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WHEN SCARS (!) BECOME ART

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

ROMANIA

ASSOCIATION NEVO PARUDIMOS

2025





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Well-being and discrimination of marginalized young people in Romania

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0. Executive Summary

The project „When Scars (!) Become Art” aims to analyze the relationship between social inclusion and mental wellbeing in young Roma, migrants and refugees at European level and in 6 European countries: Germany, Greece, The Republic of North Macedonia, Turkey, Serbia and Romania.

Our motivation with this project is to improve the knowledge on the effects of discrimination and exclusion on the mental health of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds: Roma, migrants and refugees.

Our goal is to enhance understanding of how discrimination and exclusion impact the mental health of disadvantaged youth, specifically Roma, migrants, and refugees. Addressing these challenges necessitates comprehensive and inclusive policies that ensure equal access to resources, opportunities, and support systems. By addressing the root causes of their marginalization, we aim to foster more equitable and cohesive societies where all young people can thrive.

Key Implications:

- **Mental Health Costs of Discrimination:** Perceived discrimination significantly undermines psychological well-being, particularly when based on sexual orientation, age, gender, and religion.
- **Importance of Body Image and Self-Esteem:** Positive self-perception of physical appearance is a strong predictor of mental health, highlighting the need for interventions that promote body positivity and self-worth.
- **Education as a Protective Factor:** Education level and access to learning opportunities are positively linked to mental health, emphasizing the importance of equitable and comprehensive education policies.
- **Social Inclusion and Respect are Crucial:** Social respect and a sense of belonging are significant predictors of mental well-being, underscoring the need for community-based initiatives that foster social cohesion and intercultural understanding.
- **Need for Mental Health Monitoring:** Integrating mental health assessments into social inclusion programs is essential to ensure holistic support and promote psychological resilience.

Recommendations for Stakeholders and Policymakers:

- **Implement Inclusive Practices:** Move beyond legal protections to actively implement inclusive practices in educational, work, and healthcare settings to address discrimination at its source.
- **Invest in Psychosocial Interventions:** Prioritize and fund psychosocial interventions that improve body image, self-esteem, and self-worth, particularly for young people and disadvantaged groups. Integrate these into universal mental health promotion programs.



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- **Promote Equitable Education:** Develop and support comprehensive education policies that ensure equal access to formal and informal schooling, vocational training, and language support for all individuals.
- **Support Community-Based Initiatives:** Continue funding local community work, peer support groups, and intercultural activities that foster bonding, social cohesion, and a sense of belonging.
- **Train Public Service Workers:** Incorporate training on respectful, dignity-based work with diverse groups into the professional development of public service workers.
- **Monitor Mental Health in Programs:** Integrate mental health assessments, such as the Mental Health Inventory, into the evaluation of social inclusion programs to ensure that services address both structural needs and psychological well-being.



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1. Introduction

Background and context

The following sections of the research provide a structured summary of the study's key findings, offering data that may inform future policy and intervention efforts targeting migrant populations and other vulnerable groups. By presenting evidence related to basic needs, perceived inclusion, and discrimination, this report aims to support decision-makers, practitioners, and researchers in designing more inclusive and responsive social programs. These findings are particularly valuable for understanding the lived experiences of marginalized communities and for promoting policies that enhance social cohesion, equity, and community well-being.

Significance of the study

Research on the well-being and discrimination experienced by marginalized young people in Romania holds significant importance, particularly for understanding the unique challenges faced by disadvantaged youngsters, especially those of Roma ethnicity. Romania, with one of the largest Roma populations in Europe, grapples with persistent issues of social exclusion, poverty, and discrimination that disproportionately affect Roma youth. Investigating their well-being within this specific context is crucial for several reasons.

Firstly, such research can illuminate the complex interplay between systemic discrimination and individual well-being. By examining the lived experiences of marginalized youth, it can reveal how discriminatory practices in education, healthcare, employment, and housing contribute to poorer mental and physical health outcomes, lower educational attainment, and limited economic opportunities. This understanding is vital for developing targeted interventions that address the root causes of these disparities.

Secondly, our focus on Roma youth is particularly important due to the historical and ongoing discrimination they face. Roma communities in Romania have been subjected to centuries of marginalization, resulting in deeply entrenched stereotypes, prejudice, and social exclusion. Research can help to unpack the specific forms of discrimination experienced by Roma youth, such as ethnic profiling, denial of services, and hate speech, and to assess their



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impact on their self-esteem, identity, and sense of belonging. This nuanced understanding is essential for designing culturally sensitive interventions that promote Roma youth's resilience and empowerment.

More than that, research on well-being can contribute to a more holistic understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized youth. While poverty and lack of access to resources are undoubtedly important factors, they do not fully explain the disparities in outcomes observed between Roma and non-Roma youth. By examining psychological and social factors, such as social support, coping mechanisms, and cultural identity, research can provide a more complete picture of the factors that contribute to or buffer against the negative effects of discrimination.

This research can inform the development of evidence-based policies and programs that promote social inclusion and well-being for marginalized youth. By identifying the specific needs and challenges faced by Roma youth, research can guide the allocation of resources and the design of interventions that are tailored to their unique circumstances. This includes initiatives that promote access to quality education, healthcare, and employment, as well as programs that address discrimination, promote cultural understanding, and empower Roma youth to become active participants in society.

Finally, research on well-being can contribute to broader efforts to combat racism and promote social justice in Romania. By raising awareness of the challenges faced by marginalized youth, research can help to challenge negative stereotypes, promote empathy, and foster a more inclusive and equitable society for all. This is particularly important in the context of rising nationalism and xenophobia in Europe, which threaten to further marginalize Roma communities and other vulnerable groups.

2. Methodology

2.1. Purpose and design

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of discrimination on the wellbeing of disadvantaged youth.

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)

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- 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:

The participants were recruited based on voluntary sampling, a non-probabilistic approach of snow-ball sampling due to the sensitive characteristic of the group (young people from disadvantaged group and refugees/asylum seekers) and to the difficulty of reaching to them (especially the ones that are refugees and asylum seekers). The total sample consisted of **101 persons: 70 Roma, 15 immigrants and 16 asylum seekers** (based on their self declared status). The average age of the participants was 24,8 years old (18+-35). Due to the sampling method, the results may not be generalized for the entire Roma and immigrants/asylum seekers residents in Romania, but they provide a useful insight of their situation and a deep understanding of their perceived well being in relation with perceived discrimination.

The details on the sample of the quantitative research (young people from disadvantaged groups), are presented below.

The interviews of the qualitative component of our methodology consisted in 2 sections of the participants:

- One category addressed the experts: people that are having a large experience in working with youth, including Roma youth and human rights – on voluntary bases we applied the interview with **10 experts**, with more than 10 years experience in the field, 8 of them working in non-governmental sector, one in public university, one in a private organisation (training center for adults' education);
- One category addressed the youth: **10 participants** were selected from our area, in a snowball sample and on convenience criteria. They were youth workers and immigrants confined with the general criteria of age (<35 years old).

2.3. Tools and measures

The interviews were conducted during december 2024 – february 2025 in person or online. The average period of the interview was 40 minutes, and audio recorded. The instrument consisted in a semi-structured line of questions, with a focus on a non-directive approach, based on the research methodology settled within the project.

The key themes of the interview included:

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



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The interview addressed the 4 themes in an interview grid of 10 items for both categories of sample, focusing on the respondents personal experience and solutions for future social interventions and improvement of the services that might be offered for the disadvantaged groups.

The results were analysed using the thematic analysis method, based on our research objectives and general directions.

The online 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 beneficiaries' 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.



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The interviews data collected was analyzed based on a thematic analysis model, in a comparative manner between the 2 types of groups: experts and youth.

The questionnaires responses were analyzed by SPSS program.

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative component

1. Descriptive Data on Sociodemographic Characteristics

Data were collected using an online questionnaire created in Google Forms. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, and the link to the form was distributed via social media platforms and community networks. Before completing the survey, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent electronically. Participation was voluntary, and responses were anonymous. The survey took approximately 30–35 minutes to complete and included both demographic questions and items assessing the participants' experiences related to their social and economic conditions.

A total of 101 participants were included in the study. Of these, 51.5% identified as female and 48.5% as male. Regarding education level, the most common response was university degree (39.6%), followed by high school (33.7%), master's degree (17.8%), and PhD (3.0%). A small proportion had completed only primary school (3.0%) or lower secondary education (3.0%).

In terms of occupational status, 42.6% were employed, 26.7% were in training (students, children, or undergoing education), 16.8% were unemployed but seeking work, and 13.9% were unemployed and not actively seeking employment.

A majority of the participants (72.3%) reported being official citizens of the country in which they currently reside, while 27.7% were not. With regard to group affiliation, 69.3% identified as Roma, 14.9% as immigrants, and 15.8% as refugees or asylum seekers.



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In terms of basic needs, the vast majority of respondents had access to food and water (94.1%), while 5.9% reported lacking these resources. Concerning heated shelter, 64.4% had access, while 5.9% reported not having access and 29.7% did not provide a response (system missing). Financial security was reported by 67.3% of participants, while 32.7% indicated they lacked it.

Most participants reported having a sense of belonging to a social group (81.2%) and feeling part of society (81.2%). Additionally, 84.2% felt their cultural and religious needs were met, and 78.2% felt respected in society. 80.2% also felt useful within society.

When asked to compare their monthly income to that of the local population in the host country, 43.6% said it was about the same, 17.8% said it was lower, 16.8% much lower, 17.8% higher, and 4.0% much higher.

Regarding skin tone compared to the host country's general population, 46.5% indicated it was about the same, 30.7% darker, 11.9% much darker, 8.9% lighter, and 2.0% much lighter.

Finally, when asked about their perceived physical appearance in comparison to the general population, 41.6% reported looking about the same, 37.6% as somewhat different, and 20.8% as much different, with differences easily noticeable.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 101)

Variable	N	%
Female	52	51.5
Male	49	48.5
Education Level		
Primary School (Grades 1–4)	3	3.0
Lower Secondary (Grades 5–8)	3	3.0
High School (Grades 9–12)	34	33.7
University	40	39.6
Master's	18	17.8
PhD	3	3.0
Occupational Status		
Employed	43	42.6
Unemployed, seeking work	17	16.8
Unemployed	14	13.9
In training	27	26.7



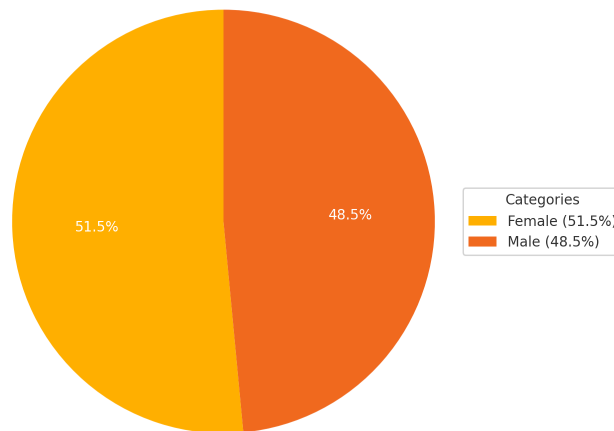
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Official citizen of current country		
Yes	73	72.3
No	28	27.7
Group affiliation		
Roma	70	69.3
Immigrant	15	14.9
Refugee/Asylum seeker	16	15.8
Basic needs: Food & Water		
No	6	5.9
Yes	95	94.1
Basic needs: Heated shelter		
No	6	5.9
Yes	65	64.4
Missing (System)	30	29.7
Basic needs: Financial security		
No	33	32.7
Yes	68	67.3
Need: Belonging to social group		
No	19	18.8
Yes	82	81.2
Need: Feeling part of society		
No	19	18.8
Yes	82	81.2
Need: Culture and religion		
No	16	15.8
Yes	85	84.2
Need: Feeling respected		
No	22	21.8
Yes	79	78.2
Need: Feeling useful in society		
No	20	19.8
Yes	81	80.2
Monthly income vs host country		
Much lower	17	16.8
Lower	18	17.8
About the same	44	43.6
Higher	18	17.8
Much higher	4	4.0
Skin tone vs host country population		
Much darker	12	11.9
Darker	31	30.7
About the same	47	46.5

Lighter	9	8.9
Much lighter	2	2.0
Perceived appearance vs general population		
Much different (easily noticeable)	21	20.8
Somewhat different	38	37.6
About the same	42	41.6

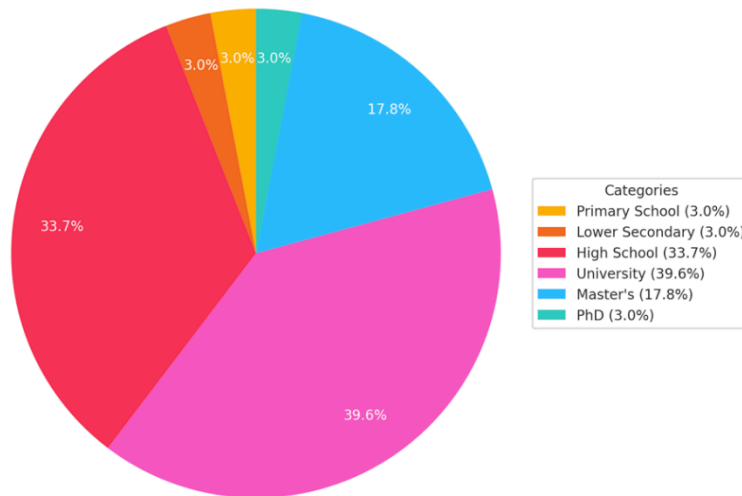
The following figures offer a visual representation of each variable, illustrating the distribution of responses as percentages. These graphical displays serve to complement the descriptive data presented in the preceding table.

Figure 1. Gender distribution (N = 101)



The sample was nearly evenly split by gender, with 51.5% of participants identifying as female and 48.5% as male. This balanced distribution allows for general comparisons across gender within the dataset.

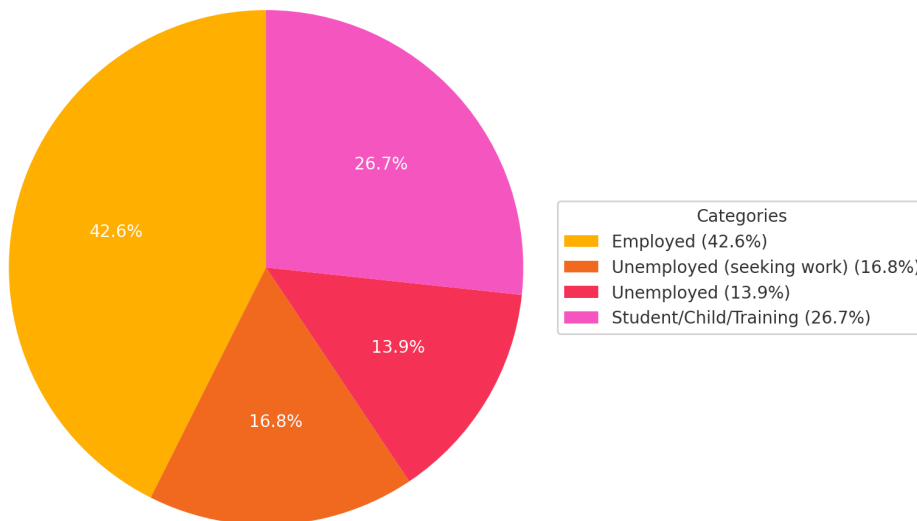
Figure 2. Education level (N=101)



The majority of participants reported having completed higher levels of education, with 39.6% holding a university degree and 17.8% a master's degree. Additionally, 33.7% completed high school, while smaller proportions reported primary school (3.0%), lower secondary education (3.0%), or a PhD (3.0%). These results suggest that a considerable portion of the sample has access to advanced educational opportunities.

Figure 3. Occupational status (N=101)

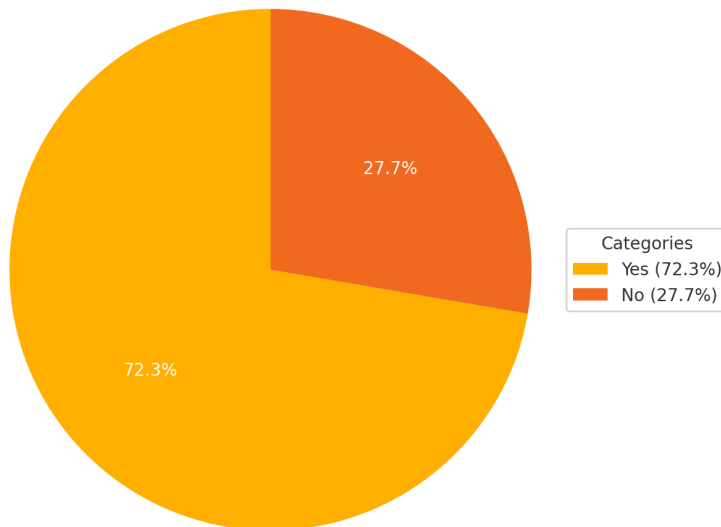
Occupational Status



Among participants, 42.6% reported being employed, while 16.8% were unemployed but actively seeking work, and 13.9% were unemployed and not seeking employment. Additionally, 26.7% were students, children, or in vocational training programs. These data reflect a diverse range of employment situations within the sample, including both labor market participation and educational engagement.

Figure 4. Official citizen (N=101)

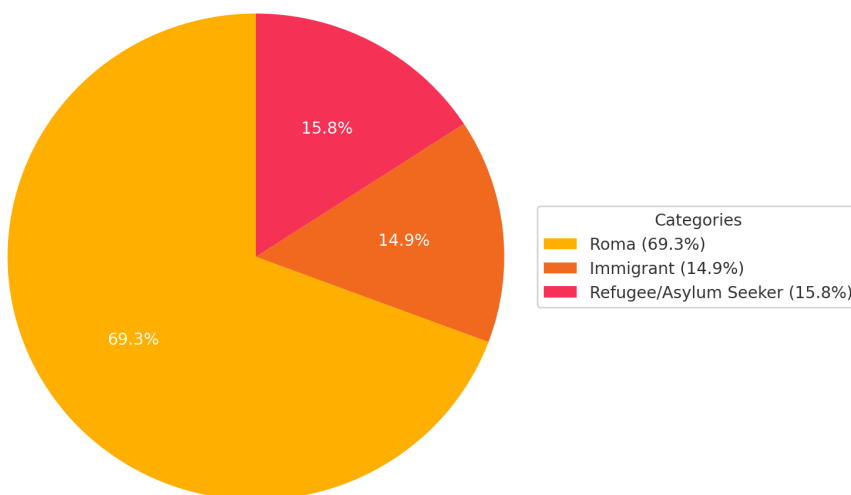
Official Citizen



The majority of participants (72.3%) reported being official citizens of the country in which they currently reside, while 27.7% indicated that they do not hold official citizenship status. These findings may have implications for participants' legal rights, access to services, and perceived integration within the host society.

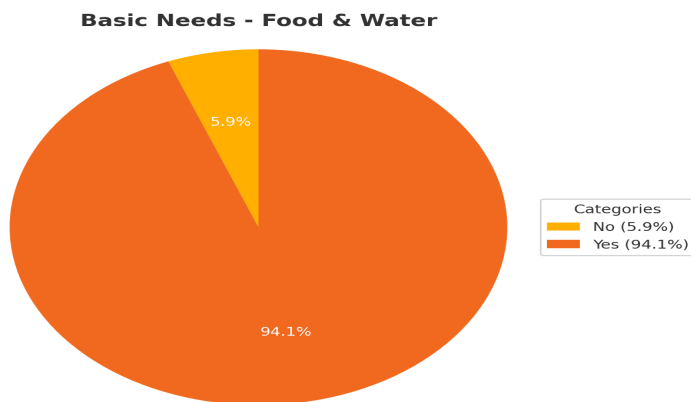
Figure 5. Group Affiliation (N=101)

Group Affiliation



The majority of participants identified as Roma (69.3%), followed by smaller proportions who identified as immigrants (14.9%) or refugees/asylum seekers (15.8%). These distributions highlight the predominant representation of the Roma community within the sample, alongside other groups considered vulnerable or in migration contexts.

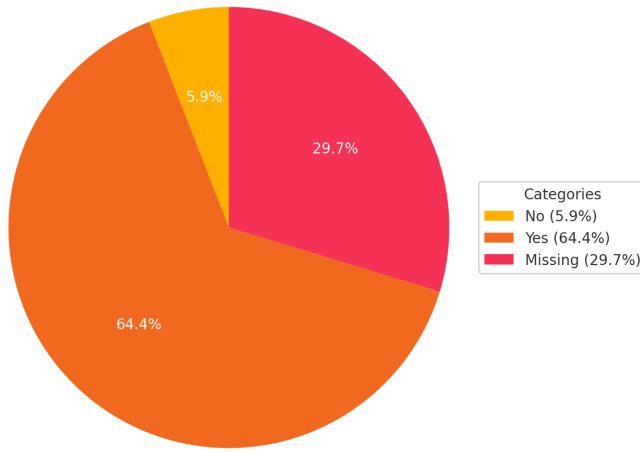
Figure 6. Basic Needs- Food and water (N=101)



A vast majority of participants (94.1%) reported having access to food and water, while only 5.9% indicated that these essential needs were not met. These results suggest that, for most respondents, basic survival needs are adequately covered.

Figure 7. Basic Needs- Heated Shelter (N=101)

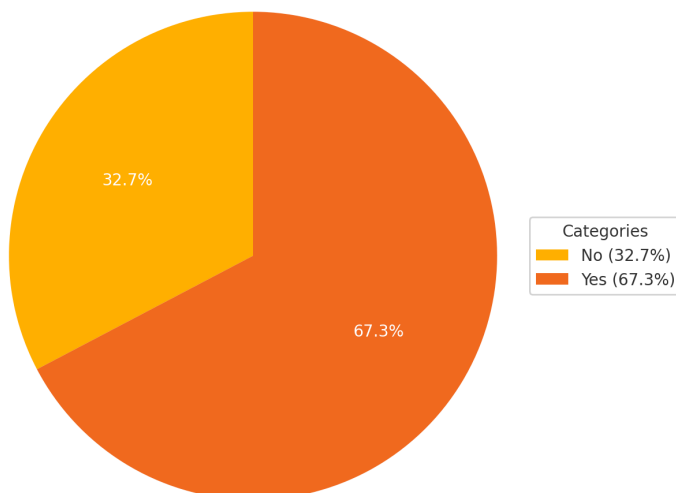
Basic Needs - Heated Shelter



Among participants, 64.4% reported having access to heated shelter, while 5.9% indicated they did not. Notably, 29.7% of responses were missing, which may reflect uncertainty, non-response, or lack of access to information. These findings suggest that although the majority benefit from adequate shelter, a non-negligible portion of the sample may face housing insecurity or ambiguity in reporting.

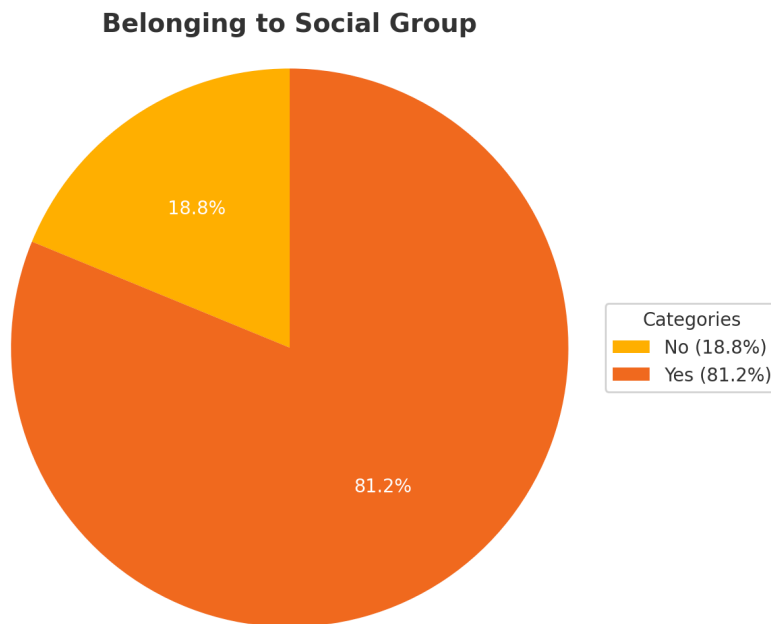
Figure 8. Basic Needs - Financial Security (N=101)

Basic Needs - Financial Security



Approximately two-thirds of participants (67.3%) reported that their need for financial security is currently met, while 32.7% indicated that this basic need remains unmet. These findings highlight disparities in perceived economic stability among respondents.

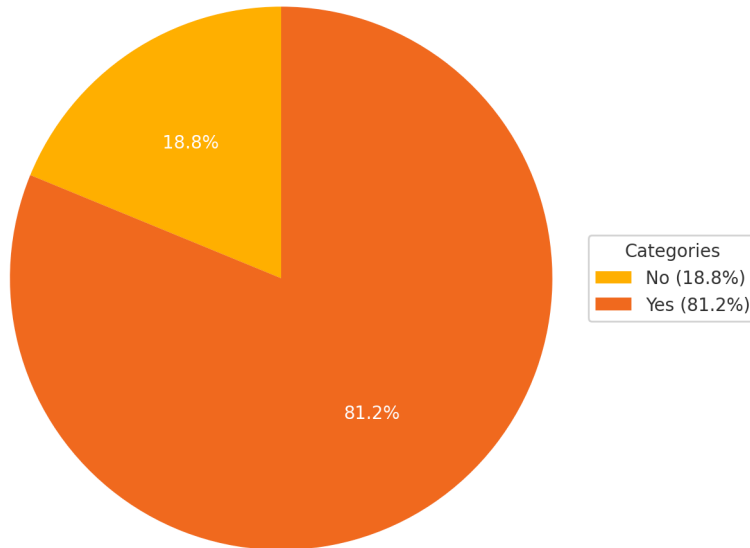
Figure 9. Sense of belonging to a social group (N=101)



A significant majority of participants (81.2%) reported feeling that they belong to a social group, while 18.8% stated they do not experience this sense of belonging. These results reflect generally high levels of perceived social affiliation among respondents.

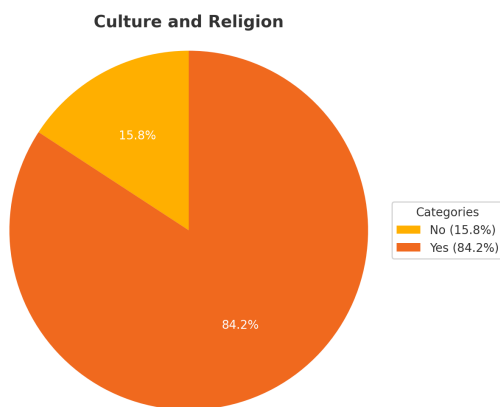
Figure 10. Feeling Part of Society (N=101)

Feeling Part of Society



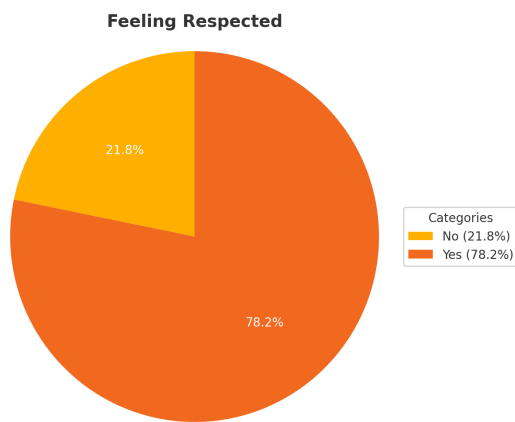
The majority of participants (81.2%) reported feeling that they are part of the society in which they currently live, while 18.8% stated they do not share this sentiment. These findings indicate a generally high sense of social inclusion among respondents.

Figure 11. Distribution of participants who reported that their cultural and religious needs are currently met



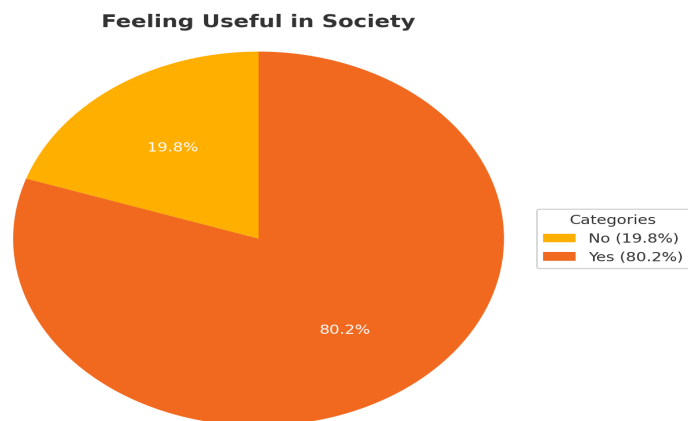
The majority of participants (84.2%) reported that their cultural and religious needs are currently met, while 15.8% indicated they are not.

Figure 12. Feeling respected in society



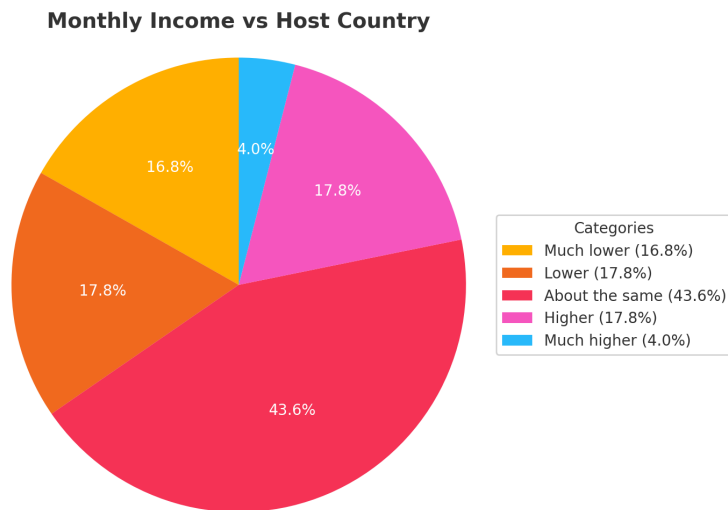
Most participants (78.2%) reported feeling respected within the society they live in, while 21.8% stated that they do not feel respected.

Figure 13. Feeling useful in society



A majority of participants (80.2%) perceived themselves as useful members of society, while 19.8% reported not feeling useful. These findings reflect how individuals view their role and contribution within the social context, complementing perceptions of being respected.

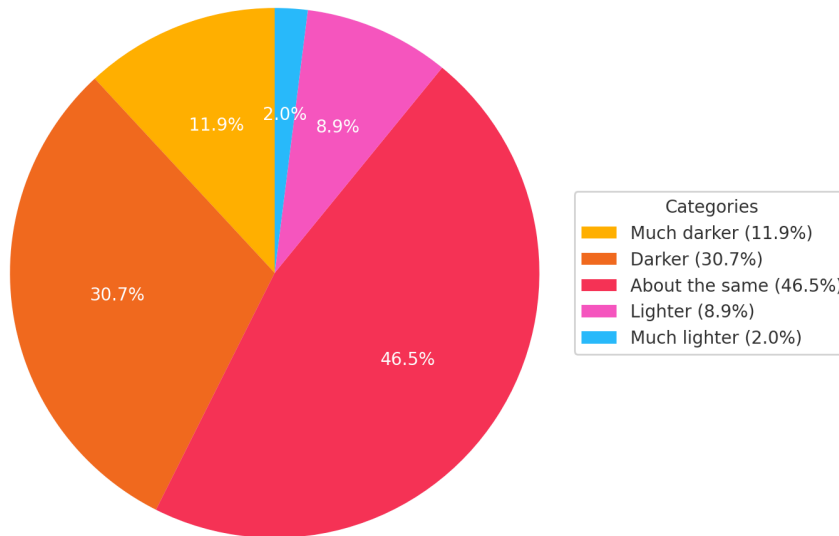
Figure 14. Monthly Income vs Host Country



A plurality of participants (43.6%) perceived their monthly income as comparable to that of the general population in the host country. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion reported earning less, with 17.8% indicating a lower income and 16.8% a much lower income. In contrast, 17.8% perceived their income as higher, while only 4.0% reported having a much higher income.

Figure 15. Skin tone vs host country population

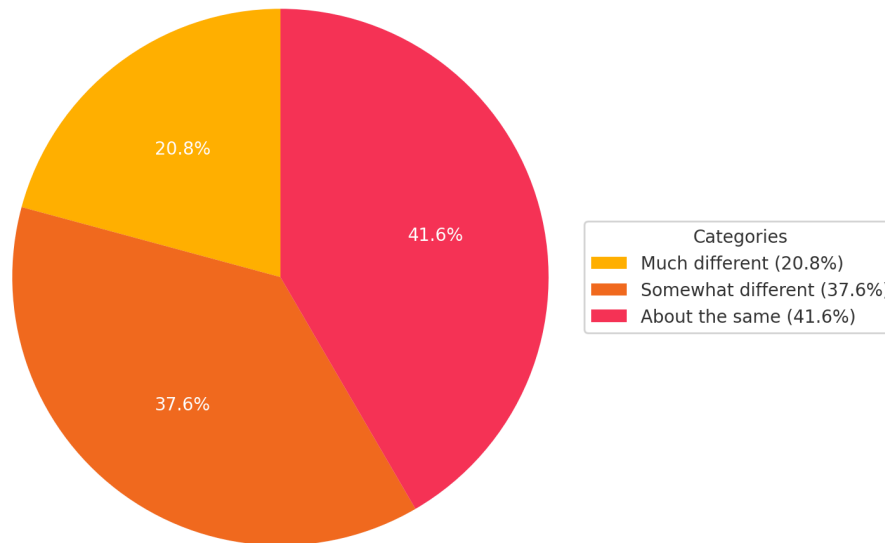
Skin Tone vs Host Country Population



Nearly half of the participants (46.5%) perceived their skin tone to be similar to that of the general population in the host country. However, a considerable proportion viewed their skin tone as darker (30.7%) or much darker (11.9%). In contrast, smaller percentages reported perceiving their skin tone as lighter (8.9%) or much lighter (2.0%). These results reflect participants' subjective perceptions of physical appearance relative to the sociocultural context.

Figure 16. Perceived Appearance vs General Population

Perceived Appearance vs General Population



The largest proportion of participants (41.6%) perceived their physical appearance as similar to that of the general population. In contrast, 37.6% considered themselves somewhat different, while 20.8% reported feeling much different, with visible distinctions. These findings highlight the diversity of perceived physical appearance in relation to the host society.

2. Descriptive data on perceived discrimination

The following section presents participants' self-reported experiences of perceived discrimination across various domains, including ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, and other personal characteristics.

Table 2. Perceived Discrimination and Reported Ethnic Background of Participants (N = 101)

Variable	N	%
Perceived Ethnic Discrimination		
Rarely or never	35	34.7
Moderate (sometimes)	48	47.5
Very often	18	17.8

Gender-based Discrimination		
Rarely or never	61	60.4
Moderate (sometimes)	34	33.7
Very often	6	5.9
Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation		
Rarely or never	83	82.2
Moderate (sometimes)	14	13.9
Very often	4	4.0
Religious Discrimination		
Rarely or never	78	77.2
Moderate (sometimes)	18	17.8
Very often	5	5.0
Age-based Discrimination		
Rarely or never	68	67.3
Moderate (sometimes)	24	23.8
Very often	9	8.9
Other Types of Discrimination		
Rarely or never	63	62.4
Moderate (sometimes)	23	22.8
Very often	11	10.9
Missing (System)	4	4.0
Ethnicity		
Roma	60	59.4
Unspecified	17	16.8
Romanian	1	1.0
Middle Eastern	3	3.0
Arab	3	3.0
Egyptian	3	3.0
North African	6	5.9
Ukrainian	6	5.9
European, Slavic	1	1.0
Muslim	1	1.0

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of respondents identified as Roma (59.4%), followed by participants who did not specify their ethnic background (16.8%). Other reported ethnic identities included Middle Eastern (3.0%), Arab (3.0%), Egyptian (3.0%), North African (5.9%), and Ukrainian (5.9%). Additionally, a small number of participants identified as Romanian



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(1.0%), European Slavic (1.0%), or Muslim (1.0%). This distribution highlights the diversity within the sample and the significant representation of Roma individuals.

Participants also reported varying levels of perceived discrimination across different domains. Regarding ethnic discrimination, 47.5% experienced it moderately (sometimes), 17.8% reported experiencing it very often, while 34.7% reported rarely or never encountering it.

In terms of gender-based discrimination, 60.4% of respondents reported rare or no experiences, while 33.7% reported moderate and 5.9% very frequent experiences.

Concerning discrimination based on sexual orientation, the vast majority (82.2%) reported rarely or never experiencing such discrimination. Moderate experiences were reported by 13.9%, and only 4.0% reported experiencing it very often.

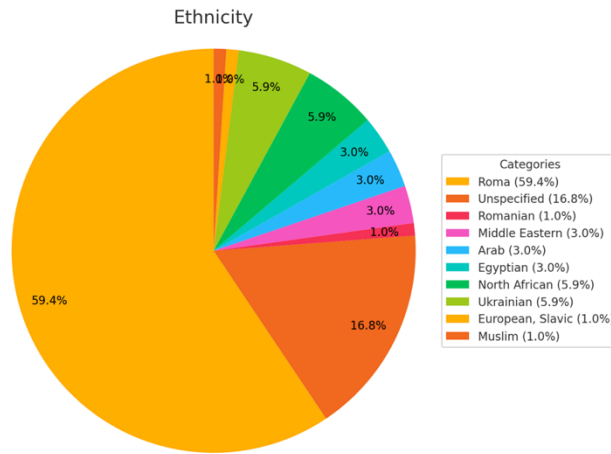
For religious discrimination, 77.2% of participants reported little to no experience, 17.8% reported moderate experiences, and 5.0% experienced it very often.

With regard to age-based discrimination, 67.3% reported rare or no experience, 23.8% reported moderate levels, and 8.9% experienced it very often.

Lastly, for other forms of discrimination, 62.4% of participants reported rarely or never experiencing them, 22.8% reported moderate levels, and 10.9% reported experiencing them very often. A small portion of responses (4.0%) was system missing.

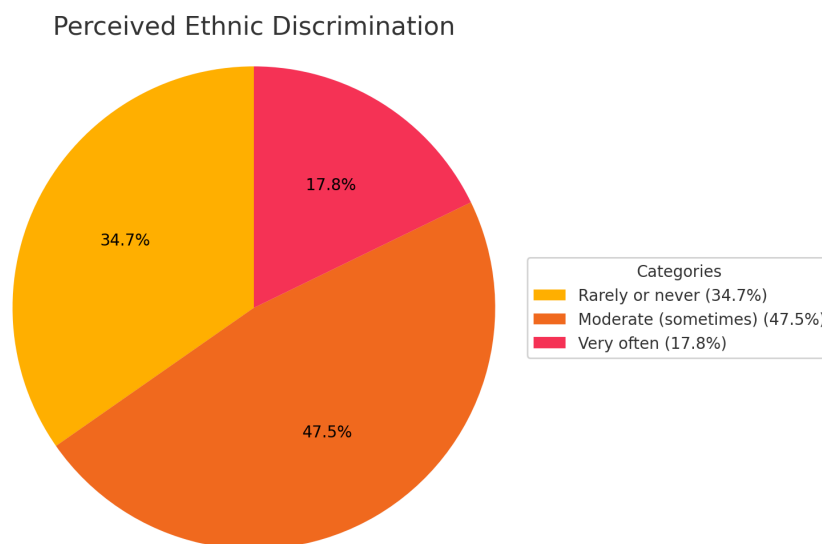
These findings provide a nuanced understanding of how different forms of discrimination are experienced across diverse ethnic backgrounds and may serve to inform more equitable and culturally sensitive policy responses.

Figure 17. Ethnicity



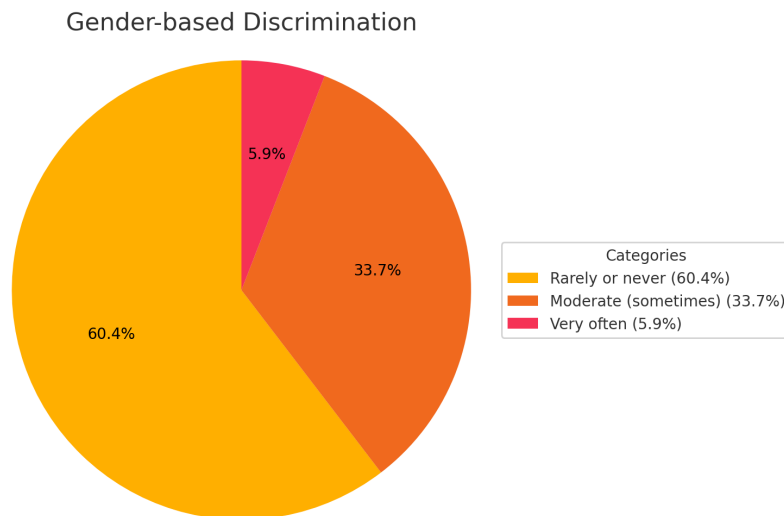
The majority of participants identified as Roma (59.4%), followed by a significant portion who did not specify their ethnicity (16.8%). Smaller percentages identified as North African (5.9%), Ukrainian (5.9%), Middle Eastern (3.0%), Arab (3.0%), or Egyptian (3.0%). Very few participants reported being Romanian (1.0%), European, Slavic (1.0%), or Muslim (1.0%). This distribution reflects both the ethnic diversity and the strong representation of Roma individuals within the sample.

Figure 18. Perceived ethnic discrimination



Nearly half of the participants (47.5%) reported experiencing ethnic discrimination at a moderate level (sometimes), while 17.8% indicated they experienced it very often. In contrast, 34.7% of respondents stated that they rarely or never experienced ethnic discrimination.

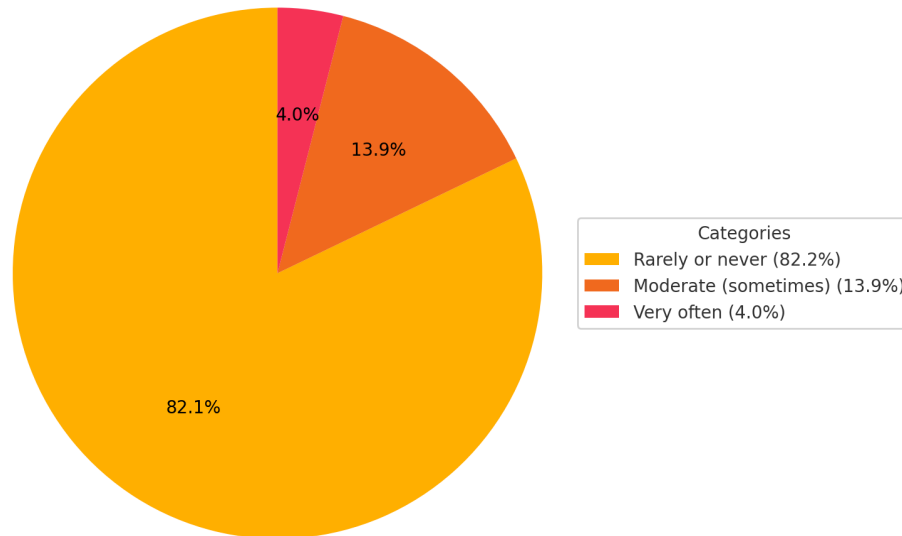
Figure 19. Gender-based discrimination



The majority of participants (60.4%) reported rarely or never experiencing discrimination based on gender. Approximately one-third (33.7%) indicated moderate experiences, while 5.9% reported experiencing gender-based discrimination very often. These results suggest that while most respondents feel minimally impacted by gender discrimination, a notable minority still encounter it regularly.

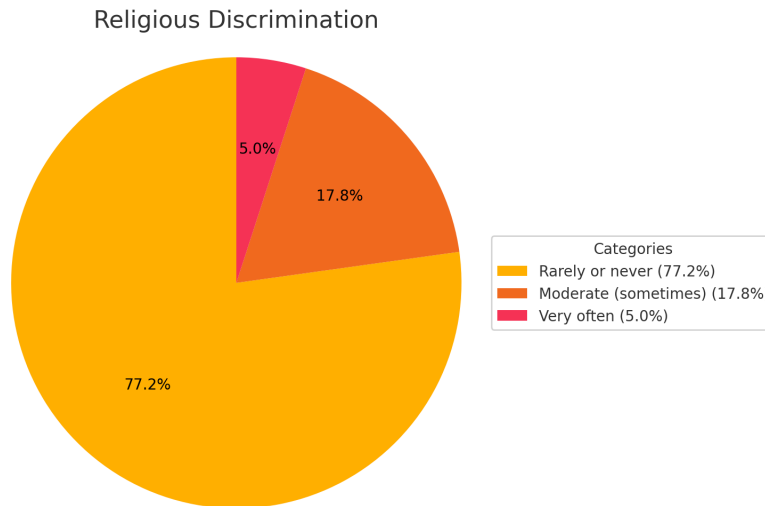
Figure 20. Discrimination based by sexual orientation

Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation



Results indicate that the vast majority of participants (82.1%) reported experiencing this type of discrimination "rarely or never," suggesting a relatively low perceived prevalence. However, a smaller yet notable percentage (13.9%) indicated encountering discrimination "moderate (sometimes)," highlighting occasional experiences among a significant minority. Additionally, 4.0% of participants reported experiencing discrimination based on sexual orientation "very often," pointing towards the presence of frequent and potentially impactful discriminatory experiences for this subgroup.

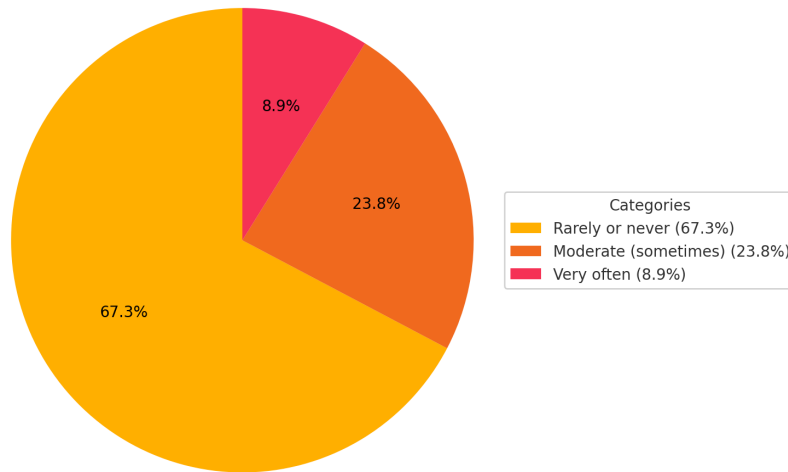
Figure 21. Religious discrimination



The majority (77.2%) reported experiencing religious discrimination "rarely or never," suggesting that most participants do not regularly perceive discrimination related to their religious beliefs. However, a meaningful portion (17.8%) indicated experiencing this form of discrimination "moderate (sometimes)," signifying that occasional experiences do occur and might impact these individuals' sense of inclusion. Furthermore, 5.0% of participants reported experiencing religious discrimination "very often," highlighting that a minority is consistently confronted with discriminatory behaviors, potentially leading to increased stress or social isolation.

Figure 22. Age-based discrimination

Age-based Discrimination



The majority of respondents (67.3%) indicated experiencing age discrimination "rarely or never," suggesting that ageism may not be a prominent concern for most participants. Nonetheless, a considerable percentage of participants (23.8%) reported experiencing age-based discrimination "moderate (sometimes)," indicating periodic encounters with discriminatory attitudes or behaviors related to age. Additionally, nearly one-tenth of participants (8.9%) reported experiencing age-based discrimination "very often," emphasizing that a significant minority regularly confronts age-related biases.

Figure 23. Other type of discrimination

Other Types of Discrimination

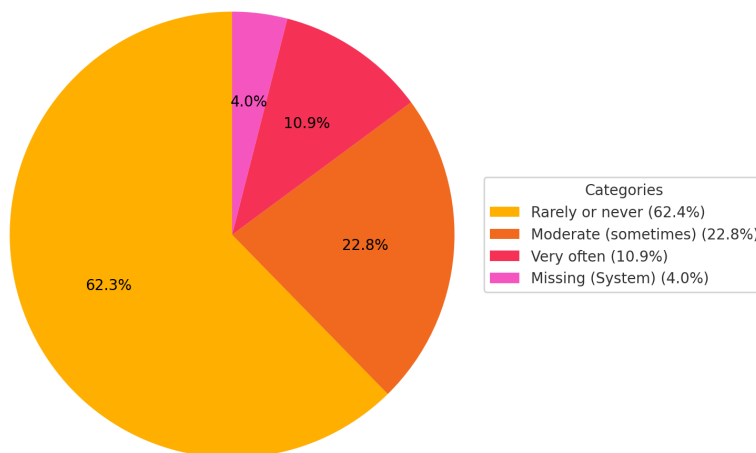


Figure 23 provides a detailed representation of the perceived frequency of discrimination concerning other types of discrimination not specifically categorized previously. Most respondents (62.3%) indicated experiencing these forms of discrimination "rarely or never," suggesting that other types of discrimination may not commonly affect a majority of participants. Nevertheless, a noteworthy percentage of participants (22.8%) reported "moderate (sometimes)" exposure, indicating occasional experiences of discrimination that may still significantly impact individuals' well-being and social interactions. Additionally, 10.9% of respondents experienced other forms of discrimination "very often," highlighting a group consistently affected by discrimination, necessitating targeted support and inclusive policies. Finally, a small portion of data (4.0%) was missing or systematically unreported, reflecting potential gaps in the data collection or respondent reluctance to disclose their experiences, warranting consideration in interpreting these results.

3. Significant Pearson correlations among the study variables

Table 3. Significant Spearman Correlations Between Study Variables (N= 97-101)

Variables (Spearman's rho)	<i>r</i> [□]	<i>p</i>
Age – Educational Level	.34**	< .001
Age – Occupational Status	-.59**	< .001
Age – Religious Discrimination	.23*	.020
Gender – Monthly Income	.20*	.041
Gender – Ethnic Discrimination	-.31**	.002
Gender – Gender Discrimination	-.21*	.034
Gender – Sexual Orientation Discrimination	.23*	.020
Gender – Other Types of Discrimination	.26**	.009
Educational Level – Occupational Status	-.32**	< .001

Variables (Spearman's rho)

	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Educational Level – Belonging to a Social Group	.24*	.017
Educational Level – Other Types of Discrimination	-.26**	.009
Occupational Status – Monthly Income	-.23*	.020
Occupational Status – Ethnic Discrimination	.28**	.005
Occupational Status – Other Types of Discrimination	.30**	.002
Sense of Belonging – Feeling Respected in Society	.42**	< .001
Sense of Belonging – Feeling Useful in Society	.33**	< .001
Sense of Belonging – Religious Discrimination	-.30**	.003
Sense of Belonging – Other Types of Discrimination	-.28**	.006
Feeling Respected – Sexual Orientation Discrimination	-.28**	.005
Feeling Respected – Other Types of Discrimination	-.28**	.005
Feeling Useful – Sexual Orientation Discrimination	-.29**	.003
Monthly Income – Other Types of Discrimination	-.28**	.006
Self-Perceived Appearance – Ethnicity	-.20*	.048
Self-Perceived Appearance – Gender Discrimination	-.23*	.023
Self-Perceived Appearance – Sexual Orientation Discrimination	-.38**	< .001
Self-Perceived Appearance – Other Types of Discrimination	-.47**	< .001
Ethnic Discrimination – Occupational Status	.28**	.005
Ethnic Discrimination – Ethnicity	-.45**	< .001
Gender Discrimination – Sexual Orientation Discrimination	.22*	.026
Gender Discrimination – Religious Discrimination	.26**	.010
Gender Discrimination – Other Types of Discrimination	.21*	.039
Sexual Orientation Discrimination – Religious Discrimination	.35**	< .001

Variables (Spearman's rho)

	r^{\square}	p
Sexual Orientation Discrimination – Age Discrimination	.41**	< .001
Sexual Orientation Discrimination – Other Types of Discrim.	.43**	< .001
Sexual Orientation Discrimination – Ethnicity	.30**	.003
Religious Discrimination – Age Discrimination	.39**	< .001
Religious Discrimination – Other Types of Discrimination	.35**	< .001
Age Discrimination – Other Types of Discrimination	.39**	< .001

Note. r^{\square} = Spearman's rho.
 $p < .05^*$, $*p < .01$.

The results reveal multiple significant associations between sociodemographic variables, perceived discrimination, and psychosocial indicators.

Age was positively correlated with educational level ($r^{\square} = .34$, $p < .001$) and religious discrimination ($r^{\square} = .23$, $p = .020$), and strongly negatively correlated with occupational status ($r^{\square} = -.59$, $p < .001$), indicating that older participants tend to be more educated but less employed, and may also perceive more religious discrimination.

Gender was significantly associated with various forms of discrimination. Specifically, women (coded lower) reported more experiences of gender, sexual orientation, and other types of discrimination, while men reported higher monthly income and more ethnic discrimination.

Sense of belonging and social value variables (e.g., feeling respected, useful, or part of a social group) were negatively correlated with multiple discrimination types, especially sexual orientation and religious discrimination. This suggests that stronger social integration may serve as a protective factor against perceived marginalization.

Self-perceived physical appearance had negative correlations with several types of discrimination, particularly sexual orientation ($r^{\square} = -.38$, $p < .001$) and other types ($r^{\square} = -.47$,



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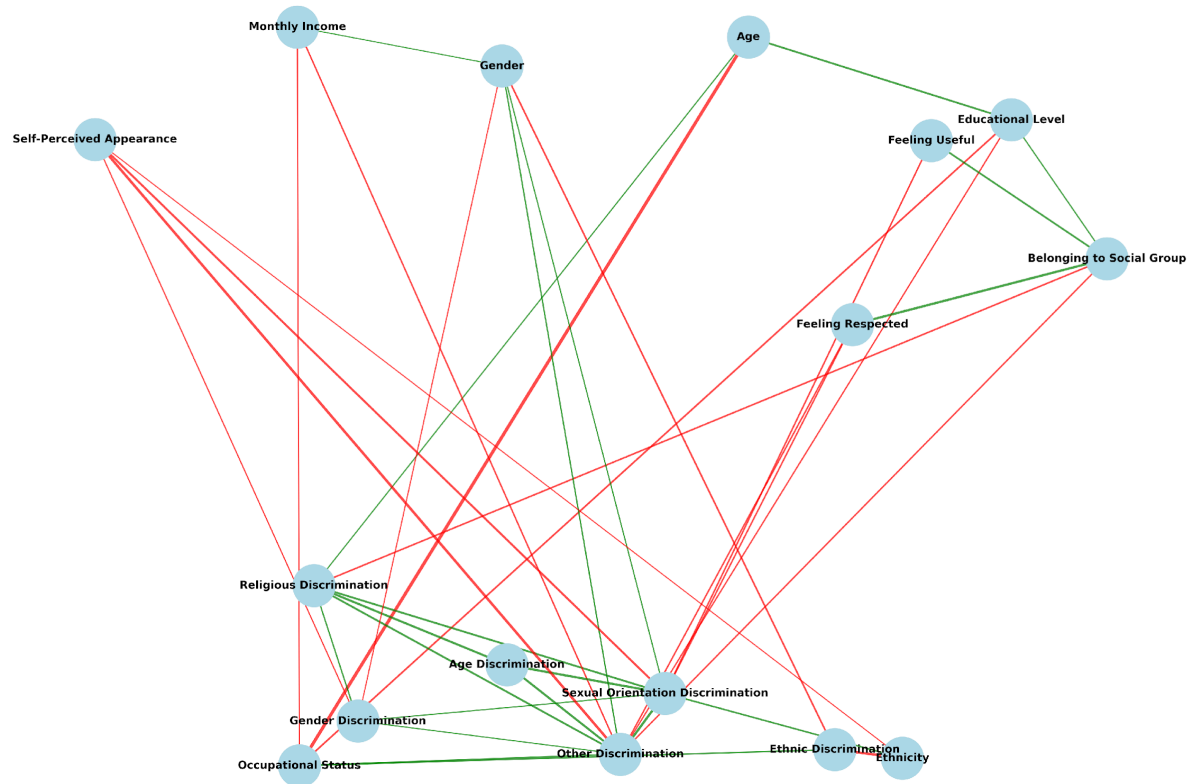
$p < .001$), indicating that those with more positive body image may perceive less discrimination overall.

Moreover, there were strong intercorrelations among the different types of discrimination. For example, sexual orientation discrimination correlated with religious, age, and other types of discrimination, reinforcing the idea of intersectionality—where individuals belonging to multiple marginalized groups experience layered or compounded discrimination.

Lastly, ethnicity (likely coded as a nominal variable with numerical values) showed moderate correlations with perceived ethnic discrimination ($r^2 = -.45, p < .001$) and sexual orientation discrimination ($r^2 = .30, p = .003$), suggesting that ethnic minority participants might report more discrimination across domains.

Figure 24. Network of Significant Spearman Correlations

Network of Significant Spearman Correlations



Note. Network of significant Spearman correlations ($*p* < .05$) among sociodemographic variables, perceived discrimination, and psychosocial indicators. Green edges indicate positive correlations; red edges indicate negative correlations. Edge thickness reflects the strength of association ($|r|$).

Ordinal logistic regression was employed in the present analysis because the dependent variable, perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation, was measured using an ordinal scale with three levels (i.e., “rarely or not at all,” “moderately,” “very often”). Unlike linear regression, which assumes interval-level data and normally distributed residuals, ordinal regression is specifically suited for modeling ordered categorical outcomes where the distances between categories are not necessarily equal.

The proportional odds (logit) model was appropriate for the data and demonstrated excellent model fit, as indicated by non-significant goodness-of-fit indices: Pearson $\chi^2(100) = 89.24, p = .771$, and Deviance $\chi^2(100) = 71.34, p = .987$.

Furthermore, the model was statistically significant overall, $\chi^2(6) = 35.81, p < .001$, suggesting that the included predictors significantly contributed to explaining variations in perceived discrimination. The Nagelkerke R^2 value of .442 indicates that the model explained approximately 44.2% of the variance in the outcome variable. These findings confirm that ordinal logistic regression was the most suitable analytical approach for evaluating the influence of sociodemographic and psychosocial variables on reported levels of sexual orientation discrimination.

Table 4. Ordinal Logistic Regression Predicting Perceived Sexual Orientation

Predictor	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	95% CI
Self-perceived appearance	-1.42	0.51	7.60	.006	[-2.42, -0.41]
Feeling respected in society	-1.70	0.64	6.96	.008	[-2.96, -0.44]
Age discrimination	0.99	0.47	4.50	.034	[0.08, 1.90]
Religious discrimination	0.38	0.50	0.58	.448	[-0.61, 1.37]
Ethnicity	0.22	0.12	3.22	.073	[-0.02, 0.46]
Gender (1 = female, 2 = male)	-0.77	0.71	1.16	.281	[-2.17, 0.63]

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. Significant results are shown in bold in the interpretation section.



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An ordinal logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine whether gender, self-perceived physical appearance, feeling respected in society, religious discrimination, age discrimination, and ethnicity predicted levels of perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation. The dependent variable was measured on an ordinal scale with three response categories, ranging from “rarely or not at all” to “very often.” The overall model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(6) = 35.81$, $p < .001$, indicating that the set of predictors significantly contributed to explaining variation in perceived sexual orientation discrimination. The model also demonstrated a strong fit to the data, as evidenced by non-significant Pearson ($p = .771$) and Deviance ($p = .987$) goodness-of-fit statistics. The Nagelkerke R^2 value of .442 suggests that the model accounted for approximately 44.2% of the variance in the outcome, which is considered a moderate-to-large effect size in social science research.

Three variables emerged as statistically significant predictors in the model. Self-perceived physical appearance had a significant negative association with perceived discrimination ($B = -1.42$, $SE = 0.51$, $p = .006$), suggesting that individuals who view their physical appearance less positively are more likely to report experiencing discrimination based on sexual orientation. This may reflect internalized stigma or heightened sensitivity to social exclusion due to body image concerns.

Similarly, feeling respected in society was a significant predictor ($B = -1.70$, $SE = 0.64$, $p = .008$). Participants who reported not feeling respected in broader social contexts had substantially higher odds of perceiving discrimination related to their sexual orientation. This finding aligns with theories of minority stress, which emphasize the cumulative impact of perceived devaluation on marginalized individuals’ experiences of stigma.

Additionally, age discrimination was positively associated with perceived sexual orientation discrimination ($B = 0.99$, $SE = 0.47$, $p = .034$), indicating that those who experience age-based discrimination are more likely to also report discrimination tied to sexual orientation.

By contrast, gender, religious discrimination, and ethnicity were not statistically significant predictors in this model. Although these factors have been shown to influence perceptions of discrimination in other studies, their lack of significance here suggests that, when

controlling for other variables, they may not uniquely explain variance in perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation in this sample.

Overall, the results highlight the importance of subjective self-image and broader experiences of social devaluation in shaping individuals' perceptions of discriminatory treatment. These findings support theoretical frameworks that consider discrimination as a multifactorial phenomenon embedded in broader sociocultural dynamics.

Table 5. Ordinal Logistic Regression Results – Gender Discrimination

Predictor	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	95% CI
Self-perceived appearance	-0.66	0.29	5.04	.025	[-1.23, -0.08]
Religious discrimination	1.03	0.39	7.07	.008	[0.27, 1.79]
Gender (1 = female)	1.36	0.47	8.40	.004	[0.44, 2.28]

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. Gender reference category: male (2). * $p < .05$ *, ** $p < .01$.

An ordinal logistic regression was conducted to determine whether gender, self-perceived appearance, and religious discrimination predict levels of perceived gender discrimination. The dependent variable was measured on an ordinal scale with three levels (“rarely or not at all,” “moderately,” and “very often”). The model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3) = 18.19$, $p < .001$, indicating that the predictors contributed meaningfully to the outcome. The Nagelkerke R^2 was .203, suggesting that approximately 20.3% of the variance in perceived gender discrimination was explained by the model.

Goodness-of-fit results were mixed, with a marginally significant Pearson test ($p = .042$) and a non-significant Deviance test ($p = .053$), suggesting that the model fit the data adequately, though not perfectly.

Three predictors were statistically significant. Gender was a strong predictor, with women reporting higher levels of perceived gender discrimination than men ($B = 1.36$, $SE = 0.47$, $p = .004$). Additionally, lower self-perceived physical appearance was associated with greater perceived gender discrimination ($B = -0.66$, $SE = 0.29$, $p = .025$). Religious discrimination was also positively related to perceived gender discrimination ($B = 1.03$, $SE = 0.39$, $p = .008$), suggesting that individuals who experience religious discrimination are more likely to perceive discrimination based on gender as well.

Table 6. Spearman Correlations Between Mental Health and Psychosocial Variables

Variable	Spearman's ρ	p-value	Interpretation
Educational level	.228*	.022	Higher education is associated with better mental health
Sense of belonging to a social group	.198*	.047	Belonging is linked to higher mental well-being
Access to knowledge and education	.320**	.001	Better access to education correlates with improved mental health
Feeling respected in society	.214*	.031	Respect is positively associated with mental well-being
Self-perceived physical appearance	.595**	<.001	Positive self-image is strongly linked to mental health
Perceived gender discrimination	-.244*	.014	Gender discrimination is associated with lower mental health



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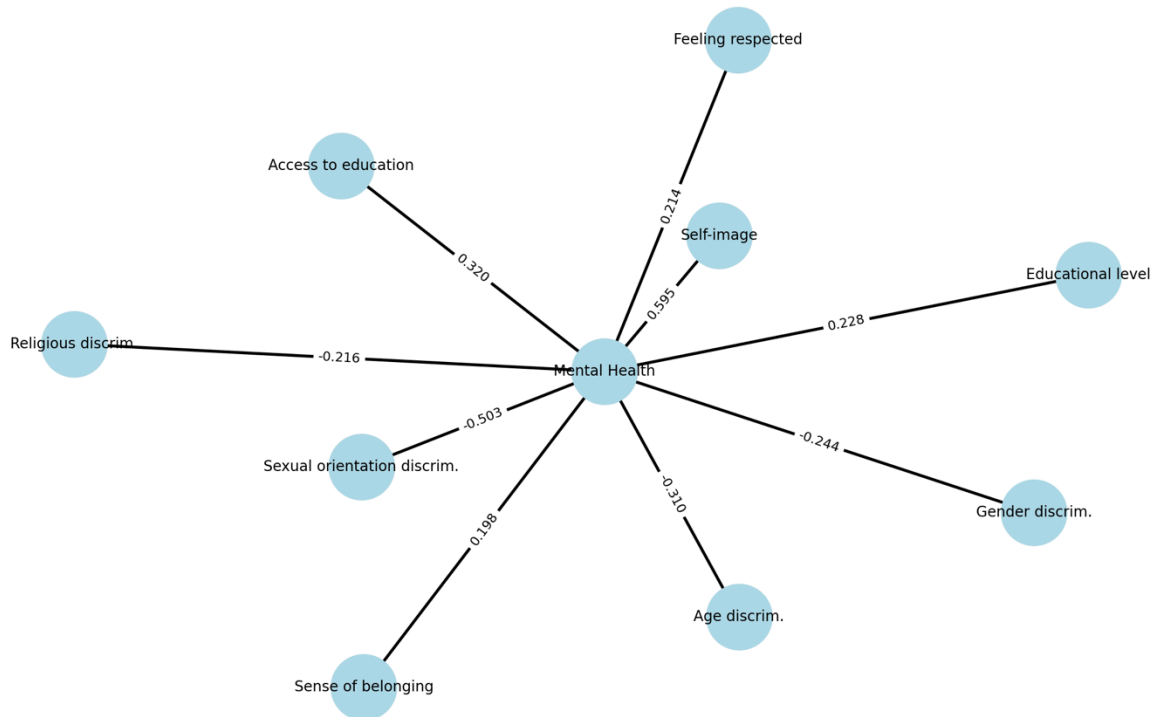
Perceived sexual orientation discrimination	-.503**	<.001	Strong negative link between discrimination and mental health
Perceived religious discrimination	-.216*	.030	Religious discrimination is negatively associated with mental health
Perceived age discrimination	-.310**	.002	Age discrimination is linked to poorer mental health

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Spearman's rank-order correlations were used.

Significant Spearman correlations were identified between mental health (MHI-5) and various psychosocial and demographic variables. Mental health was positively correlated with self-perceived physical appearance ($\rho = .595, p < .001$), educational level ($\rho = .228, p = .022$), access to education ($\rho = .320, p = .001$), feeling respected in society ($\rho = .214, p = .031$), and a sense of belonging to a social group ($\rho = .198, p = .047$). These findings suggest that both internal self-perceptions and social inclusion contribute significantly to mental well-being.

Conversely, perceived experiences of discrimination were negatively associated with mental health. Strong negative correlations were found for discrimination based on sexual orientation ($\rho = -.503, p < .001$), age ($\rho = -.310, p = .002$), gender ($\rho = -.244, p = .014$), and religion ($\rho = -.216, p = .030$). These results highlight the detrimental impact of social stigma and exclusion on mental health outcomes.

Network of Significant Correlations with Mental Health



Note: The central node is *Mental Health*, and it's connected to: **positive factors** like self-image, education, belonging, respect and **negative influences** such as discrimination (gender, age, sexual orientation, religion). Edge thickness corresponds to the **absolute value** of the correlation (i.e., the strength of the relationship), and the labels show the actual **Spearman's ρ** values.

3.2. Qualitative component

Using a thematic analysis method, the results are presented in a mirror manner for the 2 categories of the sample.

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

A. Experts' perspective

1. Impact of discrimination on the wellbeing of disadvantaged youth

Mental and emotional health: Experts emphasized that discrimination has a profound impact on the mental health of young people, leading to:

- Low self-esteem: "Low self-esteem, determined by the negative messages constantly received about their social status."
- Depression and Anxiety: "Increased risk of depression and anxiety, because the lack of opportunities and the feeling of exclusion affect motivation and self-esteem."
- Trauma: "The saddest thing is that many people of a certain ethnicity or religion who come to the territory of a country traumatized by an armed conflict already have their trauma amplified by the behavior of society towards them."

Quality of life and satisfaction: Discrimination negatively affects the quality of life and satisfaction of young people, leading to:

- Social isolation: "Social isolation, because they are afraid of being rejected or humiliated in interactions with other young people from more privileged backgrounds."
- Frustration and helplessness: "Being in the difficulty of progressing, discriminated students feel left out, excluded, ignored. This fact leads, over time, to social isolation, to the rooting of frustrations."
- School abandonment and lack of initiative: "The ability to dream of a better future, which leads to school abandonment and lack of initiative."

Perception of the world: Discrimination distorts young people's perception of the world, making them see it as:

- Unfair and inaccessible: "Yes, most disadvantaged young people come to see the world as unfair and inaccessible to them."
- An unsafe and distrustful place: "I believe that there is a phenomenon of discrimination, if I can call it that, bilateral. I believe that because of the discrimination they face, many Roma people in turn create a set of discriminatory attitudes towards the community - they come to feel that only their "bubble" offers them security and to perceive interaction with others as a danger."

2. Barriers to accessing necessary support

Reluctance and Distrust: Experts identified reluctance and distrust as major barriers:

- Reluctance on the part of young people: "We often encounter reluctance and consider that the idea of inclusion is in itself generating a feeling of exclusion."
- Distrust in institutions: "Distrust in institutions, because they feel that they do not receive real support."



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Lack of resources and funding: The lack of financial and human resources is a significant barrier:

- Lack of constant funding: "Lack of constant funding, which makes it difficult to continue projects."
- Limited resources in disadvantaged communities: "The quality of life in disadvantaged communities is precarious, the interest of local public authorities in the development of these communities is limited."

Bureaucracy and Legislation: Excessive bureaucracy and unclear legislation hinder access to support:

- Excessive bureaucracy: "Excessive bureaucracy, which delays the implementation of solutions."
- Unclear legislation: "The inability of society to accept certain people and the legislation that is made in such a way as to grant certain rights but is not always very clear."

Societal Attitudes: Discriminatory attitudes and resistance to inclusion in society represent a barrier:

- Community resistance: "Community resistance to inclusion initiatives."
- Segregation: "There are neighborhoods inhabited mainly by Roma, considered dangerous and infamous by the rest of the population/schools frequented only by Roma children and even classes in schools in the community in which only Roma children were assigned."

3. Proposals for providing necessary support

Educational interventions: Experts emphasized the importance of educational interventions to combat discrimination and promote inclusion:

- Anti-Discrimination Education: "I believe that it would be helpful to have training programs, both for youth workers and for instructors in education - teachers, school counselors, etc. (and here these programs could even be mandatory) that include anti-discrimination education and inclusive working methods with children and young people of different ethnicities."
- Promoting inclusion in education: "I believe that more emphasis could be placed on promoting inclusion in education and establishing clear policies regarding school desegregation (sanctions for educational institutions that do not take this aspect into account)."

Psychological and social support: Experts highlighted the need to provide psychological and social support to young people:

- Psychological counseling: "Mechanisms of support for young people from disadvantaged areas, such as mentoring, psychological counseling, and mobility programs."



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- Mentoring: "The organization in which I work offers mentoring and therapy services for young people from disadvantaged communities."

Interventions at the community and societal level: Experts emphasized the importance of interventions at the community and societal level to change attitudes and promote inclusion:

- Involvement of authorities and the community: "I can support them through educational projects, counseling, and access to resources, but true change requires the involvement of authorities and the community."
- Coherent social policies: "Change begins at the local level, but without a coherent national vision, our efforts are limited. We need collaboration between NGOs, institutions, and the community to combat the effects of discrimination and offer young people a chance for a better future."

Empowerment and personal development: Experts emphasized the importance of offering young people opportunities for personal development and helping them increase their self-confidence:

- Personal development workshops: "Personal development workshops, to increase their self-confidence."
- Positive models: "Camps and exchanges of experience, to offer them positive models and access to new opportunities."

B. Youngsters' perspective

1. Impact of discrimination on the wellbeing of Disadvantaged Youth

Mental and emotional health: The young people's responses reveal a significant impact on their mental and emotional well-being:

- Anxiety and Depression: "Over time, I have experienced strong states of anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and hatred towards myself because I could not adapt/be accepted as I am by others."
- Trauma: "Yes, experiences related to discrimination have only had negative effects on me, inducing an unpleasant social anxiety and traumas that I still struggle with today."
- Isolation: "Yes, they have affected my self-image and perception of my place in the world, ultimately leading me to isolate myself."
- Low self-esteem: "Initially, they affected me emotionally because they gave me the impression of inferiority compared to others."

Quality of life and satisfaction: The young people's experiences highlight the negative impact on their overall quality of life:

- Feeling different: "Yes, I was discriminated against at school; for me, discrimination is the worst because it makes you feel different from other people."
- Loss of hope: "Discrimination makes you lose hope in the world, especially if it is something very serious."
- Impact on daily activities: "Yes, it affects your day a lot."

Perception of the world: The young people's responses show how discrimination shapes their view of the world:

- The world as an indifferent place: "I did not necessarily have the impression that everyone is the same after such experiences, but what I observed is that the world is very indifferent; instead of jumping to the defense of the discriminated person, it just stands and watches."
- The world as a gloomy place: "In that period, I saw the world as a gloomy, malicious place that I did not fit into."

2. Barriers to accessing necessary support

Lack of support from adults: The young people's responses reveal a lack of support from adults, especially in school:

- Teachers as aggressors: "I probably would have liked there to be more support from teachers for discriminated children because, in addition to not prohibiting or punishing bullying, they also did it intentionally or unintentionally."
- Lack of intervention: "I was constantly discriminated against because none of the older people spoke to them. No one told them what they were doing and that this thing is not beneficial to anyone."

Difficulty in asking for help: The young people's responses show a reluctance to seek help:

- Did not request support: "I did not receive support because I did not request it."
- Lack of courage to talk to parents: "My sister was all I needed at that time because I did not have the courage to tell my parents."

Lack of understanding from others: The young people's responses reveal a feeling of not being understood by others: Feeling obnoxious: "I probably needed to talk to my parents or the help of a psychologist, but I did not have the courage to do it. And the other people around me thought I was obnoxious."

3. Proposals for providing necessary support

Emotional support and understanding: The young people's responses emphasize the importance of emotional support and understanding:

- People who listen: "I think of someone who can continue to help me in the process of treating conscious and unconscious traumas."
- People who support: "I believe that we as people should support each other, sustain each other."
- People who accept: "I believe that belonging to a Roma association helps young people to cope with these negative experiences because it offers them belonging to a "family" where most have gone through similar experiences and can learn from each other how to overcome them. It is important for young people to feel included, seen, and appreciated."
- People who help you feel good about yourself: "Some of the daily things that I consider help me to cope with these experiences effectively are music, order, and spending time with loved ones."

Educational interventions: The young people's responses highlight the need for education and awareness:

- Education about discrimination: "That is why it is very important to talk to children about this phenomenon and to teach them how to proceed in such situations."
- Combating stereotypes: "I have been trying since I was a child to demonstrate that ethnicity does not differentiate you from any point of view."

Support from organizations: The young people's responses show the positive impact of organizations that offer support:

- NEVO Parudimos as support: "The most I can say is that I received support from the NEVO Parudimos organization; it was the best thing at the right time."
- Youth workers as support: "Honestly, everyone is cool from NEVO Parudimos top:)"

Changing societal attitudes: The young people's responses emphasize the need for a change in societal attitudes:

- Better people: "For the end, I would like to say "Good people, be better!""
- Love and Acceptance: "Love has no color."
- People who do not judge: "What I think I would need is to no longer care so much about the gratuitous malice offered by some people."

4. Discussion

Instructed by these separate findings from our national research, future policy choices could consider closely a variety of particular domains of targeted development and intervention:



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To begin with, tackling the high levels of unemployment among respondents—16.8% actively looking for work and 13.9% not actively looking for work—should be the priority. Implementing comprehensive employment programs, such as job training, career counseling sensitive to the diverse backgrounds, and incentives for companies hiring marginalized groups like Roma (69.3% of your sample), immigrants (14.9%), and refugees/asylum seekers (15.8%), would make a significant step towards bridging employment gaps.

Second, since 32.7% of the respondents report financial insecurity, policies that promote economic security through social welfare programs and micro-financing mechanisms specifically for vulnerable groups can augment their financial independence and reduce their dependence on social welfare.

Third, since essential needs such as warm shelter did not exist for a large majority of respondents (29.7% data unavailable, perhaps masking hidden vulnerabilities), increased housing initiatives, particularly to marginalized ethnic minority groups and refugees, need to be implemented or extended.

Moreover, with approximately one in every five participants being left out of social groups (18.8%) and not being respected (21.8%), community-based inclusion policies that provide social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and anti-discrimination education would give more inclusive conditions to the social environment.

Lastly, and with a recognition of the importance of physical appearance and skin tone attitude-related—where over 42% of respondents felt considerably different from the rest of the host country's population—anti-discrimination training, sensitization campaigns, and increased enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation must become priority in an effort to reduce appearance and skin tone stigmatization.

These recommendations aim to tactically solve the very problems brought up by your lone dataset, enabling equity, inclusion, and improved socioeconomic status for marginalized groups within Romania



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With such a high percentage of Roma in the sample (59.4%) and such a high frequency rate of reported ethnic discrimination (with 47.5% suffering from moderate discrimination and 17.8% very high frequency discrimination), policy makers would have to prioritize anti-discrimination policy with an emphasis on ethnicity in general. Social integration improvement initiatives, stigma reduction initiatives, and interventions involving intercultural education and communication could be of great assistance to these groups.

Gender discrimination, while less prevalent than ethnic discrimination, is still a source of issue for a large minority (around 40% experiencing moderate to frequent discrimination). Thus, policies actively seeking gender equality, equal opportunity, and gender sensitivity education should continue to be an integral part of social and institutional frameworks.

With sexual orientation, although perceived discrimination is relatively low in incidence, there are still some segments of respondents (4%) who are being repeatedly discriminated against. Measures must include special protection for sexual minority identifiers as well as education to foster a pluralistic societal attitude and reduce prejudices.

With respect to religion-based discrimination, our research indicates that approximately a quarter of the respondents experience at least moderate discrimination. Accordingly, measures encouraging religious tolerance and intercultural understanding must be reinforced with greater emphasis on mutual understanding and respect for religious pluralism.

Moreover, age discrimination crossed over as a critical issue of concern, impairing approximately one third of participants at moderate to high frequency. Efforts to reduce ageism such as awareness campaigns, inter-generational programs, and multi-age employment schemes are strongly recommended.

Finally, a high proportion of interviewees mentioned instances of other types of discrimination not otherwise coded. This indicates the necessity of having flexible and general anti-discrimination policies, capable of explaining less acknowledged or emerging categories of exclusion and bias.



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The thematic analysis of interviews with disadvantaged youth and experts reveals a consistent narrative of discrimination's detrimental impact on well-being, aligning with existing literature on minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and its effects on mental health outcomes. The findings underscore that discrimination, experienced from a young age, leads to anxiety, depression, and a distorted perception of the world as unjust and unsafe, mirroring research on the psychological consequences of prejudice (Schmitt et al., 2014). The identified barriers to accessing support, including reluctance to seek help, lack of adult intervention, and societal attitudes, highlight systemic failures in providing adequate resources for marginalized youth. These results suggest a need for comprehensive social policies that address discrimination at its root, promoting inclusive education, providing accessible mental health services, and empowering youth through targeted support programs. Educational initiatives should prioritize anti-discrimination training for educators and students, while youth support programs should focus on building self-esteem, fostering a sense of belonging, and creating safe spaces for open dialogue, ultimately aiming to mitigate the long-term effects of discrimination and promote positive youth development.

In general, policy efforts should be directed toward an intersectional strategy, understanding how these different discrimination experiences may intersect, amplifying their effect on individuals. Constructing educational initiatives, community conversations, workplace inclusive practices, and creating strong reporting and addressing discrimination mechanisms would be major steps toward increased equity, respect, and social cohesion in Romania.

Limitations of the study

While this mixed-methods study provides valuable insights into the impact of discrimination on the well-being of disadvantaged youth in Romania, several methodological limitations warrant consideration. The quantitative component, employing a cross-sectional design, limits the ability to establish causal relationships between perceived discrimination and well-being outcomes. The use of a questionnaire (including both online forms and self-recorded), while allowing for broader data collection, may be subject to recall bias and social desirability bias, potentially underreporting experiences of discrimination or overreporting positive well-being indicators. Furthermore, the sample (N=101), comprised of Roma, migrants, and



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refugees/asylum seekers, while representative of key disadvantaged groups, may not be fully generalizable to all marginalized youth populations in Romania. The sample size within each subgroup was not equal distributed (based on voluntary responses), which could limit the statistical power to detect significant differences between groups. The qualitative component, while providing rich contextual data through in-depth interviews, is subject to potential researcher bias in data interpretation and analysis. The selection of participants for the qualitative interviews may have also introduce bias, as those willing to participate may have different experiences or perspectives than those who declined. Finally, data collection limitations, such as language barriers or cultural sensitivities, could have influenced the depth and accuracy of responses obtained from both youth and youth workers.

The Relationship between Mental Health and Social Inclusion in the present study

The analysis of demographic variables within the study reinforces the strong connection between social inclusion and mental health outcomes. Participants who reported higher levels of social inclusion, such as belonging to a community or feeling respected, also indicated better mental health scores. Access to basic needs, financial stability, and community acceptance were directly associated with reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. For instance, respondents with stable housing and financial security exhibited a stronger sense of belonging and lower psychological distress.

Educational attainment and occupational status further influenced mental health perceptions. Higher education levels were associated with greater social mobility and community integration, factors that reduce vulnerability to psychological stress. Moreover, those who were employed or pursuing vocational training reported better mental health, driven by a sense of purpose and societal contribution. Conversely, unemployment and lack of community engagement were linked to poorer mental health outcomes, reinforcing the need for inclusive employment policies.



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The connection between mental health and social inclusion has been widely explored in contemporary research, particularly concerning marginalized communities such as the Roma population. Social inclusion, which involves the capacity of individuals to participate fully in society, significantly influences mental health outcomes (Wright & Stickley, 2013). Exclusion from social, economic, and community life has been linked to poorer mental health, higher rates of anxiety and depression, and reduced overall well-being (Boardman, Killaspy, & Mezey, 2022). Conversely, promoting social inclusion through community-based programs and supportive social networks can foster resilience, enhance well-being, and mitigate the psychological impact of discrimination and social isolation (Ness, Davidson, Oute, & von Heimburg, 2021).

In the context of the Roma community, social inclusion is crucial for improving mental health outcomes. Studies indicate that Roma individuals face considerable barriers to accessing mental health services due to stigma, socioeconomic challenges, and discrimination (Thompson, Stone, & Tyson, 2022). These barriers contribute to the perpetuation of mental health disparities and hinder effective community integration (Guerrero, Civišová, & Winkler, 2024). Effective interventions aimed at social inclusion, such as community engagement and empowerment initiatives, have demonstrated positive effects on mental health by strengthening social ties and reducing stigma (Borgi et al., 2020).

Furthermore, research highlights the importance of community-driven approaches to enhance mental health and social inclusion. Social farming, for example, has been identified as an innovative practice that promotes well-being and community engagement among marginalized groups, including the Roma (Borgi et al., 2020). These initiatives support not only mental health recovery but also foster a sense of purpose and belonging, which are critical components of social inclusion (Valero, Elboj, Plaja, & Munté Pascual, 2021).

Efforts to improve the mental health of Roma populations must prioritize inclusive practices that address both social and economic inequalities. Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that economic instability disproportionately affected Roma households, exacerbating mental health challenges and highlighting the need for targeted social support (Porrás et al., 2020). Promoting equitable access to health care, education, and



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community services is essential for reducing health disparities and enhancing social inclusion (Robinson, Oluboyede, Vale, & Olariu, 2022).

5. Conclusion

The results highlight the profound mental health cost of perceived discrimination. Exclusion on the basis of sexual orientation, age, gender, and religion were all significantly associated with poorer psychological well-being. The results indicate an approach that addresses discrimination not just through legal protections but also through the implementation of inclusive practices within educational, work, and health settings.

Second, perceived physical appearance was found to be the strongest positive mental health correlate. This underlines the significance of psychosocial interventions to improve body image, self-esteem, and self-worth, especially among young people and socially disadvantaged groups. These can be included within universal mental health promotion programs.

Third, education level and opportunities to learn were positively linked with mental health. Comprehensive education policies that facilitate equal access to formal and informal schooling, vocational training, and language support are therefore paramount in the facilitation of psychological well-being and eventual integration.

Further, social respect and feeling of belongingness were also significant predictors of mental health. Hence, it is recommended that EU-funded programs continue to fund local community work, peer support groups, and intercultural activities that facilitate bonding and social cohesion. Public service workers are also to be trained with a component of respectful, dignity-based work with diverse groups.

Finally, monitoring mental health in social inclusion programs is highly advisable. Short measures like the Mental Health Inventory may be included in program evaluation to ensure that services not only address structural needs but also promote psychological resilience and well-being.

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7. Appendices

Include any supplementary materials, such as additional data tables, or technical details of statistical analyses.