

Discrimination: a question of visible minorities

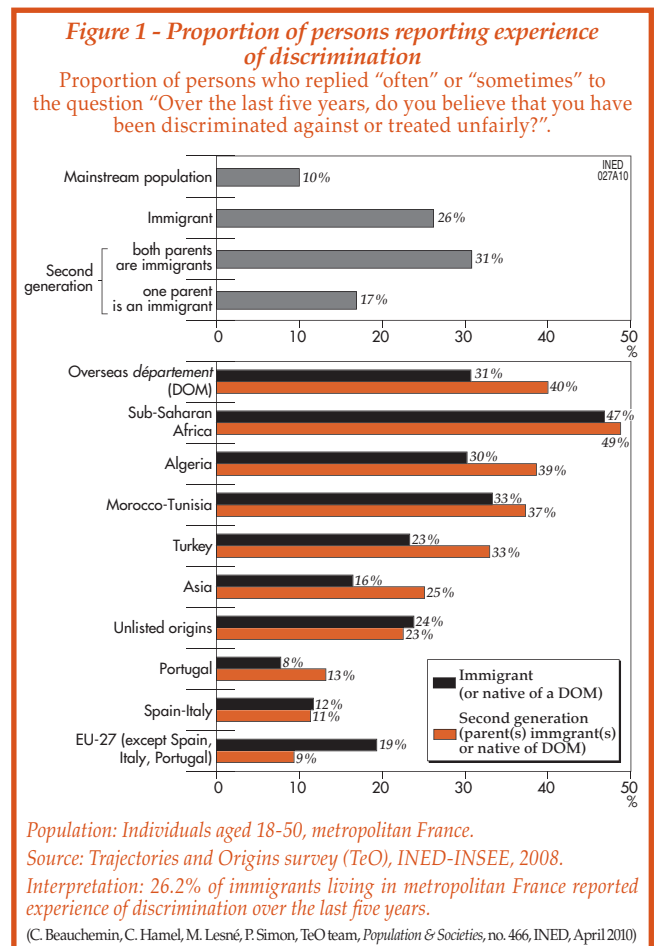
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In France, the chances of finding a job or a place to live, or simply a service to which one is entitled, vary according to an individual's sex, family situation, ethnic origin, physical appearance, etc. The Trajectories and Origins survey (Trajectoires et Origines, TeO), conducted in 2008 by INED and INSEE does not simply record discrimination but examines in detail the various factors at play. In this article, the survey authors present their initial analyses of respondents' perceived experience of discrimination.

Measuring discrimination is a politically sensitive issue. It is also a complex problem in methodological terms and various different approaches have been developed [1,2]. Discrimination testing conducted in France since the early 2000s shows that for equivalent qualifications and work experience, applicants of North or sub-Saharan African origin are 3 to 5 times less likely to be invited for a job interview than applicants of European origin [3]. Beyond these findings obtained with non-representative samples, statistical studies at national level show that the unemployment risk of immigrants (see definitions in Box 1) and immigrants' children (the so-called "second generation") is 20 to 50% higher, depending on their origin, than that of the rest of the population, all other things being equal [4].

The Trajectories and Origins survey (see Box 2) is shedding light on the varied experience of discrimination in France related to ethnic origin or other characteristics such as education, employment, housing, health, etc. It also provides information on the motives for discrimination as perceived by respondents (sex, age, health status, ethnicity, skin colour, etc.). We will analyse here the answers given by interviewees to questions on perceived experience of discrimination over the last five years, and its various grounds. It should not be forgotten that discrimination is measured here from the viewpoint of those who are exposed to it.

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Our findings are based on respondents' personal accounts, which reflect both the magnitude of discrimination and their sensitivity to this issue.

◆ One quarter of immigrants and second generations report experience of discrimination

Among persons living in France aged 18-50, slightly below 14% report having experienced discrimination in the previous five years, whatever the grounds (sex, race, sexual orientation, age, religion or health status) or the circumstances (while looking for a job or a place to live, in school, in the street, etc.). Around 10% of individuals comprising the mainstream population (see Box 1) report experience of discrimination, compared with 24% of second generations and 26% of immigrants. In other words, for the latter two groups the incidence of discrimination is two and a half times higher (Figure 1), and while immigrants and their children account for only 22% of the adult population living in metropolitan France, they represent 40% of persons reporting experience of discrimination. Having just one immigrant parent, and not two, halves the probability of reporting discrimination, from 31% to 17%. This difference can be explained by a lower risk of exposure, linked in some cases to less visible ethnic traits or to a family name that no longer sounds foreign. Moreover, second generations with a mixed parentage are more frequently of European ancestry, a group less exposed to ethnic and racial discrimination.

◆ Visible minorities on the front line

Among minorities (definition in Box 1), not all groups are "equal" with respect to discrimination. The most visible groups are targeted most frequently. Almost half of immigrants and second generations from sub-Saharan Africa report experience of discrimination over the last five years, compared with just 10% of the mainstream population (Figure 1). Persons from the French overseas *départements* and their children born in metropolitan France report an incidence of discrimination similar to that reported by North African minorities. They are followed by immigrants from Turkey and Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), and their offspring. The European groups show no significant difference with respect to the mainstream population.

In practically all groups severely affected by discrimination, the second generations report more experience of discrimination than the immigrants themselves. This is especially true for the children of immigrants from Algeria, Turkey and Southeast Asia. Born and socialized in France, they are probably more likely to interpret unfavourable treatment as discrimination, while immigrants, marked by their subaltern status and their history, are more resigned to their fate.

Self-reporting of discrimination is clearly sensitive to origin. But it also depends on other factors such as

box 1

Glossary

Immigrant: person born abroad to non-French parents and currently residing in France. Immigrants may acquire French nationality after immigrating, or may keep their foreign nationality.

Minorities: Generic term including immigrants, persons born in the French overseas *départements* (DOM) and their children.

Mainstream population: All French people who are neither immigrants nor children of immigrants or of persons born in a DOM. This group includes French persons born abroad and their children, including colonial repatriates and their children born in metropolitan France. It also includes the grand-children of immigrants.

Second generation: Children of immigrants or of person(s) born in one of the French overseas *départements* (DOM).

sex, age, educational level, occupational category, religion and place of residence. We have attempted to disentangle the different factors and determine the influence of each, "all other things being equal" (Figure 2).

◆ Women over 35 report less discrimination than men and young people

In the TeO survey, after controlling for all other factors, women report discrimination less frequently than men (25% less, Figure 2), a surprising finding since women are the potential victims of both sex and race discrimination [5]. This is probably because, in addition to classic situations of discrimination (employment, school, etc.), the TeO survey also covers very varied contexts where men from minorities are more likely to be discriminated against than women (night clubs, encounters with the police, etc.). In addition, men from minorities experience more discrimination on the job market because of their stigmatized status.

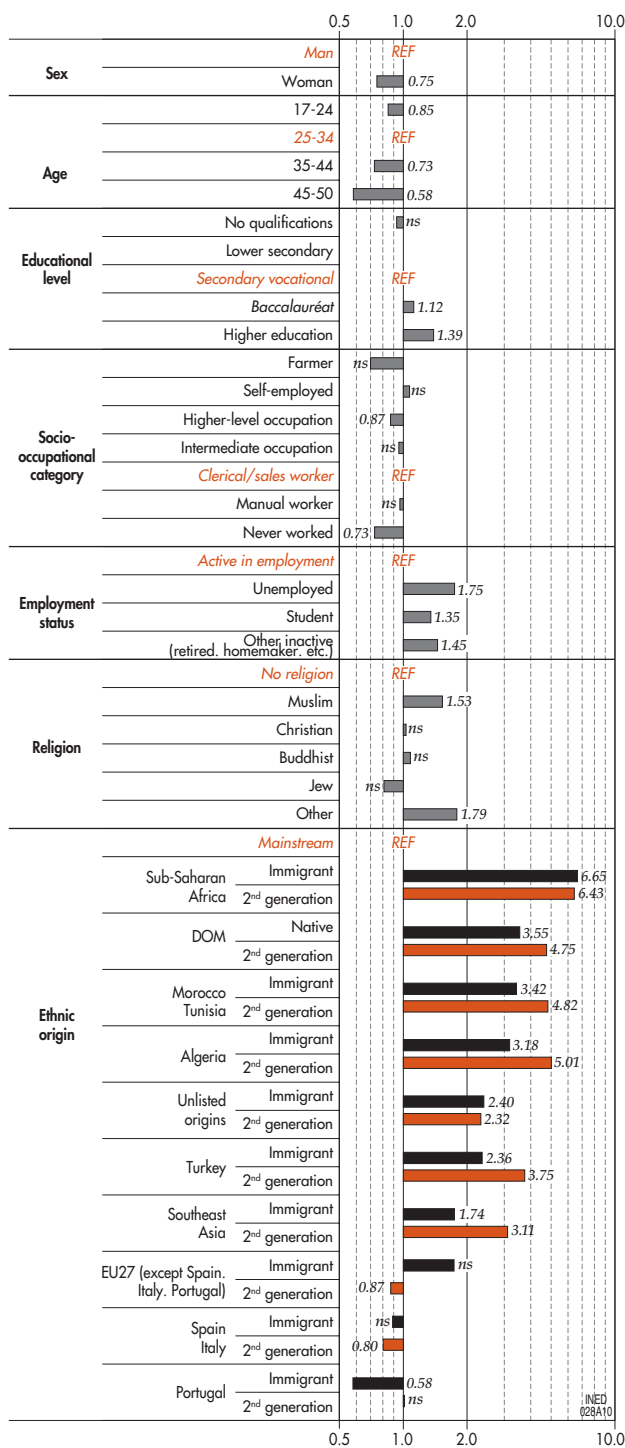
Young adults aged 25-34 report more frequent discrimination than younger and older age groups. This is the transition age when young people are moving towards economic and residential independence, and hence feel more vulnerable to discriminatory decisions. The young are also more sensitive to discrimination than their elders because they feel more strongly about their right to equal treatment.

◆ The effects of social status are variable

Compared to persons in employment, unemployed people are 75% more likely to report "unequal treatment or discrimination", while students are 35% more likely and other inactive persons 45% more likely (Figure 2). Being in employment not only protects against the negative experiences of unemployment but, more generally, brings a sense of security which reduces the perception of discrimination.

Independently of employment status, the feeling of being discriminated against increases with educational

Figure 2 - Factors influencing the likelihood of replying "often" or "sometimes" to the question "Over the last five years, do you believe that you have been discriminated against or treated unfairly?"



(C. Beauchemin, C. Hamel, M. Lesné, P. Simon, TeO team, *Population & Societies*, no. 466, INED, April 2010)

Population: Individuals aged 18-50, metropolitan France.

Source: Trajectories and Origins survey (TeO), INED-INSEE, 2008.

Interpretation: For each variable, the different categories can be compared with the reference category (REF) which is equal to 1. All other things being equal, a value higher than 1 indicates that a variable is associated with a higher risk of reporting discrimination. For example, with a value of 1.75, the unemployed are 75% more likely to report discrimination than persons in employment. A value below 1 indicates a reduced risk. For example, with a value of 0.75, women are 25% less likely to report discrimination than men. The letters "ns" indicate that the difference between the value of the observed category and that of the reference category is not statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

level. Compared with a person who left school with a lower vocational certificate (CAP, BEP or equivalent for immigrants), the probability is 12% higher for high-school graduates (*baccalauréat* or equivalent) and 39% higher for persons with a degree in higher education. Not only does education bring a stronger awareness of discrimination, but a degree in higher education enables members of ethnic minorities to occupy jobs where their presence is rare, and where they are still treated with a certain wariness. When seeking promotion, they are confronted by the famous "glass ceiling" and their qualifications are not sufficient to curb the expression of racial prejudice towards minorities.

Perceived discrimination varies little by occupational category, however. Farmers, the self-employed, intermediate occupations and manual workers are just as likely to report discrimination as clerical workers. Only the status of a higher-level occupation seems to offer a limited level of protection (likelihood reduced by 13%). In short, discrimination is felt in all occupational categories.

Overall, men, young people, the most highly qualified and the unemployed more frequently report discrimination than the others. Note that for immigrants, acquisition of French citizenship does not seem to make a difference, and neither, for the second generation, does having parents of mixed origin. Beliefs and religious affiliation are associated with significant differences, however. Whatever their ethnic origin, Muslims report more discrimination than Christians, Buddhists, Jews or persons reporting no religion (agnostics, atheists or non-believers). Last, the most striking result of this analysis is that ethnic origin is still the most determining variable for self-reporting of discrimination (Figure 2).

◆ Ethnicity and skin colour still top the list

When asked directly about the reasons why they were discriminated against or treated unfairly (1), respondents most frequently mentioned their ethnic origin or nationality (37%), then their skin colour (20%), their sex (17%) and their age (12%). This distribution varies considerably according to the respondent's migration background. Ethnicity and skin colour are mentioned mainly by immigrants and second generations, and they stand out so clearly that they tend to dominate the other discrimination criteria. Sex and age discrimination are quite infrequently reported by these two groups, notably by comparison with the

(1) If they replied "often" or "sometimes" to the question "Over the last five years, do you believe that you have been discriminated against or treated unfairly?", respondents were then asked "In your view, this was because of..." followed by a list of reasons: your ethnic origin or nationality; your skin colour; your age; your way of dressing; the place where you live; the reputation of your neighbourhood; your family situation (single, divorced, small children); your accent; your way of speaking; a health problem or disability; your religion; your sexual orientation; other. While worded slightly differently, this list covers most of the 18 criteria of discrimination prohibited by law.

Box 2

**Trajectories and Origins (TeO),
a survey on the diversity of populations in France**

The TeO survey aims to describe and analyse the living conditions and social trajectories of individuals in relation to their social origins and their migration history. It examines how the experience of discrimination affects the individual life course.

Around 22,000 individuals born between 1948 and 1990 living in an ordinary household in metropolitan France were interviewed in 2008. For second generations, the representative scope of the survey was limited to individuals born after 1958.

The TeO questionnaire explores migration history, educational and occupational trajectories, residential histories, housing conditions, family life and the transmission of languages and religion. On a cross-sectional basis, it examines individuals' access to goods and services (employment, housing, services, healthcare, etc.) and the discrimination they may experience in these areas. While often mentioning skin colour as a factor of discrimination, the survey did not record the respondents' own skin colour, in compliance with the recommendation of the Conseil Constitutionnel dated 15 November 2007.

The survey was organized jointly by INED and INSEE. It was conducted between September 2008 and February 2009 by INSEE interviewers.

More information is available on the TeO website at <http://teo.site.ined.fr/>

mainstream population (these two forms of discrimination are reported by 23% and 16% of respondents in the mainstream, by 5% of immigrants and 9% of second generations). Place of residence and religion, on the other hand, are more important reasons for discrimination (15%) for second generations, and immigrants also mention spoken accent as a factor. Skin colour occupies a decisive place in the list of reasons for discrimination reported by the children of French persons born in the overseas *départements* (DOM) and by sub-Saharan African immigrants. It is mentioned by 73% and 88% of them respectively, well ahead of ethnic origin or nationality.

◆ The most frequent victims rarely complain

These initial results concerning self-reported discrimination are a combined reflection of both experience and perceptions. Future analyses of the TeO survey data will aim to disentangle these two factors through a dual analysis of subjective questions and of objective situations experienced by individuals. Another challenge is to analyse the specific contexts in which this perceived discrimination occurs (school, workplace, access to housing, public services, etc.).

Despite its imperfections, the measurement of perceived acts of discrimination provides an overall picture of this issue which reveals just how rarely such acts are reported to the competent authorities. Among persons reporting experience of discrimination over the last five years, only 13% lodged a complaint to the police, an association, a trade union or to the anti-

discrimination authority (Haute autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l'égalité, Halde). The percentage was 16% for the mainstream population, but only 8% for second generations and 7% for immigrants. The persons reporting most discrimination in the TeO survey are also those who complain the least. This finding highlights the risk of underestimating discrimination if measures are based on administrative or legal sources. It also highlights the need to understand why individuals are reluctant to complain officially about the experience of discrimination that they report in the survey. ■

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ABSTRACT

According to the Trajectories and Origins survey (Trajectoires et Origines, TeO), slightly less than 14% of persons aged 18-50 living in France report experience of discrimination over the last five years, for whatever reason (sex, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, age, religion or health status). Among French people who are neither immigrants nor second generations, 10% report discrimination, versus 24% of second generations and 26% of immigrants. The reasons given are primarily ethnic origin (or nationality) and skin colour (57% and 17%), followed by sex and age. Women over 35 report less discrimination than men and young people. While being in employment protects against a sense of being discriminated against, the perception of unfair treatment increases with educational level. Highly qualified immigrants and second generations feel confronted by a "glass ceiling" that prevents access to senior positions. However, only 13% of persons reporting experience of discrimination lodged a complaint with the police, an association, a trade union or the French anti-discrimination authority (Halde).