

Experiencing Racism and Discrimination

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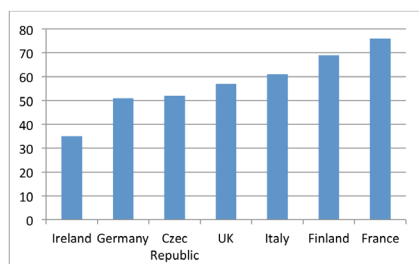
I was told that 'you are the first Black guy I have ever met...I didn't know that Black people are nice'.

(Ireland, focus group)

Introduction

Ethnic, racial and religious discriminations are widespread phenomena in contemporary Europe. Migrants or long established ethnic minorities in multi-ethnic states are experiencing unfair treatment in different areas of social life and this is especially true for the young migrant men who tend to embody the 'dangerous other' conversely to the women who receive a more positive opinion.

Consciousness of discrimination varies considerably among young men. The way discrimination is framed in the national debate influence the sensitivity to it and offers the conceptual toolkit to think about one's experience. The last Eurobarometer on discrimination published in 2012 shows that awareness of discrimination is higher in Finland and France than in Ireland or Germany, with very significant gaps. Even though these rates are collected for the general population, one may consider that the ethnic minorities will declare more group discrimination than the mainstream population but with similar gaps can be anticipated among minorities. What is also known is that descendants of immigrants born in the receiving countries report more discrimination than the migrants.



Source: Eurobarometer 393, 2012

Figure 1: Beliefs that ethnic discrimination is widespread in the country. Source: Eurobarometer 393, 2012

Accounts of Experiences of Explicit (and Violent) Racism

Not all migrants are equally exposed to othering or discrimination. There are different stereotypes circulating on ethnic groups and in the same society, some may not be perceived negatively where others are highly stigmatized. Coming for a former colony for example and/or having a different skin colour generate a higher risk of discrimination than displaying mostly cultural specificities. Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africans in France or Ireland tell stories of racial slurs, like "go back to your country you Nigga". A second generation Chinese in Paris recalls that once he was in a bar and a woman shouted at him "You the Chinese, you're everywhere, you're invading us". Similar experiences of being perceived as

different even when being born and having the citizenship of the country have been told by Chinese or Vietnamese in Czech Republic. Cases of harassment by neighbours have also been reported by Somali youth in Finland, up to the point that his mother decided to change neighbourhood.

However, these cases are not the most common feature in countries where a control of public speeches and behaviours has gradually reduced overt racism. **Islamophobia** is more commonly voiced without clear sanctions and our Muslim respondents testify of the atmosphere of open hostility against Islam. Last but not least, the rise of populist parties with explicit anti-immigrant discourses, like the National Front in France or the true Finn party in Finland is mentioned by the respondents as contributing to the expression of racism.

Contexts Matter: Small Cities vs Cosmopolitan Cities

The urban context where our respondents grew up shapes their sense of difference and their experience of othering. Large cosmopolitan cities offer more opportunities to be accepted and somehow invisible than small cities where few other minority young men are living. Diverse neighbourhoods provide a friendlier environment where minority young male feel safer. However, some would regret the lack of social or ethnic ties in such neighbourhoods while mingling with members of the mainstream society helps them to understand the national culture, learn the language and build networks.

"When I came to Eutin, there were probably only two of us Blacks in the entire town (...) There are still times, at school, in class, other places, or when I go into a building, when people stare at me because I look different. And when you look different, then you don't feel, I don't want to exaggerate, you don't feel at home, when people are always looking at you (...). I wouldn't stand out in Hamburg, because it's a big city." (Germany, age 21)

"Tivoli is not like Rome where you see everything. You can see the difference between Tivoli and Rome very clearly, it seems to be 30 years back in time." (Italy, age 24)

Internalizing Unequal Statuses

Compare to second generations who have higher expectations of being treated fairly in their society and report more experiences of discrimination, young migrants tend to anticipate different treatments or subordinate positions and

consider these to be somehow justified by their own limitations. A large number of migrants felt that they should be critical against the receiving country. Others acknowledge the negative stereotypes about their group, but distance themselves from the negative examples. Talking about discrimination is not straightforward for most of the respondents who tend to deny the experience discrimination when asked directly, and then may tell stories of unequal treatment later without labelling these as discrimination.

In most cases, the revelation of discrimination come from an explicit situation attached to verbal abuse. When unfair treatments occur without specific negative comments, they remain invisible to the victims who then would need to compare their trajectories to the one followed by members of the majority population to be able to sort out what comes from the lack of chance and what can be defined as discrimination.



Sense of otherness and exclusion from the mainstream identity

In a minor tone, questions about 'where do you come from' may happen too frequently to be perceived mainly as signs of benign curiosity. The repetitions of these concrete expressions of othering may foster hostility and create a sense of exclusion which builds boundaries in social life. Cultural dissonance increases the likelihood to feel excluded from certain areas of social life. For example the fact that most Muslims do not drink alcohol excludes them from typical youth ritual in parties or even at work with colleagues. Being seen as different is perceived as acceptable by most of the respondents who have an accent or linguistic limitations, but those who consider themselves to be assimilated suffer from the ascribed identity that they receive.

"You notice, even if you are on their side [Finnish people], you are an outsider. You are always reminded that you can never get rid of it [a status as a foreigner]. Because of that it [life] is a bit difficult. (...) For instance, there are people who have been born here or lived here for 20 years and they are still foreigners. (...) People don't accept that we are Finnish" (Finland, age 21)



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MiMen is co-financed by the European Commission in the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (EIF)