

Re-You-rEU

MED-looking Youth Shaping EU Policy for a "Ready Europe"

A project promoted by



in cooperation with

Gabinet d'Estudis Socials (Barcelona) and Antigone (Thessaloniki)

Youth and racism in Italy

Introduction

What do young people think about racism worryingly spreading within European societies? Do they feel they may play an active role in opposing it? And How?

Lunaria, in cooperation Barcelona's *Gabinet d'Estudis Socials* and the Thessaloniki *Antigone Observatory - Racism Information and Documentation Centre*, has carried out a consultation of youth aged between 18 and 30 years to find answers to these questions. The consultation is one of the activities implemented within the *Re-YOU-Reu MED-looking Youth Shaping EU Policy for a "Ready Europe"* project, supported by the *Erasmus+* program with the aim, to prevent and oppose racism and hate speech diffusion at the local, national and European levels, to develop a structured dialogue between the younger generations and local governments in Rome, Barcelona and Thessaloniki.

Keeping in mind the kinds of communication, expression and grouping together characterizing today's young people, the aim has been to gather useful information and opinions of youth to better understand which policies and initiatives could be most effective in opposing racism among peers.

The consultation has taken place **from May until August 2018** using two working methodologies: in-persons semi-structured interviews with at least 10 young residents in each one of the three cities involved in the project and an online consultation tool conducted through a e- questionnaire.

In Italy, 11 in-person interviews have been carried out in Rome and **98 young people**, residents in 62 Italian cities, have filled-in the online questionnaire. Although the consultation did not have any ambition of representativeness, it allowed to gather useful information and food for thought.

1. In-person interview results' analysis

The interviews have taken place in four socialization spaces: the Villa Mercede library (Tiburtino neighborhood), Vittorio Emanuele square, Galilei technical high school and at the Pigneto neighborhood. 6 girls and 5 boys have been interviewed, aged between 18 and 30 years, with the main objective to inquire about the perceptions of racism in a randomly chosen group of young persons who are *not active* in youth or human rights organizations.

1.1 Racism is a problem

The spreading of racism is considered a worrying phenomenon by all the interviewed persons, even if only two of them have declared to have had direct experiences of it. For one *it is not too worrying* (I. 10). Superiority, barriers, "hate for the different", hostility, wickedness, fear, selfishness and individualism are the terms most commonly used to define it. Ten out of eleven identify it with forms of xenophobia against migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees to Italy and Europe. Racism worries not only for the direct effects on people who are victims of it, but also for its cultural and social impact: *racism generates hate which is unpleasant for everybody; there is racism in daily life, in every-day relations, with fear arising and all the rest* (I.2).

The assessment of the dimensions of racism (social behaviors, media and governmental policies) is more differentiated. For two young people only political action and propaganda play a fundamental role (I.10 e I.11). In both cases the explicit reference is to the current political debate on migration policies: *the latest example is the new Interior Minister against disembarkations, with all the connected economic interests being given priority over human beings. That's in my opinion the worst thing* (I.10); *I believe that the political movements which have won the elections are really a problem for society's cultural direction* (I. 11). Two youth express concern for all three dimensions (I. 1, 2); two (I. 2 e I.3) give great importance to the negative story telling on migrations by TVs, newspapers and social networks. *On TVs it is worse because people watch them and possibly then imitate what is being reported; TV news influence a lot* (I.3); *Let's say that media may also create empathy around the topic (...) often, in TV shows when there are funny parts in most cases actors imitate foreigners because they are .. anyway, they are different from us and rightly so they speak a different language and therefore when they speak ours they sound funny.* (I.9)

But the greatest interest arises with regard to daily discriminatory and racist behaviors (I. 2, I.4, I.6, I.8 e I.9), those experienced indirectly in schools (I.8 e I.9), on public transportation (I. 1, I.2, I.6, I.8 e I.9) and in the personal difficulty to have relations with domestic peers (I.4).

Not all the young people interviewed are in the position to tell directly experienced episodes of racism, public buses appear to be the one most easily associated with discriminations towards foreign citizens: *I think of when on the bus the controller asks me for the ticket and I say I have a pass, which he does not want to see, while to people looking immigrants controllers ask for everything and even give them fines* (I.1); *on public buses I see people seating*

away from immigrants. Above all the elderly (I.6); in public buses it happens often to have a free seat next to me and people prefer to stand up for thirty minutes because they don't want to seat (I. 5). Violent behaviors in school have been reported only in one case (I.7), while insults, jokes and nasty remarks (*negro*) are considered ordinary (I.7 e I.8).

1.2 What leads to discrimination?

With various accents and motivations, according to the interviewed young people the roots for the spreading of racism are cultural and connected to identity, on one hand, while, on the other, are socio-economic. Fear and hostility towards differences are mentioned by two (I.1 e I. 8). "Fear" is interpreted as a psychological phenomenon (I.1), but also related to the public debate about migrations, to the perception of a *danger to be invaded* (I.8) and to the connection between immigration and criminality proposed by media: *violence, events reported by the TV news have a significant influence* (I.3).

The general perception on the supposed competition between national and foreign citizens on the labor market and social services is another mentioned trend: *I remember the story, which people believe are unjustified, of the daily 35 euro for immigrants. They say foreigners come here, do nothing and we even give money to them* (I.1); *they receive a preferential treatment and compared to Italians they are favored. One of the main complaints is that immigrants steal our jobs* (I.8).

However the direct and explicit reference to the role of the economic and social crisis started in 2008 in the spreading of hostile behaviors towards migrants and asylum-seekers emerge in one case only: *causes are to be searched mostly in the economic aspects, for example within the labor world, perhaps because Italians, like all European peoples, see themselves in difficulty, in an economic crisis and in a labor market crisis and from certain point of view they see their jobs stolen from low-wage labor force and all the consequences of this, because there is no equality, there is no possibility all live in a decent way* (I.10).

To summarize, migrants are seen as cause for troubles disturbing society's balance and normality. *Scapegoats*. (I.4).

Fully beyond is the definition of racism as fashion among youth: *Right now it looks like a fashion among young people to me, they don't have a specific reason to be racist, but they are. There is no point. They don't even know themselves why. They simply imitate others*. (I.7).

1.3 Acting against racism. The role of youth, of institutions and of civil society.

The interviewed youth seem to be aware of the complexity of causes for the spreading of discriminations, racist hate speech and violence and towards it tend to consider irrelevant the role they may play to prevent and oppose racism. The point of view they express retain a subjective and individual dimension, both when supposing to be able to intervene and when feeling that one cannot/must not act. Nobody mentioned direct involvement within social spaces, such as the engagement with youth, antiracist or human rights associations.

For three, young people can do little or nothing. For all of them racism has to do with hard to change people's mentality. What can be done is *to avoid being influenced by past mentalities* (I.2). But not doing anything may also mean to practice equality: *Not doing anything is right because when you do something means that there is a difference. As young people we should behave with them like with anybody else* (I.6); not practice any kind of difference (I.8).

Individual acting is basically identified with one's own daily behavior and the ability to have social relations "without walls": *if you behave well towards others, something will improve* (I.1); *it's necessary to help and integrate, to socialize, not to isolate within a group, but rather try to open your mind* (I.3); *to create friendship, love relations, it doesn't matter. It's crucial.* (I.5).

Three girls underline the importance of *working on oneself* (I.4) to avoid stereotypes and prejudices: *it is necessary to do something for oneself because if we feel well with ourselves we may feel well with everybody* (I.10); *to travel and open our minds to what is new* (I.11).

The role attributed to civil society organizations is in line with the perception of individual potentials to start processes of change. Those thinking that *racism is in the racist's head* (I.2) and that *people continue to believe what they believe* (I.6), feels also that collective subjects (associations and institutions) cannot stop the spreading of racism. Intercultural events and awareness-raising campaigns (I.3), (I.4), (I.7) are proposed by young people feeling that racism has cultural roots. To avoid segregation and ghetto-like dimensions and *to create equality situations* (I.4), fighting against racism however means above all to promote the social and work inclusion of foreign citizens.

Associations should then host and find jobs, valorizing the migrants' skills (I.8), provide assistance (I.9), create socialization and dialogue spaces (I.4) because *we should speak more, listen more, interact more with these people to understand that there is nothing wrong about them* (I.8). One of the interviewed girls underline that associations *should be active without taking away money from structures which are involved in true integration, thus supporting these kinds of social activities. And this would help making integration in schools, in working places, in squares, real* (I.10), which implicitly refers to "rumors" in the Italian public debate about the misuse of public resources by civil society organizations active for the hosting and solidarity with migrants and refugees.

Local institutions are those mostly expected to promote migrants' inclusion to facilitate their access to education (I.2, I.10, I.11), training (I.11), in the labor market and social services, (I.1, I.8, I.11), but also the interaction and communication between natives and migrants (I.3). Thanks to the promotion of first-hand knowledge of those who have gone through migration, schools are considered fundamental to oppose racism. *Institutions could, I don't know, send somebody into schools to open people's eyes. Not people working in offices, but persons with direct experiences, volunteers, Italians who have migrated bringing their culture to other countries, so that it may be explained why people emigrate.* (I.7).

To modify the collective consciousness, some feel that awareness-raising projects improving relations between migrants and the territories in which they live through the immigrant's inclusion in socially useful initiatives, would be useful, because in this way *native citizens could appreciate the immigrants' positive contribution to the area hosting them and this is for sure a right integration model. The refugee would be then not a foreigner, but somebody doing something for the whole society and the common good.* (I.10).

National institutions should facilitate the issuing of permits to stay (I.5), which are considered fundamental to be able to work.

In two interviews the fight against racism is related to the one against social inequalities characterizing Italian society. *Institutions should bring everybody to the same level, without inequalities among the rich and the poor (I.3); safeguard a decent life for everybody, not only those coming to our country from another country, but also for those born here, for those who are citizens of this country. In this way we can oppose racism, because you don't create any gap, nobody, in quotation marks, steals anything to anybody else and everybody may live in dignity (I.10).*

European institutions are mentioned by three young people, above all with regard to migration, asylum and border control policies. The need for common policies is expressed, although with various accents, by all three of them. Europe should *open European borders, it's a problem for which all countries should take responsibility for (I.7). The distribution (of migrants - editor's note) might probably be a solution. But it cannot be mandatory...or better said, there could be a discussion about it, but a country which does not want migrants in its territory, it cannot be forced (I.8). It is not right that countries act in different ways or that they may be obliged to take different decisions from one another. Because Europe is by now almost one country. This could also contribute to decrease the hate that we see growing (I.11).*

1.4 Communicating equality

Communication is considered very important to oppose the spreading of discriminatory and aggressive speech against migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. The press, TVs and social media are the **communication channels** assessed as the most influential ones in orienting public opinion. Social media (I.1, I.6, I.8, I.9, I.11) and education in schools (I.2, I.3, I.4) are those to be given priority to raise young people's awareness. In the Internet well-known public figures *could give a useful contribution by taking side (I.6).*

Only one of the girls interviewed feels that it is necessary to go to the squares in real life, *in squares people talk to each other, they meet (I.10).*

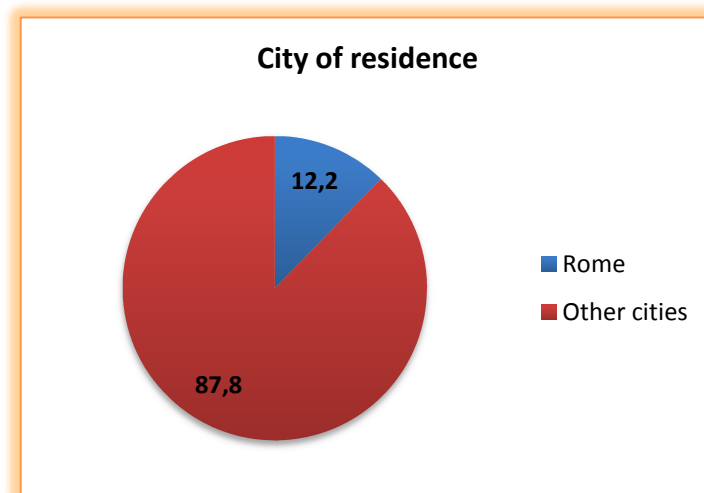
Equality and humanity are the **principles and arguments** to be used as leverages to overcome negative images of which migrants are victims and discourage discriminatory and racist practices. *We are all equal, we are all human being (I.4, I.6, I.10).* Together with those expressing trust that it is possible to convince racists to change idea - *I would ask them to think about what bothers them and create their fear (I.2),* there are others arguing that racists should be reminded that *racism is wrong, from an ethical point of view (I.6)* and those who feel that the priority should be given to build relations, share experiences and the history of those emigrating (I.8, I.9, I.11) to favor knowledge and the understanding of the motivations originating migrations. The suggestion is *Start from the lives of the people who have come here (I.9),* because the story telling and witnessing are rated as more powerful than any other form of communication: *I believe that anybody would be happy to stay at his or her own place. Happy also to travel, but travelling is something else from running away. If a migrant leaves home it is because he or she is forced to do so, with real reasons to leave and they should be made explicit. If in your country there is a war, you are forced to leave; if you don't have something to eat, you cannot act differently because otherwise you would die or see those you love dying and you're forced to leave. This is, in my opinion, what should be made clear to those*

receiving migrants.(I.11). Finally, going abroad and travel to see situations which function better than here (I.1) is considered important.

Only five of the eleven interviewed young people declared themselves available to personally participate in an awareness-raising campaign. Among the motivations indicated are the lack of time and the missing trust in the possibility to change the minds of persons with stereotypes and prejudices. Only two girls have manifested their availability with two interesting comments: *I hope that not only decisions against, but also for* (I.4); *I repeat, for me it's like we should all start again from zero. With humility from everybody's part, from institutions to us individuals, to give everybody, because I say it again, not only migrants are facing problems now, but also the Italians. If they understand that we are all on the same boat and, as human being, they should all have the same chances from institutions, they could all get together rather than living the ones against the others* (I.10). In the first case there is a criticism against governmental policies giving priority to opposing migrations over inclusion. In the second one a strong belief emerges for the need that institutions engage themselves for economic and social policies to improve the quality of life of both national and foreign citizens, avoiding that the ones are against the others.

2. The online consultation results

The online consultation through a structured questionnaire has involved **98 youth aged between 18 and 30 years, living in 62 cities.**

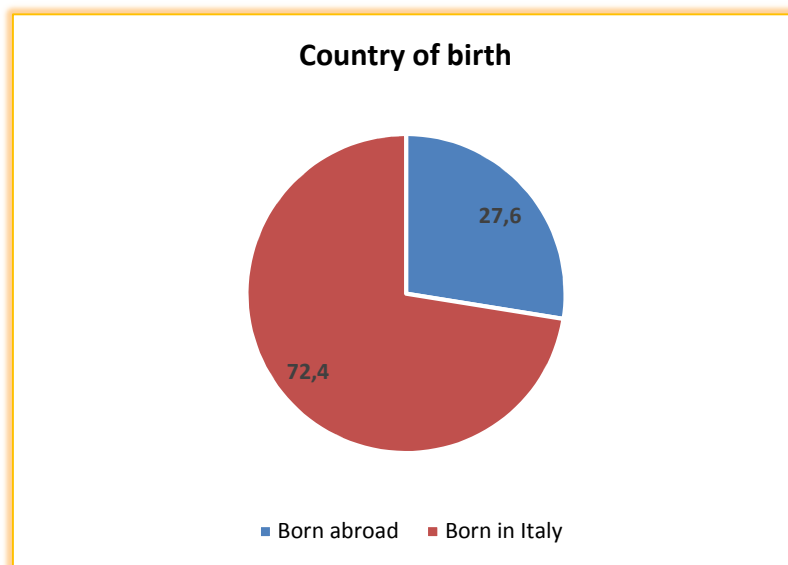
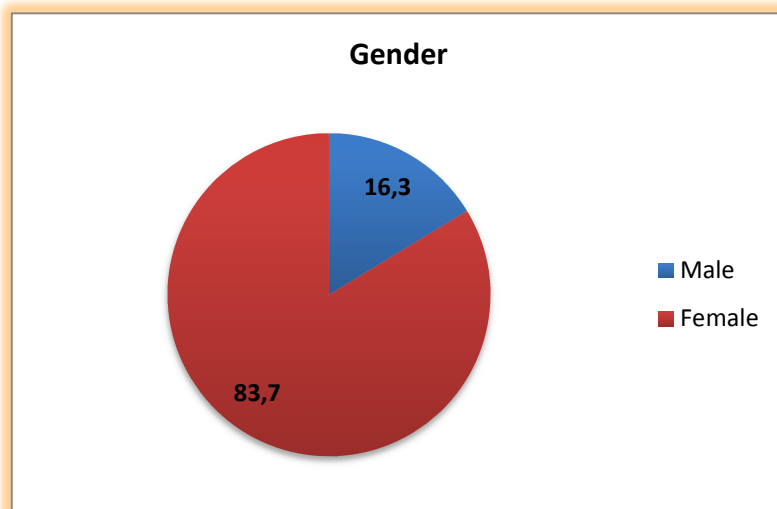


The questionnaire has been shared through the *Chronicle of ordinary racism* newsletter which reaches persons who are **already aware** of the importance of discriminations and racism. Also in this case the attempt has been to study current perceptions of racism (definitions, direct experiences, main elements of self and outside representation of one's own subjectivity, identification of the main causes and of those mostly responsible for it), but a greater attention has been paid to collect opinions on institutional and civil society NGOs'

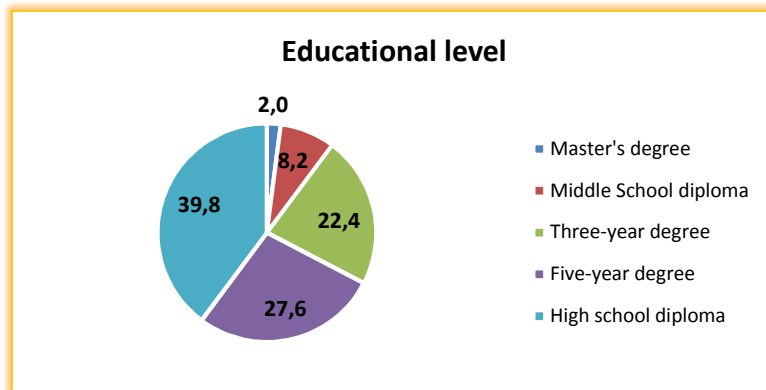
policies, initiatives, tools and arguments considered most effective to oppose the spreading of racism among youth.

2.1 The respondents' profile

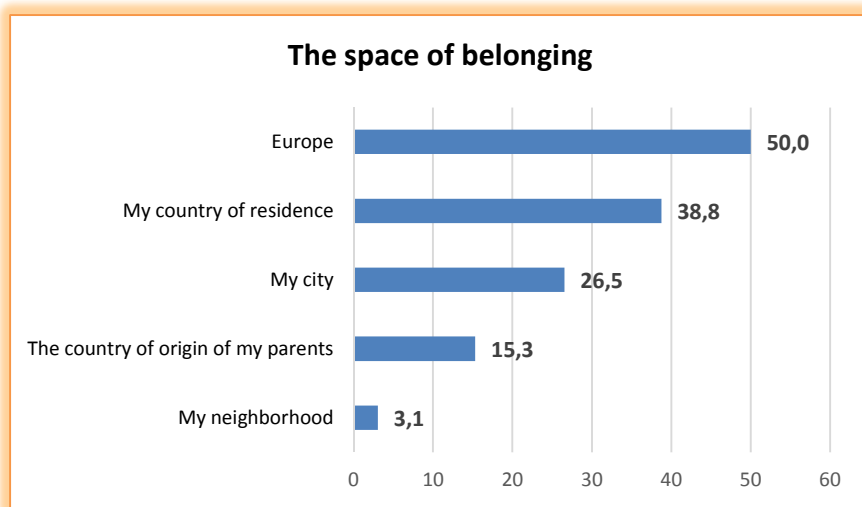
The large majority has been **girls** (83.7%), with Italian citizenship (90.8%), 26.7% of whom have been born abroad.



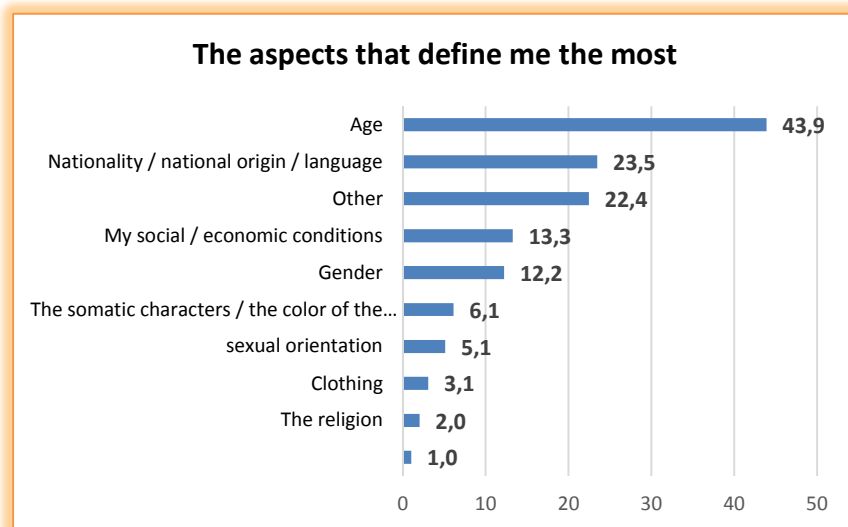
The majority of the respondents has a higher education degree (39.8%), 27.8% with a MA and 22.4% a BA. Limited the percentage of those with a junior high school diploma only (8.2%) or with post-graduate degrees (2.0%).



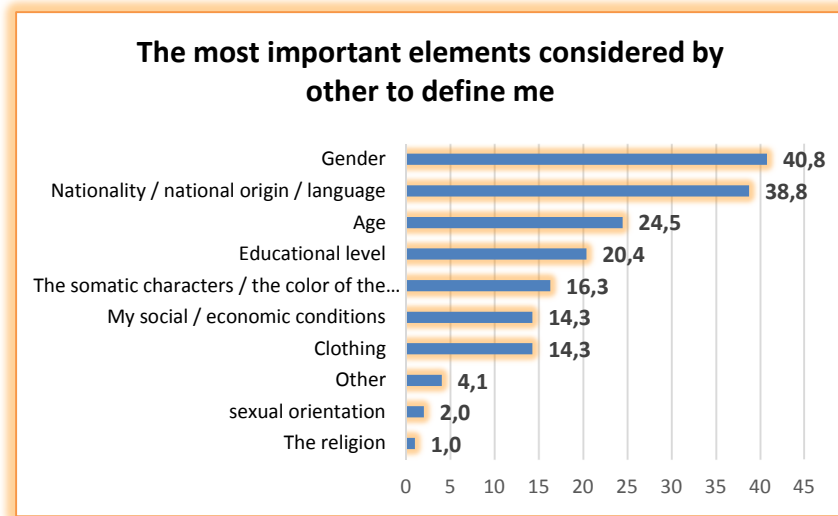
For half of the respondents **Europe** is considered the space of belonging, followed by the country of residence (38.8%) and only after that the city of residence (26.5%).



The **level of education** (43.9%), age (23.5%) and nationality / national origin / mother tongue (22.4%) are the elements considered most important to define oneself (self-portrayal).



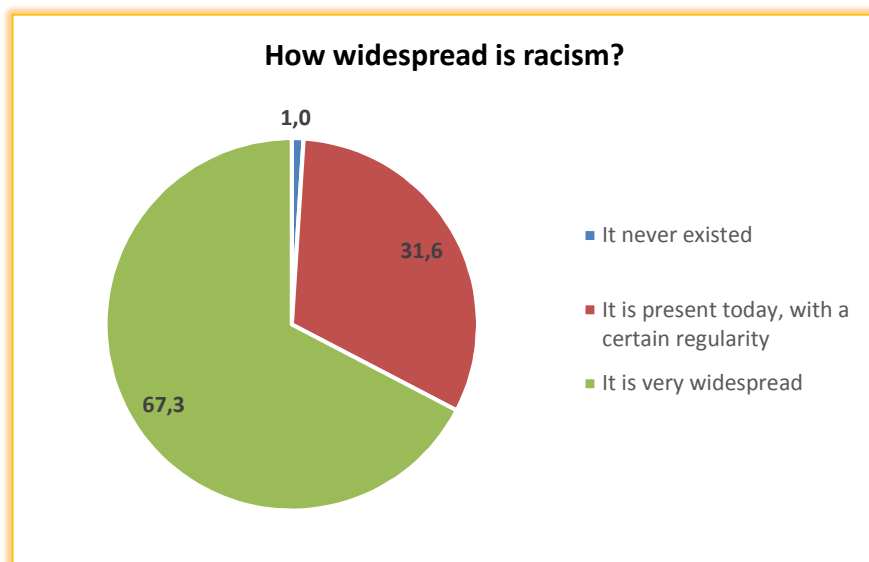
Gender (40.8%), together with nationality / national origin / mother tongue (38.8%) and age (24.5%), are more often indicated as the most important elements considered by other people when representing them.

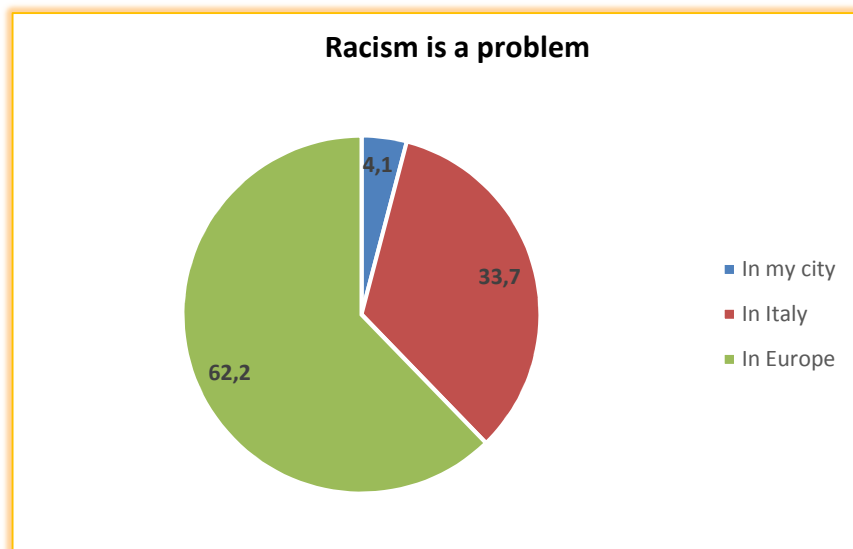


2.2 Definition and forms of daily racism

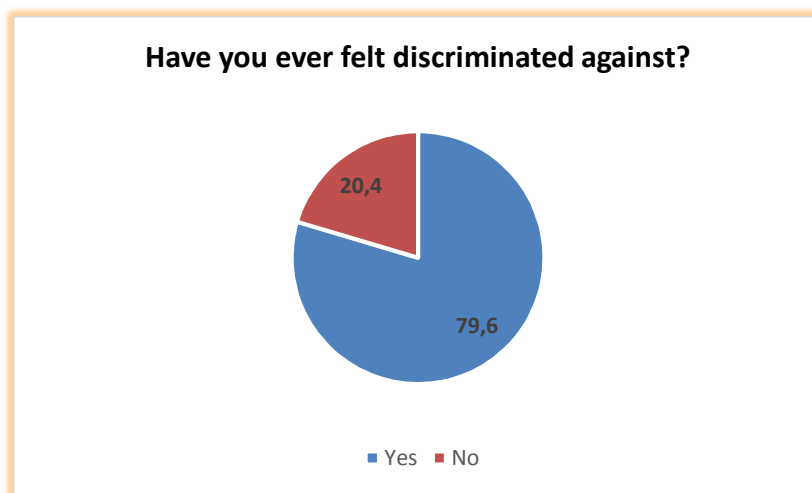
For 68.4% of the respondents, racism corresponds to the conviction, by a person or by a social group, of superiority towards others with regard to nationality, national origin, ethnic belonging, cultural or religious diversity and following discrimination and verbal or physical violence, while 16.3% identifies it as a process of denial and violation of human dignity. Much lower the percentage of those defining it as a general superiority behavior on the basis of which some social groups feel themselves superior or as theory of the superiority of one "race" vis-à-vis others.

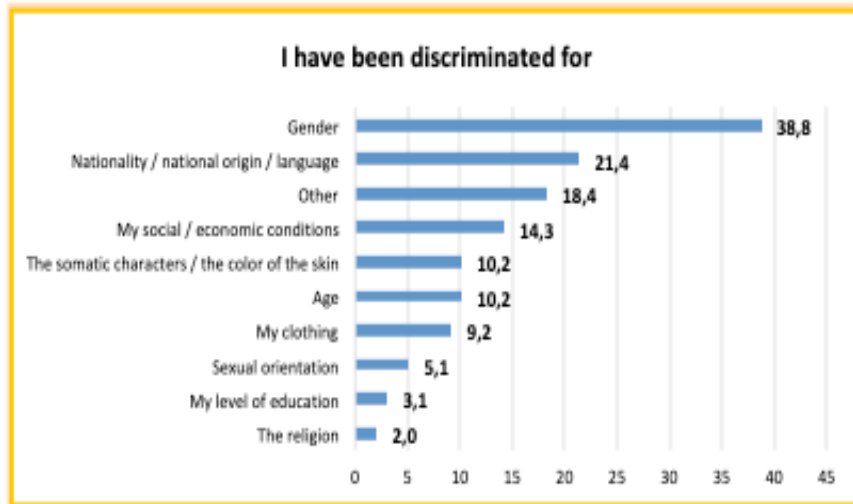
A very large part of them believes that **racism is very widespread** (67.3%) or that it may be detected with a certain regularity (31.6%) and defines it as a European problem (62.2%). Around one third sees it as an Italian problem (33.7%), while only 4.1% connects it to his / her own city.



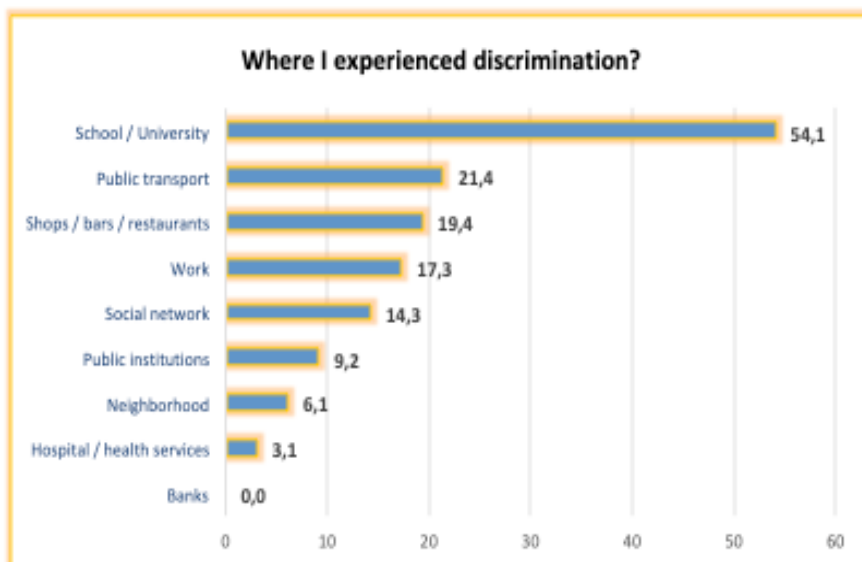


The largest part of respondents declares to have had a **discrimination experience** (79.6%) and that the first discriminating factor has been **gender** (38.8%) followed by nationality / national origin / mother tongue (21.4%).



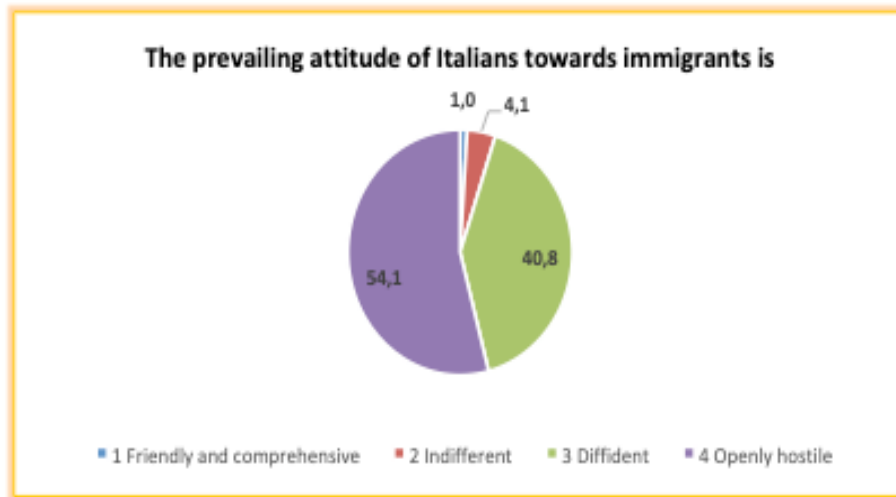


School and university (54.1%), public transportation (21.4%), shops (19.4%), work (17.3%) and social networks (14.3%) are the most often mentioned spaces in which discrimination has been perceived / experienced.

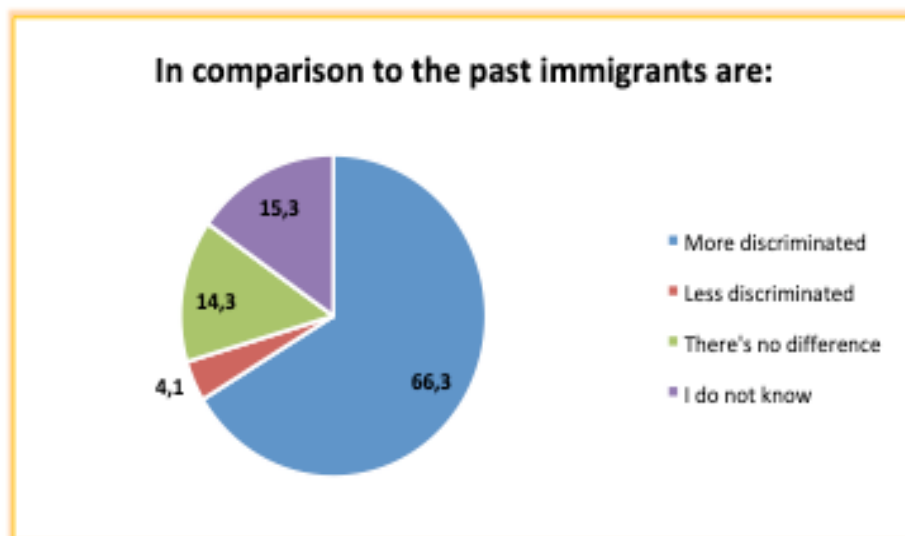


2.3 Italians and migrants from the point of view of view of youth

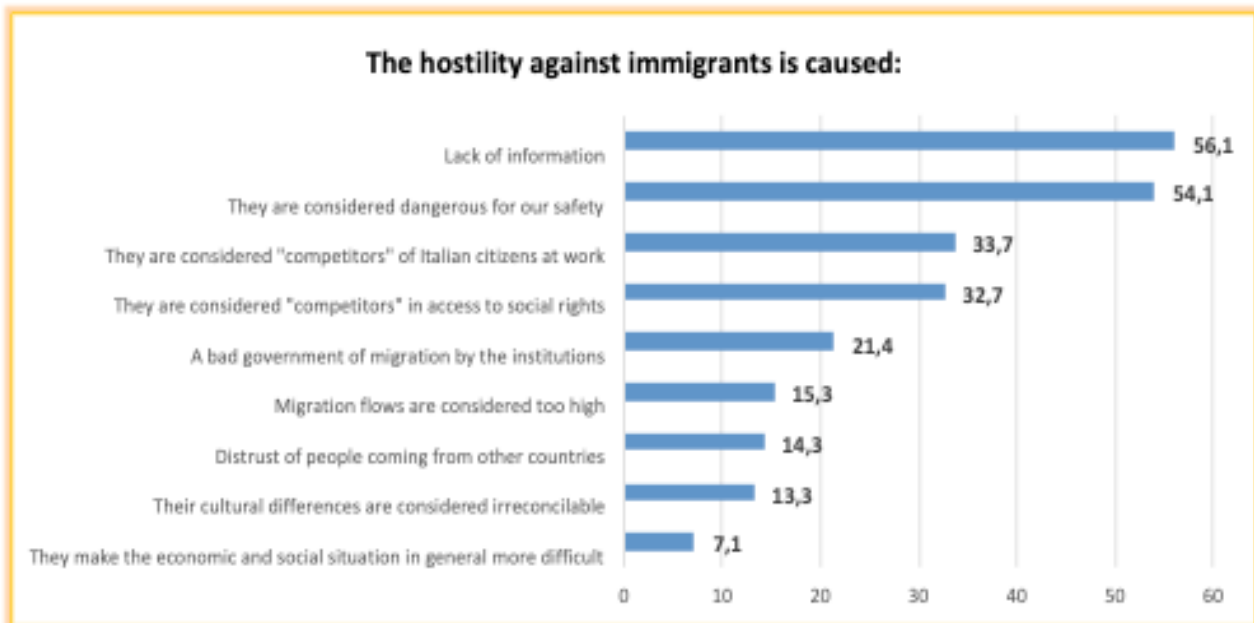
According to the majority of young people who have participated in the online consultation, Italian citizens are **openly hostile (54.1%)** or at least **distrustful (40.8%)** towards immigrated ones. Only 4.1% believes that it is in fact indifferent.



The largely shared opinion is that immigrant citizens **are today more discriminated in comparison to the past** (66.3%), 15.3% declares not to be able to answer, only 14.3% feels that there is no difference between the situation in the present and in the past.

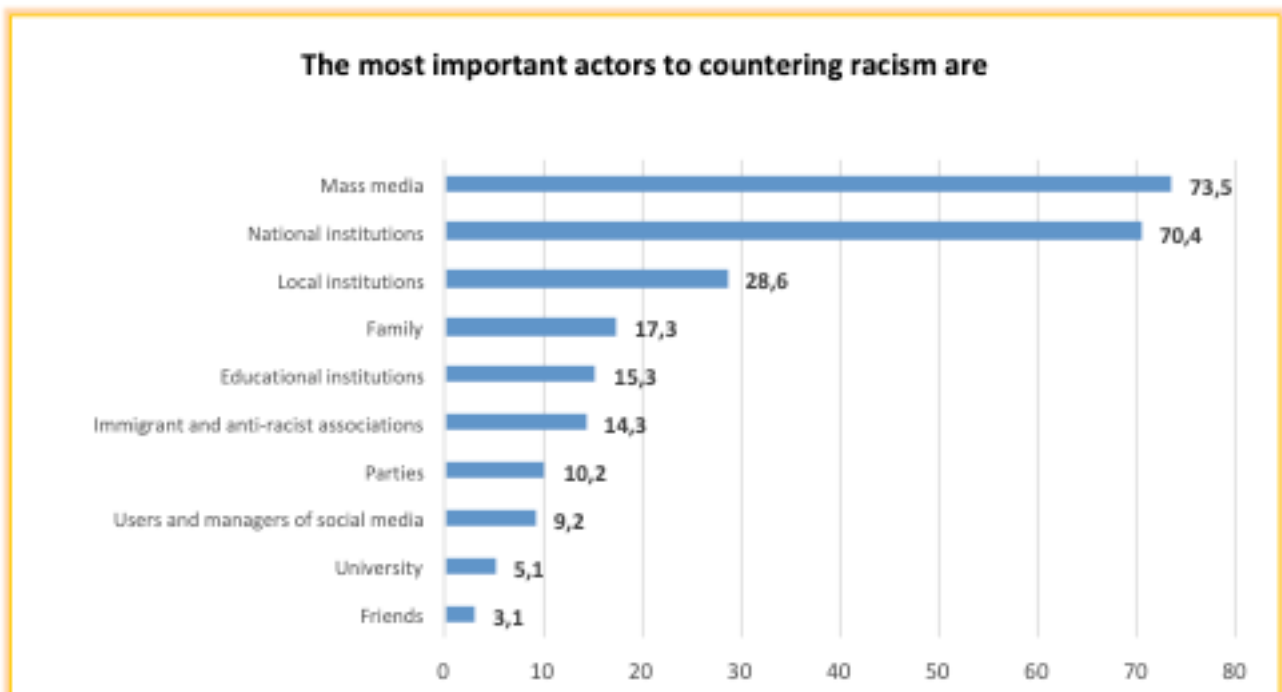


Answers are more differentiated with regard to the causes from which hostility behaviors towards migrants originate. With a maximum of two answers the identified causes include **the lack of information** (56.1%) and the conviction that **migrants are dangerous for our safety** (54.1%). The other more often mentioned causes promoting mistrust and hostility to foreign citizens are the competition on the labor market (33.7%), the access to social rights (32.7%) and the bad management of migrations (21.4%)

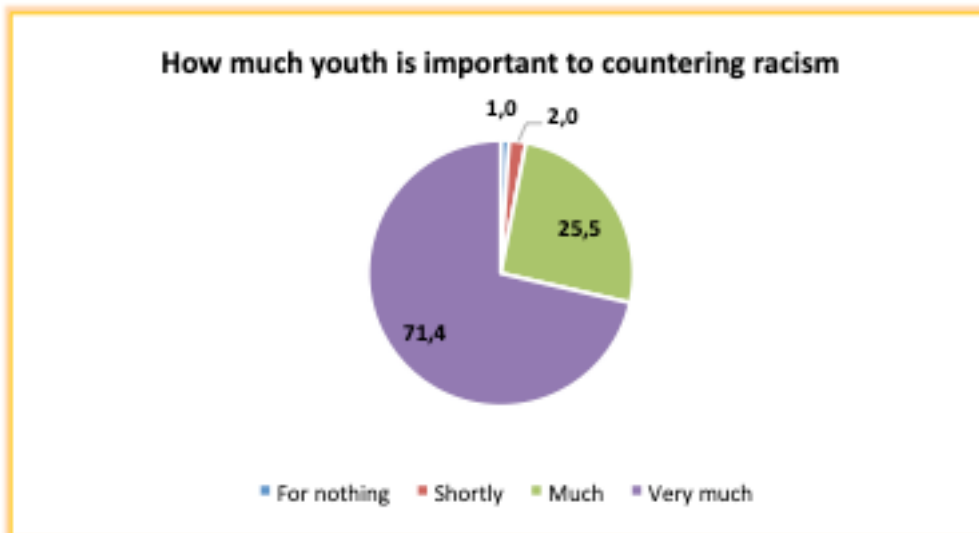


2.4 Who and how the spreading of racism among youth may be opposed?

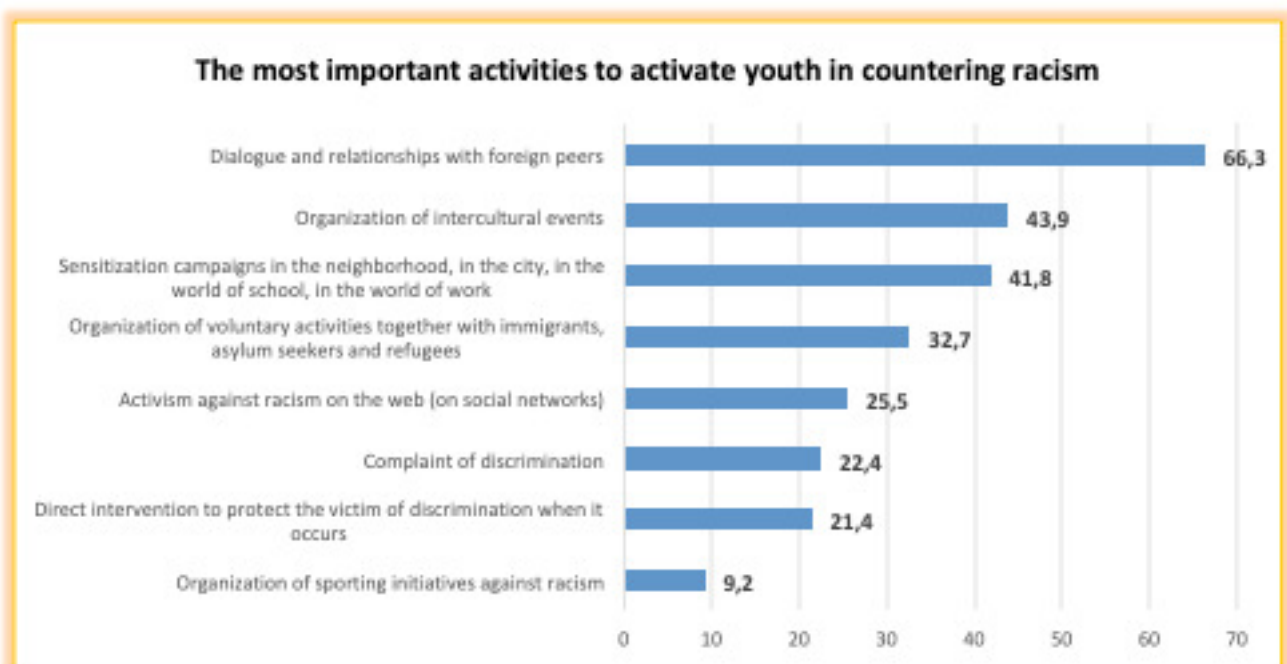
Invited to give a maximum of three answers, the young people have indicated the greatest responsibility to combat racism first of all to **mass media** (73,5%) and **national institutions** (70,4%). Local institutions (28,6%), families (17,3%), schools (15,3%) and immigrants and antiracist associations (14,3%) follow. Other collective actors are considered less relevant.



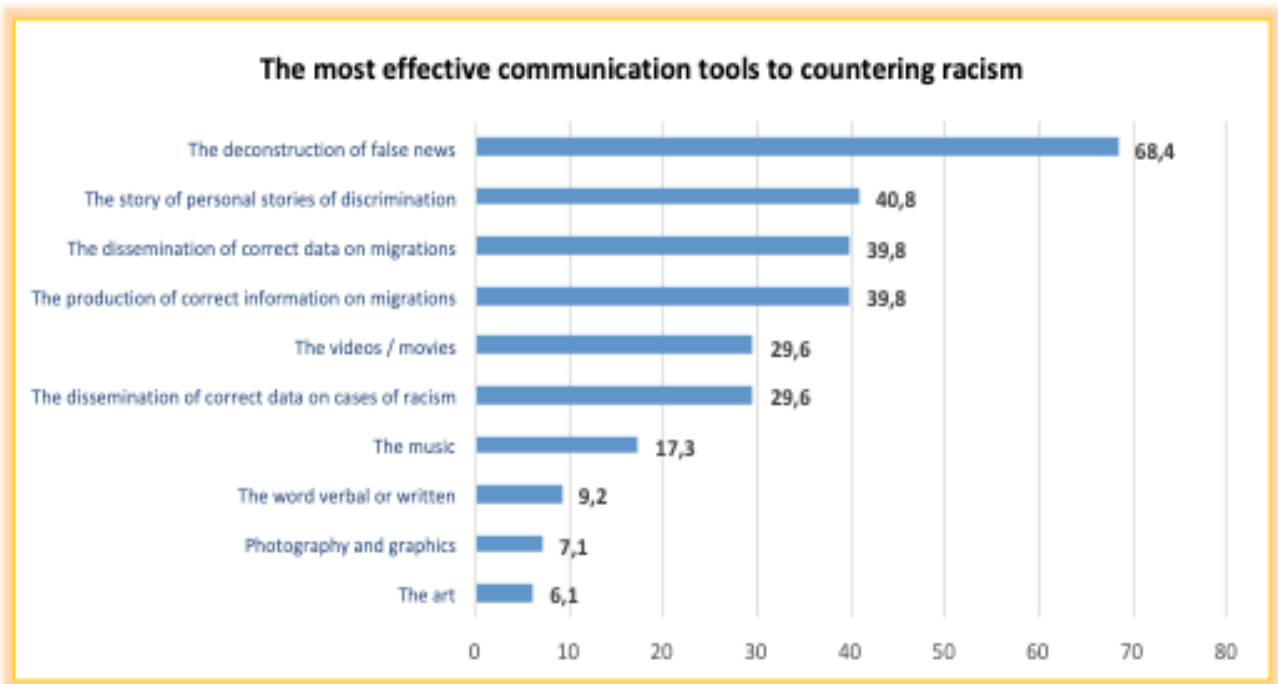
Together with these collective actors, the importance of the direct engagement by young people is rated as **very much** (71.4%) or **much** (25.5%).



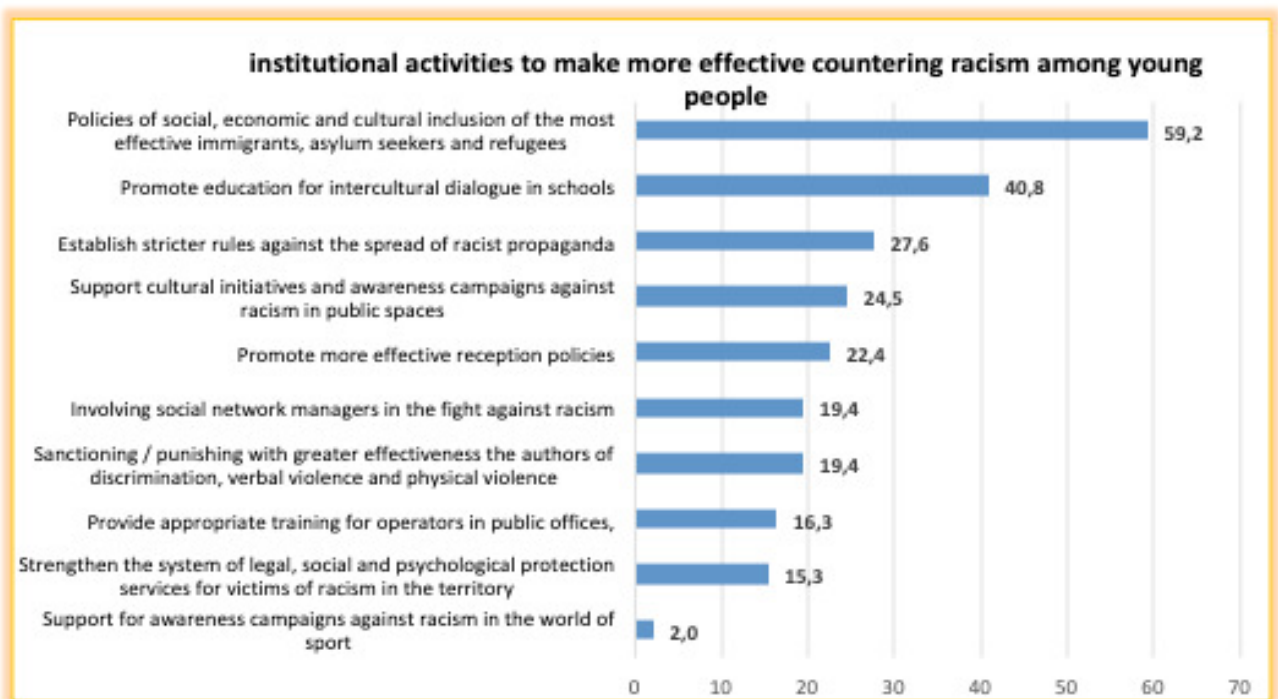
The most frequently suggested priorities (with the possibility to indicate three answers) to oppose the spreading of racism among youth have been **dialogue and the building of relations with foreign peers** (66.3%), followed by **the organization of intercultural events** (43.9%) and by the promotion of **awareness-raising campaigns** in one's own neighborhood, at school or at work (41.8%).



With regard to communication: **de-masking fake news** (68.4%), **sharing personal discrimination experiences** (40.8%), **disseminating data and the production of correct information about migrations** (39.8%) are considered the most important activities to activate youth against racism.



With the possibility to give three answers, the institutions interested in preventing the spreading of racism among youth should concentrate on the **promotion of policies for the migrants' social, economic and cultural inclusion (59.2%)** and on **intercultural education in schools (40.8%)**. Most often suggested actions are stricter rules against the circulation of racist propaganda (27.6%), the support to cultural events and awareness-raising campaigns (24.5%) and the implementation of more effective hosting policies (22.4%). The other activities have been selected with a percentage lower than 20%.



Only a few of the respondents have accepted the invitation to add, at the end of the questionnaire, proposals and personal comments. The most recurrent **proposal** among those shared is the organization of meetings / workshops in schools and school classes with the migrants and the victims of discrimination as main actors. One respondent has proposed to involve teachers in collecting “with no censorship” questions by students and their families and to organize meetings with victims of discrimination to develop open discussions with students, teachers and families. The idea of including the topic of immigration in school and university curricula has also been mentioned.

Overall, the **development of opportunities favoring relations and interaction** among National and foreign citizens appears to be the most effective key to prevent and oppose the spreading of racism among youth. A fact-based information on migrations and a “new public dialectics” showing the real causes of the economic and social crisis are additional suggestions “to channel people’s resentment in the right direction”.

3. Conclusions

The consultation in Italy has involved a total of **109** young people aged between 18 and 30 years; **11** have been randomly chosen in 4 areas of the city of Rome and individually interviewed using a semi-structured template (Annex 1); **98** living in 63 Italian cities have answered an online questionnaire circulated among the readers of *Chronicles of ordinary racism*.

The consultation results in the two groups show elements of both convergence and divergence.

The **concern on the spreading of racism** in Italy and Europe is **shared** and the majority of those interviewed feels that racism is more widespread today than in the past.

Particularly by the youth of the first group, racism is identified as a phenomenon **with cultural roots** and showing a difficulty in relating to the “other”. In the online consultation it is mostly defined as a **superiority relation towards others based on different motivations**: there may be racism also without referring to the concept of “race” and the most worrying form of racism appears to be the one against migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees.

The deep awareness about **the complexity of the causes** promoting discriminations, hate and racist speech and violence has emerged: identity and cultural motivations, the lack of correct information about migrations, the widespread perception that migrants are dangerous for security and in competition with national citizens in the labor market and for welfare services, are those most often mentioned and emphasized.

The majority of the youth filling-in the online questionnaire has declared to have directly experienced discrimination on the basis of gender, age, national, "ethnic" origin and of mother tongue.

Social racism, experienced in daily life, is the most worrying for the young people interviewed: identified spaces in which racism is most recurrent are school and university, public transportation, shops and the Internet, in particular social networks. Political parties remain in the background, for propaganda as well as for the prevention and contrast to discriminations.

The two groups show different opinions about the role **recognized to young people** in contrasting racism, with the first group considering it with little or no influence, whereas the second one see it as very relevant. This difference suggests that youth without the experience in antiracist and humanitarian NGOs are more skeptical about the possibility to change, with the own involvement and in an organized way, their peers' ideas and behaviors. Respondents online show a greater optimism.

The **responsibility of media and of local and national institutions** is, on the other hand, assessed as great. In order to oppose discriminations and racist propaganda and violence, the consultation identified as priority the development of policies for the inclusion of migrants to facilitate their access to education, training, to the labor market and social services, but also the interaction and communication among natives and migrants.

The **creation of spaces and meeting opportunities**, exchange, interaction among natives and migrants is in general considered a priority and the interviewed young people tend to consider this possibility for their direct involvement.

With regard to intercultural dialogue **school institutions are recognized as having a specific responsibility** to foster knowledge about migrations, not only towards pupils and students, but also with teachers and families. Direct witnessing by those have gone through the migration experience is seen as essential in promoting information and awareness-raising campaigns, both within and outside schools.

Communication activities are considered very important to oppose the spreading of discriminatory and aggressive speech against migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. Newspapers, TVs and social media are **the communication channels** viewed as most influential in orienting public opinion. Social media and schools are the channels which should be privileged to address young people. Identified priorities are **fake news unmasking**, the **sharing of personal discrimination experiences**, of **facts & figures** and the production of **correct information on migrations**.

Equality and humanity are the **key principles and arguments** identified to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices against migrants and to discourage discriminatory and racist practices.

Annex 1

Profiles of young people interviewed with in-person interviews

- I.1, 21 years old, student of letters, female
- I.2, 19 years old, student of letters, female
- I.3, 19 years old, a mechanical engineering student, male
- I.4, 19, a sociology student, female
- I.5, 26, unemployed Gambian, male
- I.6, 18 years old, technical institute student, male
- I.7, 20 years old, technical institute student, male, born in Italy, of Bengali origin
- I.8, 20 years old, technical school student, male
- I.9, 18, student, son of Italian and Jordanian, male
- I.10, 27, a student in economics, female
- I.11, 25, a medical student, female