

## Lesson 2

### Vesna's story

How would we react if this should happen to us?

Learning objectives	The students become aware of prejudice and discrimination in society. The students are able to understand the viewpoint of victims of discrimination. The students are able to react to situations of discrimination.
Student tasks	The students discuss a case of discrimination and compare it with the situation in their country.
Resources	Copies of student handout 2.1 (with questions) for each student.
Method	Text-based group work.

### Conceptual learning

Discrimination is a widespread form of behaviour in society. Not only are authorities involved in discrimination, but many other bodies and individuals are too. By starting with a true story of discrimination, the lesson gives the students the opportunity to reflect on their own behaviour.

## The lesson

The teacher can either read aloud a copy of student handout 2.1 or give students a copy to read for themselves.

### **Vesna's story**

Vesna, a Roma woman, tells what happened to her:

*"I saw a job for a sales assistant advertised in the window of a clothes shop. They wanted someone between 18 and 23. I'm 19, so I went in and asked the manager about the job. She told me to come back in two days because not enough people had applied.*

*I returned twice and was always told the same thing. Nearly a week later I went back to the shop. The job advertisement was still in the window. The manager was too busy to see me, but I was told that the vacancy had been filled.*

*After I left the shop, I was so upset that I asked a non-Roma friend if she would go in and ask about the job. When she came out she said that she had been asked to come for an interview on Monday."*

Once all students have heard or read the story, the teacher divides the students into groups of four or five and asks them to discuss the following questions (the handout includes these questions; if the teacher has presented the story orally, he or she should write the questions on the blackboard or a flip chart):

1. How would you feel if what happened to Vesna happened to you? How would you react if your friend told you that she was invited for an interview?
2. Why, do you think, did the shop manager behave in this way? Do you consider this a form of discrimination? Why (or why not)?
3. What could Vesna do about it? Do you think that she could change the situation? What could other people have done on her behalf?
4. Do you expect the law to do anything about such a situation? What should the law say?
5. Could this also happen in your own country? If so, which groups would be affected?

The teacher asks the groups for their initial response to the questions. This can be done by asking each group one question or asking groups for brief responses to more than one question.

The teacher then tells the students that Vesna's story actually happened, more than a decade ago, and that later, when asked for the reason for her behaviour, the manager of the shop said:

### **The manager's response**

*"I felt that Vesna would find it difficult to work here, because of the distance that she would have to travel in to work each day. It would be an eight-mile journey on two buses. It makes it very difficult to run the shop if staff are always late. I'd much prefer to appoint someone from this area. The person to whom I gave the job seemed just right."*

The teacher tells the students that the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 14) states that: "The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status"; and that Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind,

such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

The teacher then asks the students what these texts mean in relation to Vesna’s situation. To end the class, the teacher tells the students how Vesna’s story ended in reality.

### **The conclusion to Vesna's story**

*“Vesna took her case to a special European court, which enforces the law about discrimination. The court agreed that she had been discriminated against. Several other people who lived far away from the shop had been interviewed. The girl who got the job was only 16, white, and lived the same distance from the shop as Vesna. The shop had to give Vesna some money for the injury to her feelings.”*

As a follow-up, the teacher asks the students to write a letter to the manager of the shop or to the mayor of the town. He/she should help them to write both from their personal point of view and from the point of view of the European Court of Human Rights. It is important that the whole class should see these letters, so a discussion could also take place outside the normal school hours.