1. ***What are the key challenges and issues of racial discrimination in your country/region today and how do you work to address them?***

In a general way, the main challenge in racial discrimination is assuming a concept of citizenship based in diversity as a forming (constitutive) question of our society: to make the transition from the idea “they/ the others” are this people who bring diversity to the idea of “we all are diverse”. We need to change political and public speech and perspective

Three most important key challenges (we are based in Barcelona, Spain):

1.- Religious diversity in general and Islamophobia in a particular sense

2.- Lack of access to fundamental rights linked to be in an irregular situation

3.- Situation of Roma

Foundation Bayt al-Thaqafa has been working more than 40 years in the field of migration, focused specially in Muslim-Arab migrants background (30 workers/ 60 volunteers& trainees, 3000 people/year attended – www.bayt-al-thaqafa.org)

We address these challenges in the following way:

* ***Islamophobia and religious diversity***

1.- Awareness and training about what’s Islam (religion culture) address to general public and to specific targets (social workers, school teachers, etc.) in order to set up a “neutral” perspective about what’s the Islamic sense of life and how it could be lived in the European context and FFRR framework without problems.

Also spreading the idea Islamic universe is so complex and Islam is not more a “foreign religion”: European citizenship also contains Muslim identity for lot of people, and we have to build Europe and future also from the respect and the incorporation of this reality

2.- Citizenship building: awareness and training in FFRR and again discrimination addressed to NGO’s staff and communities/ minorities, and also for the people involved in our services

3.- We manage (from 2011) a local public service¨: Barcelona City Council Religious Affairs Office’s. The aim of this service is to guarantee freedom of conscience and religion. It works with the objective of all the visions of life, religious and non-religious, will be recognized and respected as a fundamental right and equality on the access to facilities (public places, funding, etc.).

The main activities are:

- Advise and help manage the everyday issues of religious communities.

- Offer training on different religious beliefs.

- Mediate in conflicts related to religion.

- Information about the spaces and services offered by various religious groups on the city

- Manage on opening and regularization of worship places

- Advisory on administrative life for religious communities and its relations with their context

* ***Lack of access to fundamental rights linked to be in an irregular situation***

1.- We offer universal and free services on (irregular/regular migrants, refugees and citizens with migrant background): basic needs, language and social context/ local reality, legal advisory, housing advisory, labor market advisory, temporal housing and specific programs for children, youth and unaccompanied minors.

Our objective is trying to give answers to needs, but, more than that, empowering and give dignity to face life in more equal conditions

2.- Awareness, training, networking and lobby on migrants rights and for the idea of the richness of diversity and a positive view on migration.

3.- Citizenship building: awareness and training in FFRR and again discrimination addressed to NGO’s staff and communities/ minorities, and also for the people involved in our services in order to empower them and give tools to claim for rights and trust in protection and safeguarding institutions

* ***3.- Situation of Roma***

Discrimination suffered by Roma community is deeper and consolidate in Spanish society, something completely normalized as a “classical” discrimination too consolidate by the Roma community and also by the non-Roma.

Data and indicators of HHRR and integration shows than, although the big invest of work, money and campaigns, Roma reality on access to housing, work, education, discrimination experience, etc. presents clear disadvantage if you compare with non-Roma population.

We do not directly work with this issue, but we guess any step we climb fighting against racial discrimination for a minority helps for all the others types of discrimination and/or collectives affected by.

1. ***What has been your experience, as civil society, of engaging with CERD to date?***

By the moment, we have not developed a real relationship with CERD itself. We know about it throught general UN information (website, etc.) as a body fighting against discrimination at global level…far away to our reality and our daily life!

One year ago, we were informed about the change of our national representative and we were asked to give support to the candidate. We knew him well and he has our respect and trust because we knew well his work in the fight against racial discrimination in front of the National Observatory against Racism and Xenophobia (official body at state level). We decided to support the candidate and we have been increasing the relationship with our representative. Last month, for example, he participated in a Round Table organized in the framework of an exhibition and school activities in our program against discrimination.

Usually, he informs us about his agenda and the forum he participates presenting CERD’s work and we have established a permanent contact.

1. ***How can the CERD improve and enhance its engagement with civil society, and its work on racial discrimination for greater impact on the ground?***

* By the work of national experts and their effort in explain and make known the work of CERD and its tools and mechanisms
* By the work of CERD in a better communication strategy including training about its work and how to use its tools by civil society
* By promoting the participation of civil society organization in the CERD sessions as observers
* By promoting the implication of the states in making possible the participation of civil society in the CERD sessions
* By presenting CERD rapports or thematic discussions at national level