

Underreporting Discrimination cases and why we need Data Equality

Underreporting data on discrimination.

In today's world, discrimination seems to be a topic that even though there are a lot of campaigns on raising awareness to the public, state institutions are more aware of the importance of punishing these offences related to discrimination, still numbers of cases reported are low.

In a 2024 OECD working paper on well-being and inequalities it was stated that under-reporting is more common than over-reporting of the discriminatory events.

A 2023 Eurobarometer survey showed that half of respondents said that discrimination is widespread in their country but only 21 percent of the respondents reported a case of harassment or discrimination in the past year.

EU Agency for Fundamental Rights reported that there is a big gap between the official crimes and the actual experiences of people. Particularly affected were people that do not identify as heterosexual and people with disabilities. There are a lot of statistics that could be named and cited but they all state the obvious that the reporting of cases of discrimination is low in comparison with the number of cases there are happening in everyday life.

What causes the phenomenon of underreporting?

In a 2024 article of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights a lot of reasons were mentioned on why the afflicted do not report crimes. The reasons ranged from very serious to less serious. Many victims responded that they did not report the crime because according to them the incident was not that serious as for them to report it. Moreover, they did not want anyone to know what happened and sought for the help of their friends and family to resolve it.

When it came to state institutions a concerning majority of victims stated that they had very low trust in police and that the authorities would do anything about the incident.

The ones that did report the incidents to the police stated that reporting is too much of a burden as the procedure are perceived as too bureaucratic, are not convenient and require a lot of time to be completed.

This brings light to the main reason why Data Equality was found to be necessary and the stakeholders that the project works with are law enforcement agencies and judicial organs and civil society organizations. The reason is the improvement of the procedure; for it to become less bureaucratic and more accommodating to the citizens.

Another reason why underreporting is high in statistics is that victims do not report due to fear and shame. Fear is elaborated as in fear from the reaction/intimidation by the perpetrator, fearing retaliations to issues such as residence permits, visa status, fear of losing children, feeling ashamed, or being blamed for the crime.

Statistics show the same as well. One in ten responders to the Fundamental Rights Survey stated that they did not report incidents to the police because they were scared from reprisals.

20% of cases when it came to sexual partners violence said that they did not report the crimes out of fear. 11% of the cases of physical violence from their partners feared to report the crime. One in five women do not report cases of sexual violence because they are ashamed and embarrassed to do so.

20% of the respondents of the FRA survey “LGBTIQ at a crossroads: progress and challenges” done in 2024 said that they did not report the hate motivated attacks physical and sexual because they did not want anyone to know out of shame.

Another FRA report on “Severe labour exploitation, workers’ perspectives” found that one of the main reasons that victims of labour exploitation with irregular residence status did not report their cases to the police out of fear of being returned to their country of origin.

Statistics and studies mentioned here but not only concluded that underreporting is relevant still because of the social and emotional aspects that accompany a victim or the party that is affiliated with the crime. The law and the law enforcement agencies are there to support them.

Hence the Data Equality project saw the need for a new way of reporting and dealing with the way law enforcement agencies and victims and all the parties involved deal with data when it comes to facilitating the way of the victims to the law enforcement agencies and judicial organs. The underreporting of discrimination constitutes a major challenge for equality and justice policies. Victims frequently refrain from reporting incidents due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust

in institutions, difficulties in proving discrimination, social stigma, and limited awareness of their rights. As a result, official statistics often underestimate the true prevalence of discrimination.

DATA EQUALITY project addresses this issue by promoting standardized and inclusive methods of collecting, analysing, and exchanging equality data, thereby helping institutions identify patterns of discrimination that would otherwise remain invisible.

The DATA EQUALITY project matters because it addresses a fundamental challenge in the fight against discrimination: the lack of reliable and comprehensive data. By improving the collection, analysis, and use of equality data, the project helps make discrimination visible, supports evidence-based policymaking, strengthens accountability, and contributes to the development of more inclusive, impartial and unbiased societies.



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