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# *The big gap: perceived, experienced and reported discrimination among immigrants in Italy*

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## **Abstract**

Discrimination experienced by immigrants can only partially be captured by complaints reported by anti-discrimination institutions, because of the uncertain will of discriminated migrants of denouncing the racial harassment as well as social, cultural and political constraints. Comparing the number of reports followed by judicial authorities and equality bodies with the results of national statistical surveys is possible to fill the gap between experienced and reported discrimination. The article will present a comparison between the number and trends of complaints received by the Italian Equality body against discrimination during ten years, and data from a national inquiry of the Italian Institute of Statistics detecting the experiences of discrimination suffered by foreign nationals resident in Italy. The numerical chasm between the two reporting procedures shows the great variability of perceived, experimented and complained discrimination, offering at the same time an in-depth and original overview of xenophobia and discrimination in Italy.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, Xenophobia, Immigrants, Racism, Data analysis, Italy

## **Introduction**

The reality of discrimination experienced by migrants and ethnic minorities in Europe is not easily detected. Since 2000, European anti-discrimination legislation has been widely implemented by EU Member States, and the European Commission promotes a better understanding of perceptions and experience of discrimination through regular Eurobarometer surveys. At the same time, equality agencies set up in order to implement the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC), provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination and monitor and report discrimination issues. In spite of the prohibition set out in data protection regulation governing the handling of personal data, which includes racial origin, equality agencies are entitled to collect and process data on claims of discrimination addressed to them, publishing statistics of complaints of discrimination in their annual reports. In some countries, such as Italy, their reports represent the only official source of data on complaints presented by victims of discrimination on a racial/ethnic basis.

However, the number of complaints received by equality agencies implementing antidiscrimination laws is just the tip of the iceberg of a wider phenomenon. The discrimination experienced by immigrants can only partially be captured by the number of complaints recorded by governmental anti-discrimination institutions, because discriminated migrants are always fearful of reporting racial harassment. A measure of the discrepancies between the number of complaints and the effective phenomenon can be partly obtained by comparing the number of reports filed with the judicial authorities and the equality agencies with the results of statistical surveys on a national basis, specifically targeting people at risk of discrimination. This paper aims to present a comparison between the number and trends of

complaints received by the Italian Equality agency over the course of ten years (2005-2014), and data from the first national survey performed by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2012) "Condition and social integration of foreigners", which provides an indication of instances of discrimination suffered during 5 years by 934,000 foreign nationals resident in Italy. On the one hand, the equality agency, institutionally competent for the management of discrimination complaints, received from 300 to 1000 complaints of discrimination on an annual basis; on the other hand, according to the ISTAT survey, almost 1 million foreign nationals, that is to say 29.1% of the foreign population aged 15 or older, reported that they had experienced some form of discrimination in the last five years: 19.2% of foreigners claim to have been discriminated against in the workplace or when looking for jobs; 12.6% of foreigners reported having experienced discrimination at school, when looking for a home (10.5%), and so on. If we compare these data with the actual complaints of discrimination, we are faced with a numerical gulf between the two reported experiences of discrimination. Reported claims of discrimination total 1000 victims per year, according to the complaints received by the equality agency, while hundreds of thousands of foreigners have reported discrimination according to the national survey. This comparison highlights the gap between statistical and administrative sources, and how sharing of qualitative and quantitative data on discrimination can provide a better picture of social reality, and the possibility of introducing more effective antidiscrimination policies. This is clearly a case of methodological fragility. There is a great difference between an experience or a perception of discrimination and going as far as filing a discrimination complaint with the authorities. In the first case we risk over-estimation due to a biased individual perception of unequal treatment; in the second case, we have a clear under-estimation due to the legal evaluation of each complaint on the basis of circumstantial evidence and facts that must have a strict juridical relevance.

### **1. Facing discrimination**

Racial prejudice cannot be labelled xenophobic behaviour until the individual makes this explicit in a relationship or in a social context, when it becomes socialized; in the same way, we would say there is no discrimination until it produces awareness of disparity of treatment in one of the parties involved or in an external witness who can confirm it. But even in this case, it is unlikely that the person responsible for the discrimination reports his own behavior, and it is rare that the casual witness complains to the authorities, preferring instead to take refuge in indifference. It is also uncertain whether the discriminated person is likely to file a complaint for racial harassment.

In fact, the process of exposing a discriminatory experience faces many obstacles, which can include psychological, cultural, social, economic and legal factors. The victim is often prevented from reporting discrimination not only due to feelings of fear, embarrassment or resignation, but also out of a lack of knowledge of their rights and the legal instruments available for his/her protection, a diffident attitude towards institutions, and/or fear of repercussions due to their uncertain legal status. For all these reasons, there is a wide gap between actual discrimination suffered and reported discrimination.

To some extent, we could also consider that perceived discrimination can muddle and over-compensate the estimation of actual discrimination, but this statement cannot be easily demonstrated, because perception of unequal treatment is a psy-

chological process that is hard to evaluate, as it depends on how individuals react and /or interpret a discriminatory instance (Major & alii, 2002). At the same time, the stigma of being (or being perceived to be) different owing to one's skin color, language or ethnicity can stand in the way of efforts to include people with a different ethnic background (Padilla, Perez, 2003), and increases the reluctance to blame discrimination (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). Another aspect that justifies the reluctance to bring claims is the high psychological cost of the complaint, and its direct impact on interpersonal, social and working relationships (Crosby, 1982). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that members of some stigmatized groups are more likely to attribute negative outcomes to discriminating attitudes or behaviours (Crocker & Major, 1989 & 1994; Dion K.L., Kawakami K., 1996).

For all these reasons, it is obvious that the number of complaints followed by non-discrimination equality agencies alone cannot capture the broader discrimination experienced by immigrants. Therefore, a comparison between actual complaints and statistical observations of perceived discrimination can help to narrow down the phenomenon to its actual dimensions.

For this reason, the paper will be based on the perception, attitude and experience of racial discrimination, as set out in Article 1 of the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life". The conceptual category of 'discrimination' helps to overcome the limits of racist narratives: as Bordieu suggested, "now there can't be just one racism, but many experiences of racism: there are as many racisms as there are groups that need to justify their existence" (1980, p. 264). The metamorphosis of contemporary forms of racism, already widely outlined in another work (Vulpiani, 2014), makes way for the ethnicization of social conflicts, inequalities and claims for rights lodged by migrants and refugees. In the contemporary market and consumer economy, according to Wieviorka (1996, p. 165) exploits racial discrimination as the basis for the unfair treatment of Others in areas such as employment, services, education, health and urban segregation. Social, economic and political claims are subjugated by the racial rhetoric by ambiguously emphasizing the right to difference (Castel, 2007). In this time of "racialization without racism, but also of racism without race" (Fassin & Fassin, 2006, p.29), the concept of discrimination can help to overcome the limits of traditional categories of xenophobia and racism.

A brief analysis of trends, cases and processes of discrimination in the framework of the complaints registered by the Italian office against racial discrimination (Unar) can offer more insights on these aspects.

The Unar is part of the Department of Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. It was set up with the Legislative Decree, n. 215 on 9 July 2003, implementing European Directive 2000/43/CE, to promote the principles of equal treatment of individuals, regardless of race or ethnic origin, and with the purpose of banishing all forms of racial and ethnic discrimination. Decree n. 215/2003 provides a framework of rules, that mean to provide a clear distinction between direct and indirect discrimination, as well as harassment. Direct discrimination is experienced when, for reasons of race or ethnic origin, any person is treated less favourably than another in a similar context. Indirect discrimination is determined when an apparently neutral criteria or procedure (i.e. in the administration or the judicial system) can, in practice, put a person at a

disadvantage due to their race or ethnic background. Harassment is defined as a hostile, degrading, offensive and undesirable behaviour based on ethnic or racial factors that may violate the dignity of an individual or create a climate of intimidation around them.

Discrimination and harassment can irreparably compromise the slow process of social integration of immigrants. This can lead to untold personal harm and social damage to the victim, his/her family and also, indirectly, to the host society. In particular, harassment plays a crucial role in the reporting of discrimination. On the whole, a victim of discrimination doesn't easily find the courage to make their experience of abuse of power and disparity public. It is often due to harassment, which affects the dignity of an individual, that a person can find the strength to report the incident to public authorities in order to obtain justice.

The Unar's Contact Centre collects, records and manages complaints related to the events of discrimination in order to find a solution to them, offering the victims a chance to seek justice. The Contact Centre's records provide an indication of ethnic and racial discrimination in Italy, categorising spheres of discrimination, profiles of the victims that have the courage to report it and the geographical areas where most complaints are filed. The aim is to remove the negative effects of discrimination, provide assistance in judicial and administrative procedures, as well as carrying out inquiries with the aim of confirming the existence of the discriminatory phenomena.

The Contact Centre operates in Italian, English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Romanian, Chinese, Mandarin, Hindu, Urdu and other languages or dialects. The service operates on two levels. The first level attempts to resolve the case in real time wherever possible. The second level collects and examines the reports, researching all the useful information needed to resolve the case.

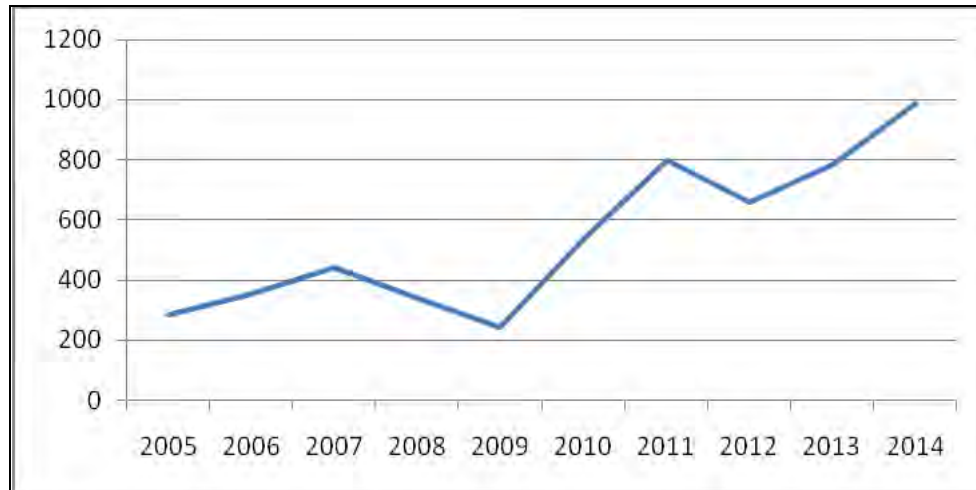
First of all, it is interesting to understand who and how discrimination complaints are filed. One of the Unar's contact centre's tools is a toll-free number, that in the first years of operation collected practically 100% of complaints, while nowadays it only collects 20% of complaints. In fact, in the recent years other more efficient means of complaint reporting have been introduced: the systematic monitoring by the public administration of cases that come to light in public information (now accounting for 40%), e-mails and facebook profiles (now accounting for 30%) or the center's web site (around 10%). The number of Italians who call the Unar as witnesses of a case of discrimination decreased from 29.4% in 2005 to the 20,1% of 2014. Victims who have the courage to file a complaint in person are in general around 20% of all complaints received (21,1% in 2014), while a similar amount of complaints come from associations and NGOs, and the most relevant number of cases are identified as a result of institutional monitoring by the Office (37,1% in 2014).

## **2. The tip of the iceberg**

The flow of complaints from 2005 to 2014 shows a marked growth in the number of discrimination events reported: from 282 in 2005, to 339 in 2008, 540 in 2010, 659 in 2012 and 990 in 2014. Cases of ascertained discrimination are obviously a small part of the huge number of calls received by the Office and through web contacts, which generally stand at around 15,000-20,000 per year.

The figures show a gradual and continuous increase in the number of complaints of discrimination filed each year:

Table 1: Complaints of discrimination 2005-2014 - Absolute values



Source: Elaboration from absolute frequency of complaints recorded by Unar

In ten years, the most frequently reported spheres of ethnic-racial discrimination have changed, with high rates of discrimination in the workplace in the first years of monitoring, increasingly under-reported when the economic crisis started to bite, and a growing number of cases of discrimination in the media, on the web and on social networks, mainly due to the institutional development of monitoring systems in these areas.

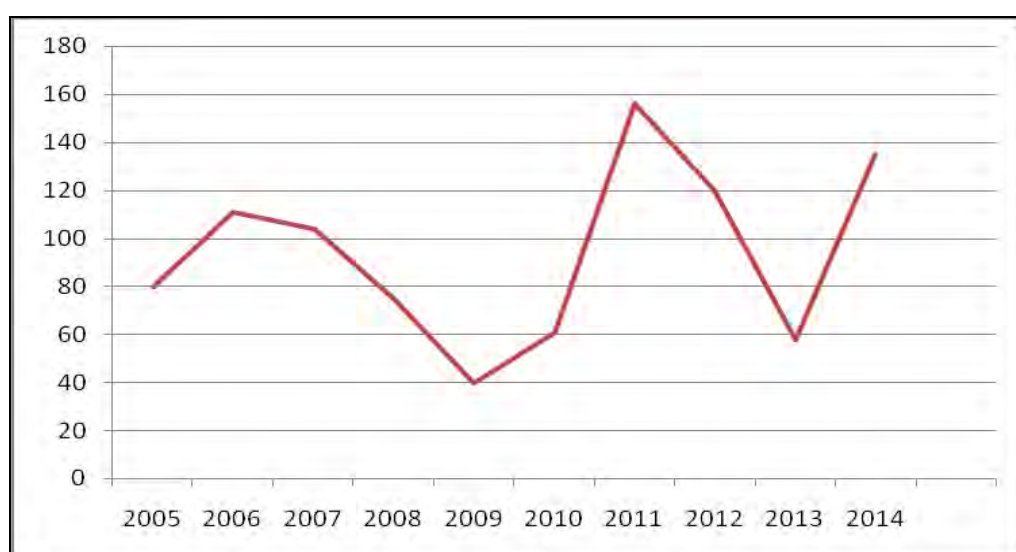
Discrimination in access to employment and on the workplace is of particular interest, and it is mainly focused in the field of selection procedures based on ethnicity, unfair wages, occupational segregation and the existence of a dual labour market: its frequency never drops during the course of the ten years, but it does indicate that the courage to report discrimination in this sphere is strongly affected by other variables: the increased political hostility towards immigration in the period 2007-2009 and the growing economic crisis from 2012, with a greater impact on redundancies among immigrant workers in 2014. Recent research has revealed the complexity and controversial nature of economic aspects when analysing discrimination (Billiet, Meuleman, De Witte, 2014) and how discrimination in the workplace is rarely reported by the victims (Goodman-Delahunty, Foote, 2011, p.88). Moreover, it is always important to underline how data related to complaints can be connected with economic and political issues. Absolute frequencies offer more information regarding these external constraints.

Table 2: Spheres of discrimination 2005-2014

Sphere	(% for Years 2000)									
	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14
Traditional and new media	2,5	5	4	2,7	10,8	20,2	22,6	19,6	34,2	29,4
Public life (political or public speeches, hate speeches, political posters)	5,3	6	12,8	13,6	17	17,8	16,7	17	20,4	19,8
Employment	28,4	31,7	23,8	22,1	16,6	11,3	19,6	18,2	7,5	13,6
Access to public services	9,9	8,7	10,6	13	13,7	15,9	10,9	11,4	7,7	10,5
Free time (discrimination in public streets, sport)	1,1	1,8	0,4	0,9	3,3	8	9,8	11,4	11,4	9,1
Housing	20,2	12,4	16,2	16,8	10	8,9	6,3	7,3	5,1	4,8
Education	3,5	5	5,7	5,3	5,4	3,3	2,8	5	4,1	4,1
Police	6,4	10,6	5,7	8,3	9,1	2,4	1,8	2,6	3,7	2,4
Access to commercial / private services	6,7	10,1	10,9	7,4	6,2	5,4	4,3	3,2	2,2	2,1
Public transportation	4,3	4,1	6,8	5,9	4,6	2,4	2,5	2,3	1,2	1,7
Financial services	6,7	2,3	2,3	1,8	2,1	3,3	1	1,1	1,1	1,1
Health	5	2,3	0,8	2,4	1,2	1,1	1,8	0,9	1,4	0,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: percentage elaborated by absolute frequency of complaints recorded each year by Unar

Table 3 - Complaints of discrimination in employment - absolute frequency



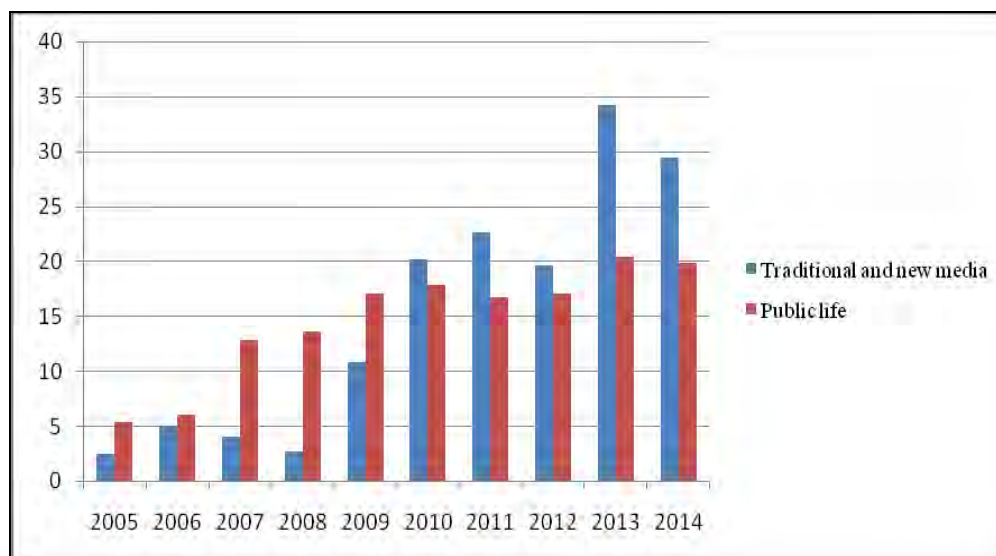
Source: Data elaborated by absolute frequency of complaints recorded by Unar

Absolute frequencies are continuously up and down and show that the courage to report discriminatory working conditions varies depending on the economic opportunities available or when faced with more hostile political attitudes towards immigration (Vulpiani, op.cit.). It is worth noting the slight fall in discrimination complaints related to housing (from 20,2% of 2005, to the 6.3% in 2011 and the 4,8% in 2014). In fact, the economic crisis has had a negative impact on the housing market, and in the last 5 years this has increased the availability of houses for new customers, irrespective of their national or migrant background.

Concerning other spheres of discrimination, it is interesting to underline the low rates of complaints received regarding the education sector, relations with law enforcement agencies such as the police, the access to private services or the financial and health services.

Conversely, the increasing number of cases related to political speeches (sphere of Public life) and stigmatizing messages published on traditional and new media, is showed in the next table.

Table 4 - Increased percentage of cases of discrimination in media and public life



Source: Data elaborated by percentage of complaints recorded by Unar

However, this evident growing percentage of cases of discrimination cannot just be interpreted as the result of increasing complaints reported by offended parties, but especially as the effect of a monitoring activity made by the public institution or NGOs. In fact, even if evident cases of stigmatizing messages are publicized by media, the direct victims of collective discrimination are not used to denounce it. It is also the case of institutional discrimination, that in particular through local acts and rules has a relevant impact on the daily life of thousands of foreign nationals, but rarely come to the formalization of a complaint (Ambrosini, 2013).

Only the pro-active role of the equality body permits a punctual collection of data, in order to tackle the discriminatory acts and messages. Moreover, the analysis of the equality body is generally based on a “one ground approach” (ethnically based), while it is widely shared that unfair conducts can be also influenced by more than one aspect at the same time or in compound (ethnic origin, gender, age,



nationality, disabilities, gender identity, clothes, skin colour and phenotype characteristics, healthy condition, beliefs and religion, and so on). These multiple factors can have an intertwined effect, and are known as multiple, compound or intersectional discrimination (Makkonen, 2002; Moon, 2006; Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2007), but are rarely taken into account in a global analysis of the case by the equality bodies; neither are perceived by the victims, as well as are relevant in the management of the case due to the one ground European anti-discrimination legislation.

### 3. Old and new victims

Another interesting element is the juridical status of the victims. Data of the last ten years show that most people who reported discrimination were of Italian nationality (an average of around the 30%), mainly because they were witnesses of a discrimination against foreigners that don't want to present a complaint, because of the fear due to the weak juridical status, embarrassment or resignation; or because their nationality hides the naturalization of citizens with a foreign background. And actually, a huge amount of complaints are presented by naturalized people, or by foreigners with a long-term permission of stay, that have been living in Italy for more than 10 - 15 years. The higher length of permanence seems to guarantee an increased feeling of economic, political and social citizenship, and a better understanding and consciousness of acquired rights, that increases the courage to denounce in case of discrimination, otherwise addressed to silence for the irregular migrants or immigrants with a short term permission of stay, blackmailed for their juridical status.

A last aspect to be underlined is the nationality of victims. In 2014 the nationalities of victims were Italian (25,6%), Moroccan (16,3%), Rumanian (9,3%), that together represent of 51,2% of nationalities. The remaining nationalities were distributed among 14 different nationalities. As Italians, Rumanians are EU citizens, and are more conscious of their rights, as well as Moroccans, which are representatives of a mature long term immigration started in the '80 and '90 of the last century.

Another issue is the lacking presence of a specific category of victims, that is people with a Roma background. Roma are one of the most stigmatized people in Europe. The public perception of Roma as thieves and criminals, ascribed to them for centuries, pushed this people at the margin of European societies. Feelings of repugnance, disregard and full of hatred stigmatize "gypsy" people (Piasere, 2012, pp. 167-187), feeding antigypsism. Biases, prejudices and stereotypes towards Roma, perceived as disproportionately reliant on welfare or perpetrators of various kinds of crimes, is deeply rooted in several European countries, stigmatising anti-Roma rhetoric in political and media discourse (Council of Europe, 2012, pp.39-40). For other stigmatized communities, international social research highlighted a quite common reluctance to blame (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997) as well as the tendency to attribute their failing grade and negative outcomes to their own fault (Crocker & Major, 1994). This phenomenon can also be observed among the stigmatized Roma in Italy, and can cover a role in their lack of trust towards institutions.

It is widely evident at European level that many Roma do not know that discrimination is illegal and that if they are victims of harassments and unfair treatment they have the right to denounce the perpetrators. As showed in a European

report: “The lack of discrimination complaints is one of the main problems affecting the Roma community. Indirectly, this is also a problem for law enforcement agencies themselves as it indicates that Roma do not trust the police (that are viewed as the “enemy”) or that the Roma community is unaware of its right” (Sáez and Giménez, 2014). According to a European survey of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, between 65% and 100% of Roma didn’t report their experiences of personal victimization to the police, due to their suspicion and skepticism about institutions where to report complaints (FRA, 2011).

In spite of the cases of perceived discrimination, also in Italy it is quite rare to receive formal complaints by people with a Roma background. All cases of discrimination against Roma are presented by associations of human rights. In Italy, complaints concerning discriminations against Roma and managed by the Unar, were 58 in 2012, 139 in 2013, reaching 202 cases in 2014. Spheres of discrimination were the access to housing, employment, political speeches and stigmatizing messages in media and social networks. Considering the mistrust of Roma towards law enforcement agencies and institutions, these complaints had been presented by non- governmental organizations, and it is plausible that are small figures of a wider phenomenon.

Hate speech against Roma is widely diffused on Internet too, but it is difficult to be detected and tackled. Cyber racism is a new and increasing area of discrimination, that overcome national borders for its global presence. The Internet is increasingly becoming an environment where discriminatory conduct is manifested. Online racial discrimination stigmatizes entire communities and people according to their skin colour, religion, language, identities, using symbols and ugly epithets in order to marginalize and exclude. Social media risks to make migrants and people with an ethnic background more susceptible to experiencing racial discrimination (Kahn, Spencer, & Glaser, 2013). The anonymity and lack of responsibility offered by the web allows prejudice, stereotypes and hate speech to emerge strongly. The worse level of prejudice and stereotypes on the web are against Roma, with stereotyped comments and negative images widespread in facebook, twitter, blog and web sites. In Italy Roma are portrayed by traditional and new media always with negative representations and considered a people with low morality and criminal attitudes. Representations are not different by that of other European countries, where they are presented “as a threat, as instigators of violence and social unrest, as nomadic and migrants, as criminals, and as relying on and exploiting multiple forms of welfare”(OSCE, 2008, p. 27).

#### **4. Closing the gap: complaints and perceived discrimination**

Undoubtedly, equality bodies and law enforcement agencies tackle, monitor and report complaints of discrimination, but they can offer statistics far from the reality of discrimination lived or perceived by millions of migrants and ethnic minorities. In order to reduce this knowledge gap between complaints and individual perception of unfair treatments and discrimination experimented by migrants, statistical surveys on discrimination may increase the comprehension of the real dimension of the phenomenon. According to the surveys of the Eurobarometer on Discrimination of the European Commission (2015), discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin is still considered as the most widespread form of discrimination in the EU by the 64% of interviewed, followed by discrimination on the base of sexual orientation

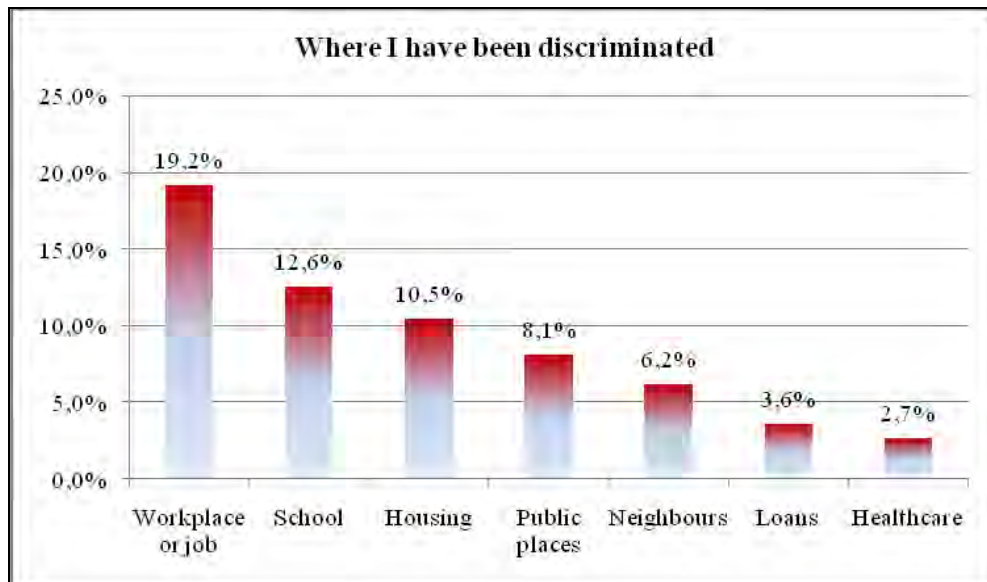
(58%), gender identity (56%), religion or belief (50%), disability (50%), age (42%) and gender (37%).

In order to verify and reduce the knowledge gap between the number of complaints received by the equality body and the perception of discrimination in Italy, in 2012 was launched the public inquiry "Condition and social integration of foreigners", conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), in which I had the opportunity to work. The inquiry offers an overview of statistical data on the wider reality of social integration and discrimination in Italy, detecting the experiences of discrimination suffered by immigrants in Italy. The survey was conducted through direct interviews with CAPI technology on a national sample of about 9,600 households with at least one foreign citizen, residing in 833 Italian municipalities, for a total of approximately 21,000 foreign residents surveyed. The foreign population of reference of the estimates was resident in the census 2011, amounting to just over 4 million people.

The data collected refers to 934,000 foreign nationals resident in Italy, equal to the 29.1% of the foreign population of 15 years and older, who reported that they have experienced some form of discrimination in different contexts (work, school and universities, access to credit, venues and public transport, access to health care, access to housing and relationships with neighbors, etc.). In general terms, the 28.4% of foreign nationals said that the reason for the discrimination is due to their status as "foreigners".

Regarding the data, 19.2% of foreigners claim to have been discriminated against in the workplace or in finding a job; 12.6% of foreigners 6 years and older reported having experienced discrimination at school, in search of a home (10.5%), in frictions that have arisen in public places, shops or transport (8.1%) or with its neighbours (6.2%), in the granting of loans (3.6%) or during visits and medical examinations (2.7%).

Table 5 - Spheres of discrimination

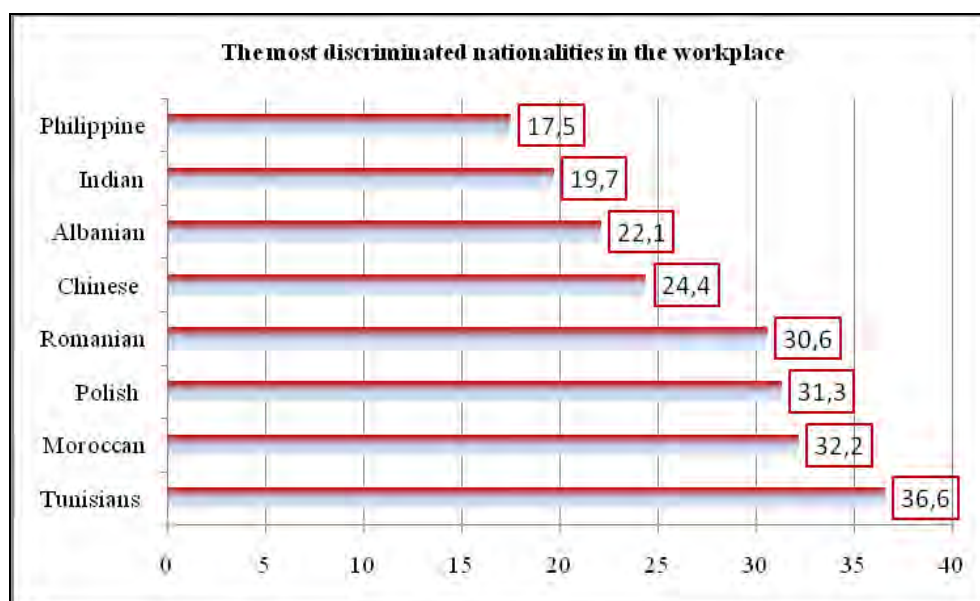


Source: Data processing from the inquiry "Condition and social integration of foreigners" (ISTAT, 2012)

Not being able to analyse the overall data in detail<sup>1</sup>, it is worth pointing out some aspects related to the world of work and school. In search of work and in the work context, 19.2% of foreigners who said they had experienced discrimination corresponds to about 555,000 people, a very large number of subjects who experienced predominantly unequal treatment in the employment context (16, 9%), as compared to discrimination encountered in the research phase of the job (9.3%).

In the workplace, greater difficulty was encountered by men (31.5%) than women (27.1%). Even the nationality has a strong bearing on discrimination, as among the top ten largest nationalities, first we have the Tunisians (36.6%) who believe they have been discriminated against, then Moroccans (32.2%), Polish (31.3 %) and Romanians (30.6%), followed by Chinese (24.4%), Albanians (22.1%), Indians (19.7%) and Filipinos (17.5%).

Table 6 - Discrimination - Nationalities in the workplace



Source: Data processing from the inquiry "Condition and social integration of foreigners" (ISTAT, 2012)

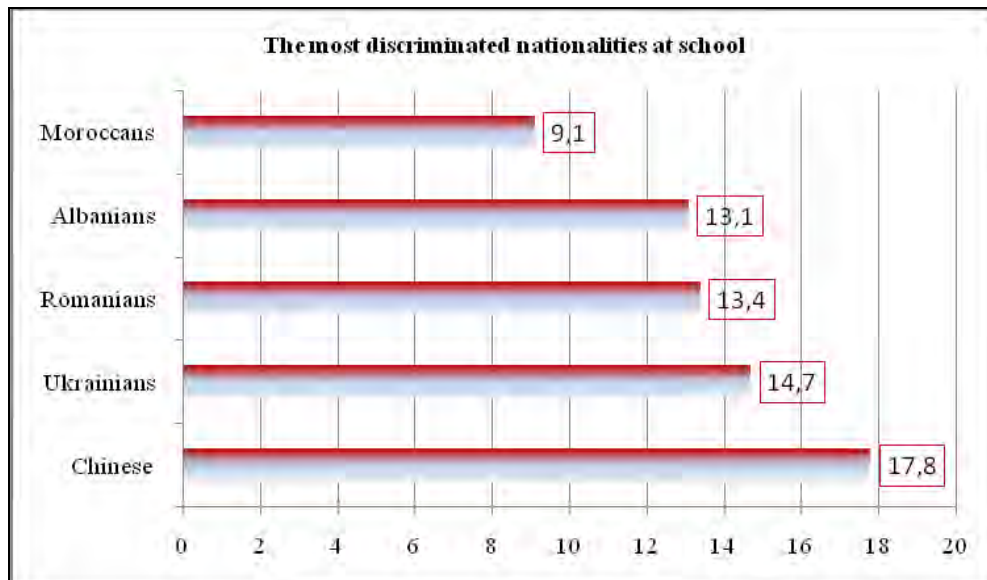
Salary gaps, unfair access and obstacles to employment, low qualification and risky jobs as well as harassments in the labour market are widely showed in literature (Zolberg, 1987; Fullin, 2011; Goodman-Delahunty & Foote, 2011). In the national inquiry carried out by ISTAT, when we enter into the workplace, we find similar experiences, as that 16.9% of foreign nationals have been discriminated against (17.7% of men compared to 15.9% of women), and of these, 49.6% worked in a hostile climate, experiencing excessive workloads (28.1%), lower wages than planned (24.1%), or with tasks of low importance (13.7%); and attribute discrimination in 90.9% of cases to their foreign origin, in 26.4% of cases to the lack of familiarity with the Italian language, in 15.6% by the colour of the skin (factor considered crucial by 21% of males compared to 9.2% of females), while the gender dimension seems to have had its impact on 23.5% of women compared to 3.3% of men.

<sup>1</sup> Please, refer to the survey results available on the web site [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)

Overall, the many different shades of a very complicated phenomenon such as discrimination in the labor market, insists that gender and nationality are dense categories of socio-cultural attributes and meanings, historically subject to constant change, and can have an impact not necessarily functional to the needs of economic and productive system. In other words, the prejudice seems to point towards emotional choices that have little to do with the economic efficiency of the right person at the right place.

Even though the universality of the right to education is guaranteed by 87.4% of the foreign students who have never suffered discrimination at school, there are 12.6% of the 891,000 foreign students, who instead have had bad experiences in the classroom. This shows that the constitutional principle is not fully fulfilled. In fact, if we analyse the experiences of discrimination in school of this minority of citizens of foreign origin from the age of 6, that amounts to around 112,261 children, in this group we find that in 78.4% of cases, bullying and harassment have been implemented by classmates, in 35% by teachers and in 8.8% by other school staff. With respect to the nationality of origin, young Chinese have suffered discrimination by classmates in 17.8% of cases, followed by Ukrainians (14.7%), Romanians (13.4%), Albanians (13.1%) and Moroccans (9.1%), with several differences between males (11%) and females (14.2%). The age has an impact on the risk of harassment and unequal treatment, which grows between 11-13 years (15.5%) and especially between 14 and 19 years (17.4%), with a greater spread of discrimination in this age group among females.

Table 7 - Discrimination - Nationalities at school



Source: Data processing from the inquiry "Condition and social integration of foreigners" (ISTAT, 2012)

Clearly, we must always be aware of the methodological fragility of a comparison between experienced discrimination and legal cases of discrimination objectively detected: in the first case we over-estimate due to a biased individual perception of unequal treatment; in the second case, we under-estimate due to the rigorous and careful evaluation of a complaint on the basis of provable facts. Within the limits set by such generalization, however, we could compare individual percep-

tions of discrimination arising from the aforementioned statistics with actual complaints of discrimination; so, it emerges a numerical chasm between the experienced discrimination, affecting almost one million of foreigners and complaints that an equality body can receive, that with difficulty reach 1,000 reports in a year, and that on a specific area such as school or work, will rarely exceed 100 reports a year.

### **...but we are still happy**

In an effort to understand the pathological aspects of social coexistence, we must not forget the silent majority who have improved their way of life through the migration. Some positive data from the survey should therefore be emphasized: first, foreign citizens do not perceive worrying levels of hostility against them, if we consider that only 2.5% had to move elsewhere and 1.2% are thinking about it, compared to the remaining 95.6% who have never had the need to move elsewhere because of discriminatory problems. In addition, when the issue of the level of overall satisfaction with their lives has been addressed, using a scale measuring satisfaction that ranges from a minimum score of "0" - corresponding to a complete dissatisfaction - up to a maximum score of "10" corresponding to a very high level of satisfaction, 60.8% of foreign nationals aged 14 and over who live in Italy placed above the level of satisfaction with the average of 7.7. In particular, satisfaction with one's life according to the answers provided by immigrant women had an average level of satisfaction "good", equal to 7.8. Since this is an average, it should also be said that the level 9 and 10, identifying a satisfaction "very high", reaches 30% among women and 25.7% among men. Moreover, among the most represented nationalities in Italy, the Filipinos and Moldovians show higher than average levels of satisfaction (respectively 8 and 7.9), together with Romanians, Polish and Indians (7.8), while the score decreases between Ukrainians and Moroccans (7.4) and among the Chinese (7.2). The geographical residence affects the level of satisfaction with their own life: in fact, people who live in the North-East of Italy shows satisfaction levels above the average in 64.7% of cases, together with those who reside in Central Italy (62.9) and North-West (61%); in the South instead, it is about 50% the number of people who express satisfaction levels above the average.

It is interesting to note that among those who have experienced some form of discrimination, the average level of satisfaction with their lives (7.3) was lower than the average level of those who have never suffered discrimination (7.8). Moreover, with age decreases satisfaction, starting from the high average levels between 14 and 17 years (8.2) and from 18 to 24 years (7.9), to the level of 7.7 between 25 and 44 years, falling to 7.5 by 45 years. Overall, it seems that a good level of social cohesion and trust in the host country, may inhibit the effect of xenophobic dynamics, reducing the impact of discrimination on the individual and on society.

This ray of light can encourage us, because it reveals that the majority of immigrants lead content and satisfied lives, but at the same time we must be careful of the illusory claims of successful integration, and remain aware that only continued qualitative and quantitative monitoring of xenophobia and discrimination can constantly redraw the variable geometry of the inter-ethnic tensions, in order to provide institutions with useful tools in their efforts to prevent conflict.

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