will improve support for disadvantaged young people, particularly in addressing issues of discrimination and marginalization.

There is a need for more platforms where youth workers can share knowledge, exchange best practices, and offer mutual support. This would strengthen the overall quality of service provision and help youth workers to better address the challenges they face in their work.

Youth workers also highlighted the need for more intercultural youth centres across Germany. These spaces would facilitate interaction and dialogue between young people from diverse backgrounds, promoting understanding and integration while providing support in a safe and culturally sensitive environment.

Youth workers stressed the importance of research and data collection to better understand the experiences of young migrants. This information would inform policy decisions and improve targeted interventions to address the specific challenges these young people face.

"Empowering is always such a big word. And we ask what's behind. But I think sometimes it's these small things, but which are continuously there and continuously done that you have people to talk to, that you have others as idols as you have an intercultural team or you see like you have these examples where you see this, it also works differently, and where you have rooms to identify with, to learn about self-consciousness, about self-confidence. And yeah, that's also why

we want to do more workshops on these topics and learn about ourselves and the cultural visions about society. And how, for example, we talked about prejudice inside the community and in Germany in general. And like these, yeah, small, these are always, these are all small tries, I would say to build a more sensitive, sensible world” (Quote from Interview #8)

4. Discussion

The results of this study underline the urgency of political and institutional change to uphold the rights and wellbeing of disadvantaged young people, particularly Roma, Sinti, migrants, and refugees. The findings make visible how these youth live at the intersection of multiple forms of exclusion — insecure residence status, precarious housing, social isolation, structural antigypsyism and racism, and the absence of responsive psychosocial care. These are not personal deficits but consequences of systems that continue to privilege some lives over others. The data call for a reorientation of policy: away from short-term support measures and toward a transformation of the structures that deny young people full participation and recognition. Consistent with existing national and international research, this study reaffirms that mental health and belonging cannot be achieved without stability, justice, and the unconditional recognition of each young person as a subject with voice, dignity, and the right to shape their society.

A particularly striking finding of this study is that discrimination, while clearly harmful, loses its statistical significance when social inclusion is accounted for. This does not mean that discrimination is secondary — its psychological toll is evident in both our data and the lived experiences of participants. Rather, the results point to a deeper structural truth: where institutions create genuine spaces of belonging and recognition, the harm of discrimination can be mitigated. Social inclusion, in this sense, is not an individual coping mechanism but a collective and institutional responsibility. The absence of belonging is not a failure of youth to integrate, but a failure of systems to include. This finding calls for a shift in perspective — from policies that focus solely on reducing harm to those that actively redistribute power and open participation, allowing young people to be co-creators of the environments that sustain their wellbeing.

This finding reframes inclusion not as a soft, aspirational goal but as the essential social infrastructure for mental health and democratic life. In the German context, the concepts of *Teilhabe* (participation) and *Integration* are widely invoked in policy yet often remain detached from the lived realities of those they concern. For many young people — particularly from Roma, Sinti, and refugee backgrounds — inclusion is not a given but something they must continually claim in the face of institutional and societal barriers. Without concrete, lived experiences of belonging, recognition, and participation, policies for mental health or social

cohesion remain incomplete. This study therefore positions inclusion not merely as an outcome of policy but as its moral and psychological foundation — a measure of how justly a society organizes power, access, and human dignity.

This insight aligns with psychological models that place social connectedness at the core of wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Our data show that youth who experience stable, trusting relationships and positive group identification report higher life satisfaction and lower distress. These findings reinforce the need for a shift in youth policy away from reactive, deficit-based models and toward collective, proactive inclusion-building. Such a shift must move beyond combating prejudice alone to creating shared spaces and relationships in which belonging is produced through mutual recognition and participation. Inclusion, in this sense, is not a programme to be delivered to young people, but a social process that must engage them as equal partners in shaping the conditions of their own wellbeing.

Another critical layer to this discussion is the long-term impact of antigypsyism, a distinct form of racism that functions across generations. To understand the depth of these structural barriers, one may look to the framework provided by Isidora Randjelović in the Report of the Independent Commission on Antigypsyism (2021). Her perspective illustrates how this specific form of racism functions not just as a contemporary hurdle, but as a transgenerational force:

"A historically grown and transnationally organised violence that affects the psyche and bodies of Romani subjects transgenerationally and causes life difficulties, injuries and illnesses, shortened life expectancy and even death. This violence excludes Rom*nja individually and/or collectively and in conjunction with other social classifications such as class, gender, sex, religious affiliation from material, financial and symbolic resources and from social recognition and structural participation." (Isidora Randjelović, 2019)

Antigypsyism has existed for centuries. It did not begin with the National Socialists, nor did it disappear afterwards. It still has its effects today, and the traumas experienced are passed on from generation to generation. Similarly, antigypsyism is passed on transgenerationally, does not refer to experiences with real people and experiences a recurring renaissance of old prejudices and reproductions.

This brings us to another core finding of a 2015 publication, namely 'Holocaust survivors pass trauma on to their children', which is clearly described by Strauß (2023). The international research team led by Rachel Yehuda (Professor at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York) and Elisabeth Binder (Director at the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Munich) analysed the genes of Jewish Holocaust survivors and their children (Yehuda et al., 2015).

"The investigations centred on epigenetic changes in the FKBP5 gene, which has long been a focus of Elisabeth Binder's work. "Epigenetic" refers to processes that do not change the actual genetic information, but only make it more or less accessible,' explains Elisabeth Binder. "FKPB5 determines how effectively the body can react to stress hormones and thus controls the entire stress hormone system. The FKBP5 gene is altered in many diseases such as post-traumatic stress disorder or depression. We have now been able to show that there are probably also cross-generational effects." (Max Planck Society, 2015)

Accordingly, the result says that 'epigenetic inheritance', in this case the Holocaust experiences of the contemporary witness generation, has a direct influence on the genes and thus the development of their offspring. This can also be applied to the Sinti and Roma group.

An increased risk of stress-related illnesses in this target group can also be observed in this study. And other alarm signals such as reduced life expectancy are also being observed. For example, the scientific service of the German Bundestag stated back in 2012: 'Among other things, the poorer state of health can be seen in the lower life expectancy of the European Roma, which is ten years below the average of the EU population.' There are no figures for Germany, as ethnic origin is not taken into account in health statistics due to the protection of minorities. (Wissenschaftliche Dienste des Deutschen Bundestages, 2012)

Further research and studies across Europe also show that there is often a difference of ten, and in some countries even 20 years, in the life expectancy of the Roma population compared to the majority society (ctxt.es, 2015). This, combined with the results of the present study, must be understood as an alarm signal. Accepting this is not worthy of a civil society.

While the intergenerational trauma of Roma and Sinti communities is distinct in form and duration, similar psychological burdens — rooted in forced displacement, loss, and institutional alienation — also shape the experiences of refugee youth in Germany today.

In line with international studies, the findings emphasise that social integration depends fundamentally on the presence of equitable and responsive institutional frameworks — across education, employment, housing, and healthcare. However, youth in our study face deep mistrust of institutions, grounded not in misunderstanding but in lived experiences of exclusion and disrespect. Encounters with police, social services, schools, and medical providers frequently reinforce a sense of invisibility and powerlessness. This is particularly pronounced among refugee and Roma youth, who often perceive public support systems as inaccessible, culturally indifferent, or even hostile. Their mistrust is therefore not a barrier to integration but a reflection of institutions that have not earned their confidence. Meaningful inclusion requires transforming these structures into spaces of dialogue, recognition, and shared accountability.

Despite these barriers, the study reveals a powerful insight: many young people demonstrate remarkable resilience, drawing on personal faith, community support, and identity strength. However, this resilience exists despite, not because of, the system. This reinforces the call for structural change. Youth are resilient, but they shouldn't have to be. A functioning society should provide stability, safety, and support — not force young people to construct those alone. Their capacity for recovery is remarkable, but also a signal of the state's absence.

These insights gain additional urgency in the current political climate. In parts of German public discourse, marginalized groups — especially refugees, Roma, and Sinti — continue to be portrayed as threats or burdens rather than as integral members of society. Such narratives do more than perpetuate stigma; they erode the social foundations of wellbeing by denying belonging and shared humanity. If inclusion is to function as protective infrastructure, it must extend beyond access to services and toward a political culture that actively recognizes and values all youth as equal participants in the collective life of the country. Only when institutions and public narratives affirm this belonging can mental health and social cohesion take root. Without such transformation, reforms remain surface-level, and inequality reproduces itself in new forms.

Ultimately, inclusion is not a gesture of tolerance but an act of justice.

4.1 Implications for Policy and Practice

Social Policies

- The study highlights that legal insecurity, unstable housing, and lack of access to healthcare are not just logistical barriers — they are key drivers of chronic psychological stress. Policymakers must recognize that mental health cannot be treated in isolation from these structural conditions.
- The data suggest that social inclusion is a stronger predictor of wellbeing than the absence of discrimination. This implies that investing in inclusive spaces, youth participation, and cultural recognition can have a measurable impact on mental health — and may, in some cases, be more feasible than eliminating all forms of bias.
- Institutional mistrust among Roma and refugee youth was evident throughout the study. Social policies must therefore go beyond formal access to rights and services and address relational access — that is, whether young people feel safe, respected, and understood when seeking help.
- The provision of culturally sensitive psychological services is essential to overcoming trauma, the effects of discrimination, and other mental health problems. In addition to cultural sensitivity, linguistic accessibility is equally important — especially for refugees and Roma youth. This applies not only to therapy, but also to general psychosocial

counselling. Interviews consistently emphasized the urgent need for free, culturally competent services in multiple languages as a key step toward building trust and accessibility.

- Last but not least, the provision of long-term financial resources is a recurring demand on social policy. Only by securing these can effective social work, anti-discrimination work and psychological support be guaranteed.

The public debate in Germany following violent attacks, presumably by mentally ill people from refugee or marginalised groups, often focuses on debates about asylum and border closures - and thus misses the real problem. There is no questioning of why these - mostly young people - came to this decision to commit these undoubtedly horrific acts, and why the advantages of a German society could not pick them up and dissuade them.

In an article in the taz newspaper, Fründt (2025) describes how the experience of flight has a long-term impact on mental health. Studies show that around 30 percent of refugees suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Nevertheless, only 3.1 percent of those affected received psychosocial treatment in 2022. One of the reasons for this is that, according to the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act, mental illnesses can only be treated to a limited extent in the first three years - the decision lies with the respective social welfare office. General standard care is poorly organised for this target group in Germany.

Yet it has been proven: Early psychosocial support prevents serious illnesses and promotes integration. Traumatized people who receive counselling and therapy in good time are less likely to develop destructive coping mechanisms, which has a direct impact on education, employment and social participation. These mechanisms are often the result of prolonged, untreated trauma in a hostile environment, and could be prevented if the system prioritized early intervention over bureaucratic barriers.

In order to prevent violence in the long term, it is not tougher asylum laws that are needed, but functioning psychosocial care, including social and legal counselling as well as qualified interpreters, so that someone notices when support is needed.

The nationwide working group of psychosocial centres for refugees and torture victims (BafF) shows in its Psychosocial Care Report 2023 (BafF 2023) that 87 percent of refugees in Germany have experienced traumatic events and around 30 percent suffer from trauma-related disorders. The other risk factors for mental illness that are also described in this report are also mentioned there (lack of social support, precarious housing conditions, loss of resources, massive insecurity). (PRO ASYL, 2023)

The importance of rapid psychosocial counselling and treatment after their arrival in Germany is also emphasised. Prompt support increases the likelihood of avoiding serious illnesses and the development of unfavourable stress management strategies. (BAfF, 2021 and 2025)

Youth Support Programs

- Traditional support programs often focus on deficits, trauma, or protection. However, this research suggests that youth programs must also emphasize belonging, self-expression, and empowerment. Programs that affirm identity and build community may offer more sustainable improvements in wellbeing.
- The expressed desire for peer mentoring, role models from similar backgrounds, and culturally grounded services implies that youth services should prioritize representation and lived experience in staffing and leadership.
- The qualitative findings underscore the critical need for safe spaces — such as youth centers, peer-led groups, or community hubs — where young people can express themselves without fear of judgment, discrimination, or surveillance. These environments were described by participants as essential to healing, social connection, and personal development.
- The clear link between resilience and informal support networks (e.g., families, faith groups, Roma self-organizations) suggests that youth programs should be embedded in existing community structures, not detached from them.

Educational Initiatives

- Schools play a central role in either reinforcing or disrupting cycles of exclusion. This study shows that young people often face discrimination or neglect in the classroom, particularly Roma and Muslim students. There is an urgent need to train educators in anti-discrimination, trauma sensitivity, and intercultural competence.
- Participants consistently emphasized the importance of early, culturally responsive education — both in terms of curriculum (e.g., teaching Roma history, refugee stories) and support (e.g., language help, mental health resources).
- Education systems should be reframed not only as academic institutions, but as key inclusion environments. Programs that encourage student voice, intercultural exchange, and emotional literacy can contribute directly to psychological resilience.

Mixed-Methods Convergence

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data in this study offers a holistic understanding of the experiences and needs of marginalized youth. Quantitative findings revealed that while discrimination significantly correlates with distress, its predictive power diminishes when social

inclusion is accounted for — suggesting that inclusion is a more powerful protective factor for mental health. This finding is reinforced by the qualitative data, in which young people consistently emphasized the importance of belonging, trusting relationships, and feeling part of a community. Support measures that youth valued most were those that fostered emotional connection, cultural recognition, and safe social environments — all of which directly reflect the mechanisms of social inclusion captured in the statistical models. Thus, the two strands of data not only align, but complete each other: the numbers identify key patterns, and the narratives give voice to how inclusion is experienced and why it matters. This convergence strengthens the study's conclusion that fostering inclusion is essential for youth wellbeing and must be central to both policy and practice.

Taken together, these findings support a fundamental shift in how youth wellbeing is approached in Germany. Social inclusion must be treated not as a byproduct of successful integration, but as its engine. It must be intentionally cultivated across education, health, housing, and social policy — and backed by structural investment, political will, and community participation. Resilience is real, but it cannot substitute for rights, recognition, and rooted belonging.

4.2. Limitations

This study is not without limitations. The sample size, while methodologically appropriate, remains limited. Selection bias is possible, as individuals most affected or engaged may have been more likely to participate. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the research prevents causal inferences.

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between mental health, perceived discrimination, and social inclusion, certain other limitations must be acknowledged. The assessment focused on specific variables and self-reported measures, which may not fully capture the complexity of these issues. Several important factors, such as socioeconomic status, personality traits, pre-existing mental health conditions, and broader structural or institutional influences, were not included and were beyond the scope of this research.

Nonetheless, the consistency across both qualitative and quantitative data, and alignment with prior research, support the validity of the conclusions. The findings offer a clear direction: fostering inclusion, supporting resilience, and reforming structural barriers are essential for improving the wellbeing of marginalized youth in Germany.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Main findings and their significance

This study offers a comprehensive picture of the mental health and social integration of marginalized youth in Germany — with a particular focus on Roma and Sinti, refugee, and migrant backgrounds. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research highlights how overlapping stressors such as structural antigypsyism and racism, insecure legal status, housing instability, discrimination, and limited access to tailored support services can significantly impact wellbeing. The findings confirm that Germany continues to face deeply rooted antigypsyism that affects both Roma and Sinti, alongside the exclusion of recently arrived refugees and migrants.

One of the most important findings is that social inclusion — the experience of being valued, connected, and able to participate — appears to be a more powerful predictor of mental health than the absence of discrimination alone. While experiences of antigypsyism and racism remain harmful and unacceptable, the data suggest that it is the lack of belonging and limited opportunity for meaningful participation that most strongly predict poor mental health outcomes. Quantitative data show that youth who feel socially included report higher life satisfaction and lower distress. This is echoed in the qualitative interviews, where young people consistently described the importance of trust, identity, and safe, supportive spaces for navigating adversity. Inclusion therefore appears not as a supplementary goal, but as a core protective factor and a condition of justice.

This insight is particularly relevant for ongoing policy discussions in Germany around *Teilhabe* (participation) and *Integration*. While these terms are well established in political discourse, their practical implementation often fails to address the realities of those most affected by **structural antigypsyism** and institutional exclusion. The findings call for a move beyond symbolic inclusion toward concrete policies that build trust, safety, and reciprocity — particularly for Roma and Sinti youth who have long experienced systemic marginalization, as full citizens of this country.

The study also exposes a persistent disconnect between educational achievement and labour market participation. Many participants have completed schooling or vocational training yet face enduring barriers to employment. Structural discrimination, lack of credential recognition, and limited access to networks contribute to this gap, creating disillusionment among youth who have otherwise demonstrated motivation and resilience.

Widespread unmet mental health needs further compound these challenges. Demand for support is high, but access is often restricted by bureaucratic barriers, cultural and linguistic gaps, and a

justified mistrust of institutions that have historically excluded or misrepresented marginalized communities. Youth workers and community mediators play a vital role in bridging these divides, yet they remain underfunded and overstretched.

At the same time, the research documents remarkable resilience — young people draw strength from family, peers, cultural identity, and community solidarity. Yet, as this study underscores, resilience should not be mistaken for protection from injustice. The fact that Roma and refugee youth continue to survive and hope within exclusionary systems is evidence of their strength — but it is also an indictment of societal structures that force them to do so. Sustainable change requires not only individual empowerment but also the transformation of institutions to confront and dismantle antigypsyism, racism, and systemic inequality.

Importantly, these insights come at a time when public debate in Germany is grappling with questions of national identity, diversity, and social cohesion parts of public discourse, marginalized groups — especially refugees and Roma — are still portrayed as threats or burdens rather than as equal members of society. Such narratives sustain antigypsyism and undermine the very foundations of inclusion and wellbeing. If inclusion is to serve as protective infrastructure, it must extend beyond access to services and toward a political culture that acknowledges historical injustices, confronts structural racism, and affirms the belonging and value of all youth.

In summary, this research calls for a reframing: **inclusion is not only a social policy goal — it is mental health infrastructure and a measure of democratic maturity.** Fostering inclusion

means investing in accessible, culturally competent services, strengthening educational and vocational pathways, and creating spaces where all young people — particularly those affected by antigypsyism, racism and displacement — feel seen, heard, and supported.

The following recommendations translate these insights into practical steps for policymakers, educators, and youth service providers.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are offered to practitioners, policymakers, and community organizations working with disadvantaged youth. These actions aim to improve mental health, social inclusion, and long-term opportunities for Roma, Sinti, refugee, and migrant youth through measures that confront the structural forms of antigypsyism, racism, and exclusion embedded in institutions and public discourse.

For Practitioners (Youth Workers, Educators, Counselors)

- *Create safe and inclusive spaces:* Youth centers, classrooms, and support groups should be designed as safe spaces where young people feel emotionally secure, culturally recognized, and free from judgment. These environments should promote social connection, trust, and empowerment.
- *Strengthen intercultural and trauma-informed training:* Practitioners must be equipped to understand and respond to the effects of trauma, internalized discrimination, and intersecting exclusions. Training should include dedicated modules on **antigypsyism**, racism, intersectionality, and the specific psychological and social realities of Roma, Sinti, and refugee youth. This includes recognizing institutional mistrust as a consequence of historical and ongoing injustice.
- *Integrate low-threshold and culturally sensitive psychosocial support:* Provide mobile or community-based counseling, online platforms, and multilingual services. Employ psychologists and social workers from similar cultural backgrounds or with extensive sensitivity training. Incorporate group therapy, art, music, and peer dialogue formats to make support accessible and stigma-free.
- *Use peer mentoring and representation:* Involve mentors and staff with lived experience of marginalization. **Roma youth leadership and representation** should be visible within service teams and advisory structures. Peer-led support groups and role models can help young people process discrimination, rebuild confidence, and envision future pathways.
- *Collaborate with mental health professionals:* Foster close cooperation between youth workers, therapists, and psychosocial counselors to address complex psychological needs. Encourage supervision, team reflection, and self-care for practitioners to prevent burnout.

For Policymakers

- *Explicitly name and combat antigypsyism:* Policies must move beyond general anti-discrimination language and acknowledge antigypsyism as a distinct, structural form of racism. Integrate its recognition into federal, state, and local strategies on inclusion, education, housing, and public health. Establish monitoring bodies and accountability mechanisms in consultation with Roma and Sinti organizations.
- *Make social inclusion a cornerstone of youth policy:* Prioritize strategies that foster belonging, civic participation, and visibility for marginalized youth. Recognize inclusion not only as a social good but as a key factor in psychological wellbeing.
- *Ensure long-term funding for inclusive youth programs:* Move away from fragmented, short-term project cycles. Secure sustainable funding for Roma-led, community-led initiatives, youth centers, and peer-based programs that have demonstrated trust and impact.

- *Reform access to mental health care:* Remove restrictions that limit refugees' access to psychosocial care in their first years in Germany, and expand culturally competent services for Roma and Sinti youth. Support trauma-informed care models that integrate cultural identity and community resilience.
- *Implement and enforce anti-discrimination and anti-racism measures:* Introduce mandatory anti-racism and intercultural competence training in schools, public services, and employment agencies. Strengthen legal protections against ethnic discrimination and ensure meaningful consequences for violations.
- *Facilitate labor market integration and recognition of qualifications:* Simplify the recognition of foreign credentials and support access through mentoring, language courses, and employer diversity incentives. Develop targeted pathways for Roma and Sinti youth, recognizing the compounded effects of discrimination in both education and employment.
- *Support citizenship pathways and legal clarity:* Accelerate access to legal residence and citizenship to reduce uncertainty and support long-term belonging. For Roma and Sinti youth, ensure recognition as citizens with equal rights and eliminate discriminatory practices in registration or service access.

For Community Organizations and NGOs

- *Support Roma-led and self-organized initiatives:* Fund and empower self-organized Roma, Sinti, refugee, and migrant youth programs. Such initiatives build trust, reflect lived realities, and provide culturally grounded spaces of empowerment.
- *Promote empowerment and identity work:* Offer coaching, workshops, and group sessions that focus on building self-confidence, processing antigypsyism and racism, and strengthening positive identity. Use creative expression to support emotional healing and identity strength.
- *Strengthen social networks and reduce isolation:* Establish youth groups, peer mentoring systems, and intercultural exchange projects that foster connection across communities. Organize joint activities (sports, cultural events, teamwork programs) to reduce alienation and build cohesion.
- *Create inclusive spaces for young women and intersectional groups:* Develop programs for women, girls, LGBTQI+ and others who face multiple layers of exclusion. Ensure that contact points are accessible, nonjudgmental, and culturally competent.
- *Document and advocate for systemic change:* Use community data, testimonies, and youth voices to advocate for reforms in education, healthcare, and social services.
- Collaborate with schools, local authorities, and civil society alliances to challenge antigypsyism and institutional racism at all levels.

For Researchers and Institutions

- *Improve data collection while respecting rights:* Support the ethical collection of anonymized data on ethnicity, mental health, and social outcomes to better understand disparities. Engage Roma and Sinti representatives in defining indicators, interpreting data, and ensuring results are not used to stigmatize.
- *Invest in long-term, participatory research:* Encourage longitudinal and participatory studies that include young people as **co-researchers**. Research on Roma and Sinti must follow principles of reciprocity, transparency, and non-extractiveness.
- *Evaluate impact of youth programs:* Fund independent evaluations of community and school-based interventions to identify what works, for whom, and in which contexts. Promote learning and adaptation rather than punishment or performance pressure.

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8. Appendices

1. Logistic Regression Analysis

Location	Inclusion_Final	.060	.011	30.937	1	.000	.039	.081
	Discrimination_Final	-.005	.008	.480	1	.488	-.021	.010
	[Age=18]	-1.221	.868	1.978	1	.160	-2.923	.481
	[Age=19]	-.514	.833	.382	1	.537	-2.147	1.118
	[Age=20]	.456	.923	.244	1	.621	-1.352	2.264
	[Age=21]	.068	.972	.005	1	.944	-1.837	1.973
	[Age=22]	-2.197	1.511	2.113	1	.146	-5.159	.765
	[Age=23]	-.762	.950	.644	1	.422	-2.623	1.099
	[Age=24]	.890	1.211	.541	1	.462	-1.482	3.263
	[Age=25]	.515	.924	.311	1	.577	-1.295	2.325
	[Age=26]	.194	1.086	.032	1	.858	-1.935	2.323
	[Age=27]	.505	.964	.274	1	.601	-1.385	2.394
	[Age=28]	.362	1.539	.055	1	.814	-2.655	3.379
	[Age=29]	.934	1.183	.623	1	.430	-1.384	3.252
	[Age=30]	2.003	1.253	2.555	1	.110	-.453	4.460
	[Age=31]	-.113	1.943	.003	1	.954	-3.921	3.695
	[Age=32]	-.875	1.095	.638	1	.424	-3.022	1.272
	[Age=33]	-1.220	1.277	.913	1	.339	-3.723	1.282
	[Age=34]	-1.807	1.449	1.554	1	.212	-4.647	1.034
	[Age=35]	0 ^a	.	.	0	.	.	.
	[Education=1]	-.082	.990	.007	1	.934	-2.023	1.859
	[Education=2]	.779	2.238	.121	1	.728	-3.607	5.165
	[Education=3]	-.151	.900	.028	1	.867	-1.915	1.613
	[Education=4]	.076	.549	.019	1	.890	-1.000	1.152
	[Education=5]	-.239	.589	.164	1	.685	-1.393	.916
	[Education=6]	0 ^a	.	.	0	.	.	.
	[EmploymentStatus=1]	-.088	.598	.021	1	.884	-1.260	1.085
	[EmploymentStatus=2]	-.029	.649	.002	1	.964	-1.301	1.242
	[EmploymentStatus=3]	0 ^a	.	.	0	.	.	.

a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

The table above presents the results of a logistic regression model used to examine the influence of various demographic and psychological factors on the likelihood of inclusion. The dependent variable is binary, reflecting inclusion status, and the predictors include **Location, Perceived Discrimination, Age, Education Level, and Employment Status**.

- Location significantly predicts inclusion ($B = 0.060, p < .001$), with higher location scores increasing the odds of inclusion.
- Perceived Discrimination shows no significant effect ($B = -0.005, p = .488$), meaning that other factors need to be taken under consideration.
- None of the Age, Education, or Employment Status categories show statistically significant effects individually ($p > .05$).
- Reference Categories of Age 35, Education Level 6, and Employment Status 3 serve as baselines for comparison.