

# THE STATE AND EFFECTS OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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## OECD PAPERS ON WELL-BEING AND INEQUALITIES

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**The state and effects of discrimination in the European Union**

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# Abstract

In the past few years, the European Union has stepped up efforts to fight discrimination against racialised communities, LGBTIQ+ people, people with disability and women, as part of its Union of Equality strategies. However, it remains difficult to measure the extent and effects of discrimination in EU Member States given the dearth of official data sources. This paper uses new survey data to examine discrimination in EU Member States, including by exploring the role that discrimination plays in driving well-being gaps between at-risk groups and the majority of the population. The paper finds that 56% of people who identify as part of a minority group based on their ethnicity or skin colour, disability status, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity state that they have experienced discrimination in the preceding year – up from 46% in 2019. For many people who belong to a minority group, experiences of discrimination occur frequently, which exposes them to severe effects. Indeed, the analysis reveals that discrimination affects many aspects of life: constraining income-earning opportunities, exacerbating housing and financial stress, subjecting people to violence, fear and low self-esteem, and contributing to mental ill health. These consequences come at a huge personal cost to the individuals directly affected and to society as a whole.

# Résumé

Ces dernières années, l'Union européenne a intensifié ses efforts pour lutter contre la discrimination des communautés racialisées, des personnes LGBTQI+, des personnes handicapées et des femmes, dans le cadre de ses stratégies en faveur de l'égalité. Toutefois, il reste difficile de mesurer l'ampleur et les effets de la discrimination dans les États membres de l'Union européenne en raison du manque de données officielles. Ce document utilise de nouvelles données d'enquête pour étudier la discrimination au sein des États membres de l'Union européenne, notamment en explorant le rôle que joue la discrimination dans les écarts de bien-être entre les groupes à risque de discrimination et la majorité de la population. Le document révèle que 56 % des personnes qui s'identifient comme faisant partie d'un groupe minoritaire en raison de leur appartenance ethnique ou de la couleur de leur peau, de leur handicap, de leur religion, de leur orientation sexuelle ou de leur identité de genre déclarent avoir été victimes de discrimination au cours de l'année précédente, contre 46 % en 2019. Pour de nombreuses personnes appartenant à un groupe minoritaire, les expériences de discrimination se produisent fréquemment, ce qui les expose à des effets graves. En effet, l'analyse révèle que la discrimination affecte de nombreux aspects de la vie : elle limite les possibilités de revenus, exacerbe les difficultés financières et liées au logement, expose les personnes à la violence, à la peur et à une faible estime de soi, et contribue à une mauvaise santé mentale. Ces conséquences ont un coût personnel énorme pour les personnes directement touchées et pour la société dans son ensemble.

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# 1 Introduction

Equality and non-discrimination are founding values of the European Union (EU) and are enshrined in the EU's Treaties, Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Parliament, 2012<sup>[1]</sup>). Everyone has the right to live freely and fully regardless of their sex, ethnicity, skin colour, national origin, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and socioeconomic status.

In recent years, the European Commission has reignited efforts to promote equality for groups that face a high risk of discrimination, such as racialised groups, including Roma, people with disability as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people.<sup>1</sup> These strategies call on EU Member States to step up their initiatives to fight discrimination including by addressing the attitudes, stereotypes and structural factors that undergird and perpetuate discrimination and deprive people of the ability to enjoy their human rights and equal opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these commitments to equality, discrimination remains a persistent reality and challenge in the EU. Every day, discrimination limits people's access to jobs, services and opportunities, and exposes them to violence and hate. Unfortunately, however, the ways in which discrimination affects people's lives remains difficult to quantify – particularly in terms of how the well-being of people at risk of discrimination compares to the rest of the population – because most EU Member States do not systematically collect the required data. Disaggregated data covering racialised communities and LGBTIQ+ people are especially lacking (Subgroup on Equality Data of the High Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity, 2023<sup>[2]</sup>; 2021<sup>[3]</sup>).

Many EU Member States are reluctant to collect information on racialised groups, in particular, owing to the sensitivity of the data, historical considerations and concerns that the data will be used to reinforce negative stereotypes about people at risk of discrimination (Balestra and Fleischer, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>; Farkas, 2017<sup>[5]</sup>; Subgroup on Equality Data of the High Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity, 2021<sup>[3]</sup>). Data risks can, however, be managed, for instance by applying a 'do no harm' principle, by using the data for the benefit of at-risk groups and society at large, and by encouraging the active participation of groups at risk of discrimination in data collection and analysis (Subgroup on Equality Data of the High Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity, 2023<sup>[2]</sup>; Balestra and Fleischer, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). Moreover, many other OECD countries successfully manage these sensitivities, and as such, they have a better

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<sup>1</sup> A note on terminology. In this paper, inclusive language is used as much as possible when referring to LGBTIQ+ people, people with disability and people from racialised communities. Where possible, the paper refers to people from groups at risk of discrimination, which includes people from racialised communities, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people and religious minorities. However, the paper also reflects the language used in empirical surveys and studies to present findings accurately. In some cases, the groups covered are narrower (e.g. LGBTI) or are based on survey participants' self-identification as belonging to a minority group.

<sup>2</sup> The European Union equality strategies and plans include the Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025, Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation for 2020-2030, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disability 2021-2030.

understanding of how each community is affected by discrimination and can monitor the success of government, private sector and civil society anti-discrimination initiatives.<sup>3</sup>

In the absence of official data sources, this paper draws on a variety of survey data sources to highlight the ways in which data can be used to understand the magnitude and effects of discrimination – thereby demonstrating the potential analysis that could be undertaken in the event that official data collections become richer. In particular, this paper presents new evidence on the role of discrimination in explaining well-being gaps between at-risk groups and the majority of the EU population; drawing on surveys that have not yet been used for this purpose. This paper focuses on discrimination against groups that are under-represented in official data sources – namely people from racialised communities, LGBTIQ+ people, people with disability and people from religious minorities. Nevertheless, discrimination on the basis of age or sex are also examined insofar as they intersect with other forms of discrimination.

The paper finds that 56% of people who identify as part of a minority group based on their ethnicity or skin colour, disability status, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity state that they have experienced discrimination in the preceding year – up from 46% in 2019. For many at-risk people, experiences of discrimination occur frequently, which compounds the negative effects. Indeed, the analysis reveals that discrimination affects many aspects of life: constraining income-earning opportunities, exacerbating housing and financial stress, subjecting people to violence, fear and low self-esteem, and contributing to mental ill health. These consequences come at a huge personal cost to the individuals directly affected and to society as a whole.

These results are discussed in more detail in the remainder of the paper. Section 2 of this paper provides an overview of the extent of discrimination in the EU and discusses some of the factors contributing to variations in discrimination rates across countries and time. Section 3 identifies who is most at risk of discrimination and describes the nature of the discrimination they face. Section 4 discusses the impacts that discrimination has on individuals and Section 5 concludes with an examination of the broader economic and social costs of discrimination.

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<sup>3</sup> The European Commission encourages Member States to improve their data collections, and information on the lives of minority groups is available via targeted surveys conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). However, at the moment, there are few, if any, official EU surveys that can be used to assess the well-being of groups at risk of discrimination relative to the rest of the population.

## 2 Self-reported discrimination rates are increasing

Available EU evidence indicates that self-reported discrimination rates have increased in the past few years. The recently released *2023 Discrimination in the EU Eurobarometer* reveals that over 21% of people aged 15 years and older reported<sup>4</sup> experiencing discrimination in the preceding year – up from 15% in 2019<sup>5</sup> (Figure 2.1). People who identify as LGBTIQ+, those belonging to an ethnic or skin colour minority (including Roma) and people with disability have the highest self-reported discrimination rates, which have all increased since 2019 (from 57% to 67%; 46% to 59%; and 50% to 54%, respectively).

While caution is needed in interpreting changes over two Eurobarometer waves, other recent surveys reveal similar results (Box 2.1). For example, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which consistently surveys at-risk groups every few years, show that some at-risk groups are increasingly experiencing discrimination. The FRA (2023<sup>[6]</sup>) found that 34% of respondents of African descent surveyed in 13 European countries in 2022 experienced racial discrimination in the previous 12 months, up from 24% in 2016, while reports of discrimination increased for people who self-identify as LGBTI from 37% in 2012 to 43% in 2019 (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019<sup>[7]</sup>).

Likewise, surveys of a subset of EU countries indicate rates of self-reported discrimination that are consistent with the *2023 Discrimination in the EU Eurobarometer*. For instance, the Opportunities module of the 2022 wave of the *OECD Risks that Matter Survey* (hereafter Opportunities module), covering 17 EU countries shows that 27% of the working-age population reported experiencing discrimination in 2021-22<sup>6</sup>, while 25% of the working-age population of the six EU countries in the AXA (2023<sup>[8]</sup>) *Mind Health Survey* (namely, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Spain) experienced discrimination in 2021-22.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, reported refers to when people disclosed their experiences of discrimination in a survey, and not necessarily making an official complaint to police or equality bodies.

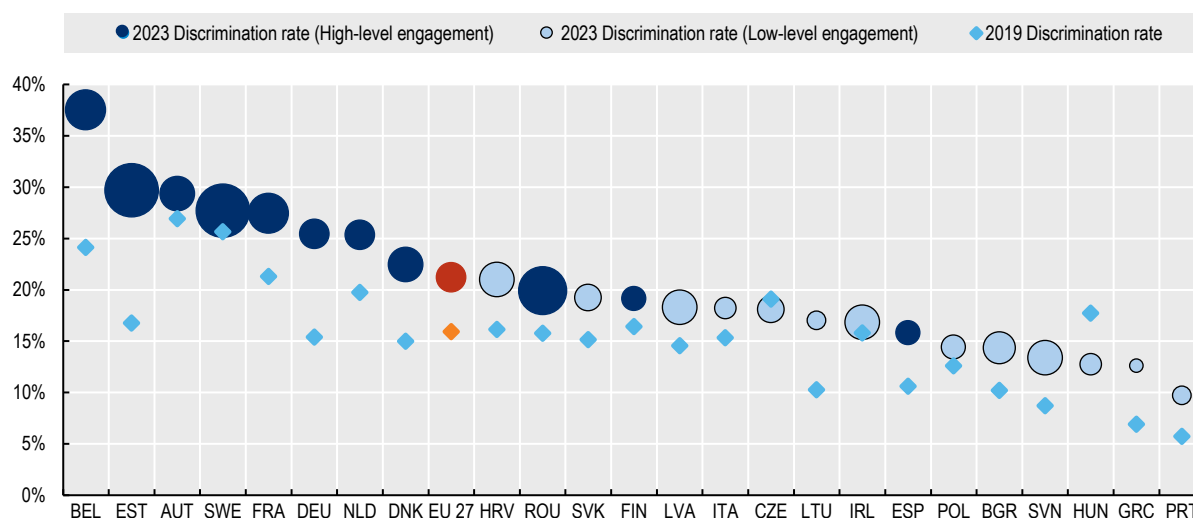
<sup>5</sup> *Discrimination in the EU Eurobarometers* have been conducted every few years since 2006, but it is difficult to make comparisons with earlier waves due to changes in the questions and response categories. For example, the 2006 wave did not ask about people's personal experiences of discrimination and harassment, while the 2009, 2012 and 2015 waves did not include 'skin colour', 'intersex', 'social class/socio-economic situation', or 'general physical appearance' as responses.

<sup>6</sup> The Opportunities module covers 17 EU countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain.

<sup>7</sup> When only looking at the six countries covered by the AXA Group *Mind Health Survey*, the *2023 Discrimination in the EU Eurobarometer* and the Opportunities module both show that 26% of the working-age population experienced discrimination in the previous year.

**Figure 2.1. Countries with larger self-reported minority populations and where people are more aware of discrimination generally report higher discrimination rates**

Self-reported discrimination rates (%) shown for each country, along with the size of the population that considers themselves to belong to a group at risk of discrimination (bubble size), and the level of anti-discrimination engagement (bubble colour), 2023 and 2019



Note: Discrimination rates are based on the following question: “In the past 12 months have you personally felt discriminated against or experienced harassment on one or more of the following reasons? Please tell me all that apply.” The following grounds are covered: ethnic origin, skin colour, sex, sexual orientation, Roma, transgender, intersex, age, religion or beliefs, disability, political opinions, social situation, general physical appearance and other reasons. Anti-discrimination engagement is derived from responses to questions about personal actions taken in the past 12 months including sharing online content about discriminatory incidents, publicly defending a victim of discrimination, joining an anti-discrimination association or campaign or publicly raising the issue of discrimination in the workplace. Respondents are considered to be raising the level of anti-discrimination engagement, if they take any of these four actions. Countries are ranked in terms of anti-discrimination engagement based on the share of their country’s respondents who engage in the four aforementioned activities. “High-level engagement” refers to countries where at least 20% of the population have engaged in activities to raise awareness of, or fight, discrimination, while “low-level engagement” refers to all other EU countries. Country rankings do not change materially when people who self-report experiencing discrimination are excluded from the derivation of the anti-discrimination engagement measure. The size of the 2023 dots corresponds to the size of the population that report belonging to a group that is at risk of discrimination: based on their ethnic identity, skin colour or religion; being Roma; being gay, lesbian or bisexual; being transgender or intersex; having a disability; or for other reasons. Cyprus<sup>8</sup>, Luxembourg and Malta are not presented in the chart due to small sample sizes, but they are included in the population-weighted European Union average, which is represented as EU 27.

Sources: European Commission 2023, *Discrimination in the European Union*, Special Eurobarometer SP535; and European Commission 2019, *Discrimination in the European Union*, Special Eurobarometer SP493.

<sup>8</sup> Note by the Republic of Türkiye

The information in this document with reference to “Cyprus” relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Türkiye recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of the United Nations, Türkiye shall preserve its position concerning the “Cyprus issue”.

Note by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Union.

The Republic of Cyprus is recognised by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Türkiye. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

## Factors that shape self-reported discrimination rates across time and countries

Self-reported discrimination rates vary widely across the EU – from 10% in Portugal to 38% in Belgium – and rates have increased since 2019 in a majority of EU countries, particularly in Belgium, Estonia, Germany and Lithuania (Figure 2.1). Only Hungary recorded a material decrease in self-reported discrimination, which corresponds with a large fall in the share of the population identifying as part of a group at risk of discrimination – from 19% in 2019 to 8% in 2023.

Variations in self-reported discrimination rates across countries and time reflect a broad range of demographic, cultural, social and political factors. In part, increases in self-reported discrimination rates may signal that the treatment of people at risk of discrimination has deteriorated over time. Recent geopolitical tensions and the COVID-19 pandemic have likely contributed to a rise in self-reported discrimination.

- Studies indicate that online hate has increased markedly in Europe following large shocks, including major terrorist attacks (Sides and Gross, 2013<sup>[9]</sup>), the refugee crisis (Zunes, 2017<sup>[10]</sup>) and the rise in support for extremist political parties (Muis and Immerzeel, 2017<sup>[11]</sup>). Hate-filled content is now widely available online, according to the European Observatory of Online Hate, which recorded 2.3 million Antisemitic and 1.7 million Islamophobic posts in Europe in the two years to June 2023 (Nijenhuis, 2023<sup>[12]</sup>).
- European civil society organisations reported that racialised people were disproportionately subjected to police brutality and racial profiling in response to police enforcement of confinement measures associated with COVID-19 (European Network Against Racism, 2020<sup>[13]</sup>). In non-EU OECD countries with available data, COVID-19 mortality rates for some racialised communities have been more than twice, while workers belonging to racialised communities have been more likely to lose their jobs during the pandemic and to experience declines in mental health as high than those of the majority population (OECD, 2021<sup>[14]</sup>). The available evidence for the EU is scant, due to the data limitations discussed in Box 2.1, but during the pandemic people with disability were in a more financially precarious position than their non-disabled counterparts and more likely to report unmet healthcare needs (Eurofund, 2022<sup>[15]</sup>).

More positive developments may also explain the rise in self-reported discrimination rates in the EU. People are becoming more open about their identities and likely more comfortable about disclosing their experiences in surveys (Box 2.1). For instance, more LGBTIQ+ people are expressing their identities than in the past. According to the FRA (2019<sup>[7]</sup>), 52% of LGBTI people aged 18 or over were often or always open about their identity in 2019, up from 36% in 2012. Further, there is a growing awareness of people's identities and discrimination in European societies, as demonstrated by national and transnational policy efforts and workplace training to highlight the importance of diversity and inclusion (OECD, 2020<sup>[16]</sup>). However, some people may still be afraid or ashamed of reporting their true identity in surveys, which could lead to under-reporting of countries' diversity and partially explain differences across countries and over time. Cultural and social factors, as well as policy decisions, can foster environments in which people do not feel safe revealing their identities (Adams and McPhail, 2008<sup>[17]</sup>). While it cannot be observed if people do not feel safe responding to discrimination surveys, less than 1% of respondents to the 2023 *Discrimination in the EU Eurobarometer* refuse to answer questions about their identities (although there may be others who respond inaccurately in order to hide their identity).

Countries with large shares of their population identifying as an ethnic or skin colour minority, as a LGBTIQ+ person, as a person with a disability or as a religious minority (each bubble's size in Figure 2.1) have higher reported rates of discrimination. Examples include Estonia and Sweden, where 20% of the population self-identify as belonging to a minority group (compared to 11% on average in the EU). Similarly, countries with lower-than-average shares of self-reported minority populations have the lowest discrimination rates (e.g. in Greece and Portugal where 5% and 7% of the respective populations identify

as part of a minority group). However, the relationship between self-reported discrimination and the size of the self-reported share of minorities does not hold in all cases – suggesting that other forces shape the reported rates of discrimination. For instance, Romania has the largest minority share at 22%, but has a discrimination rate close to the EU average.

### Box 2.1. Using self-reported data to study discrimination

To a large extent, official EU surveys contain limited information on certain groups at risk of discrimination. While all general social surveys collect information on sex and age (and, to a lesser degree, disability), other characteristics are only rarely covered or are proxied. For instance, migrant status is often used as a proxy for belonging to an ethnic minority; similarly, the analysis of sexual orientation or gender identity based on EU general social surveys is limited to those in same-sex partnerships. Moreover, official surveys do not contain information on the experience of discrimination.

In the absence of suitable official EU-level surveys that cover all groups at risk of discrimination, the analysis in this paper draws on non-official surveys and opinion polls that ask people about their experiences of discrimination, how they identify and about various aspects of their lives including their material conditions, life satisfaction, and mental health. The main instruments used are the 2019 and 2023 *Discrimination in the EU Eurobarometers* (covering all EU member states), the 2022 wave of the *OECD Risks that Matter Survey* of 17 European countries (accounting for 85% of the EU population) and its Opportunities Module, and the AXA (2023<sup>[8]</sup>) *Mind Health Survey* of six European countries.

These surveys are representative of the general population, as opposed to surveys targeting specific groups at risk of discrimination and enable the analysis to draw out the similarities and differences in the experience of various at-risk groups compared to the general population. However, they are also affected by small survey sizes (ranging between 1 000 and 2 000 respondents per country, on average), which makes it difficult to conduct a granular analysis of every group at risk of discrimination (and their intersections), and often leads to results being presented at the EU-level rather than for each country.

Moreover, self-reported rates of discrimination are likely to only provide an approximation of the extent of the issue in society and cross-country comparisons may be affected by cultural and institutional differences. For instance, respondents may not feel safe or comfortable disclosing their experiences (especially in countries where the threat and consequences of discrimination are more severe), and their subjective interpretation of what constitutes discriminatory behaviour may vary and reflect their level of awareness, their identifies (e.g. the salience of belonging to at-risk groups), as well as cultural factors.

Nevertheless, self-reported surveys have been used widely in non-European OECD countries to examine the health and labour market effects of discrimination. Further, in Europe, there are few alternatives to using self-reported data, and those that do exist, come with added disadvantages. For instance, administrative records (e.g. complaints to police and equality bodies) could be used, but these records likely underestimate the extent of discrimination even more than self-reported surveys, as only a small fraction of discriminatory incidents are formally reported. For example, 9% of people of African descent and 12% of Muslims who experienced discrimination in a 12-month period reported the incident or made a complaint to the authorities (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023<sup>[6]</sup>; Bayrakli and Hafez, 2022<sup>[18]</sup>).

In addition, the level of anti-discrimination engagement (the colour of bubbles in Figure 2.1) is an important determinant in shaping a country's reported discrimination rate. Discrimination is not always easy for people to identify, as it is often complex, and may be subtle or mutate to adapt to a changing environment, which makes it harder to observe (Pager and Shepherd, 2008<sup>[19]</sup>; Pearn Kandola, 2019<sup>[20]</sup>; Super, 2020<sup>[21]</sup>). Actions by civil society organisations, activists, and increasingly governments, are drawing attention to the insidious aspects of discrimination (Nwabuzo and Siklossy, 2020<sup>[22]</sup>), which makes it easier for people to identify discrimination in all its complexity.

Anti-discrimination engagement levels – measured in terms of sharing online content about discrimination, joining anti-discrimination campaigns, awareness raising in workplaces or helping a victim of discrimination – differ across the EU, and tend to be higher in countries where people are more likely to report discrimination (dark blue bubbles in Figure 2.1). Even people with no self-reported experience of discrimination are likely to engage in anti-discriminatory efforts in countries with high levels of engagement. These efforts are essential for changing stereotypes, behaviours and systems that contribute to the discrimination of at-risk groups (Council of Europe, n.d.<sup>[23]</sup>; Pope, Price and Wolfers, 2014<sup>[24]</sup>). As such, there may be a tipping point for reported discrimination rates as awareness rises, people begin to change their behaviour and systems are reformed to be more inclusive and equitable (Juvonen et al., 2019<sup>[25]</sup>; Lindsay and Edwards, 2013<sup>[26]</sup>; Butcher, Spoonley and Trlin, 2006<sup>[27]</sup>).

# 3 Who is most likely to experience discrimination in the EU?

While the previous section examined the extent of discrimination in EU Member States and discussed some of the factors contributing to discrimination rates in surveys, this section looks at the faces of discrimination. It delves into who is most likely to report discrimination in surveys and examines the nature of the discrimination they experience in terms of where it occurs and its frequency.

More than one-in-two people who identify as part of a minority group in the EU experienced discrimination in the 12 months to April 2023 – three times more than people who do not consider themselves to be a person with disability, an LGBTIQ+ person, or part of a minority based on their ethnicity (including Roma), skin colour or religion (European Commission, 2023<sup>[28]</sup>). LGBTIQ+ people report the highest rates of discrimination at 67% on average across the EU, followed closely by people who belong to an ethnic or skin colour minority (59%). Seventeen per cent of people who do not consider themselves to be part of a minority group stated that they experienced discrimination, typically on the basis of their gender or age.

Rates of self-reported discrimination do not vary materially between men and women for most groups at risk of discrimination, except for people who are Roma or LGBTIQ+ (Figure 3.1, Panel A). Further, women and men who are at risk of discrimination are almost equally likely to report experiencing multiple forms of discrimination (for example based on their gender and ethnic identity), but for different reasons. Women in a group at risk of discrimination are likely to state that they experience discrimination based on their gender or physical appearance, as well as because they belong to an at-risk group (e.g. based on their ethnicity or race). Men in at-risk groups tend to experience multiple forms of discrimination based on their political beliefs or for other reasons. Among the general population, women are more likely than men to experience discrimination – primarily because women face a higher risk of discrimination on the basis of their gender.

In contrast, there is a clearer age pattern, with young people more likely to self-report discrimination than older people (Figure 3.1, Panel B). Ethnic and racial discrimination and gender discrimination are the most common forms reported by people aged under 35, while people aged 55 and over are more likely to state they experienced age- or disability-based discrimination. The age distribution could reflect young people's higher level of awareness of discrimination.<sup>9</sup>

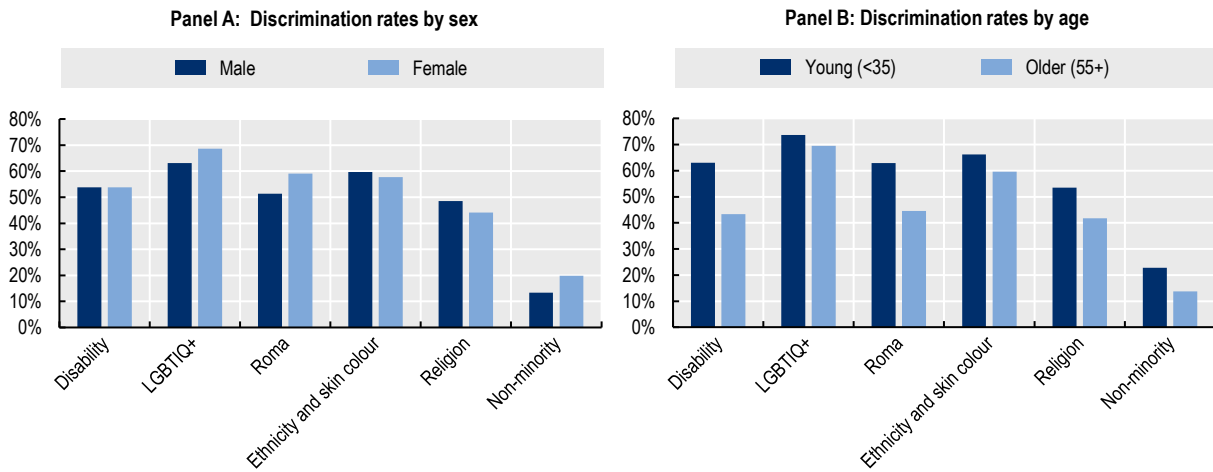
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<sup>9</sup> The 2023 Eurobarometer figures are broadly consistent with other available evidence including the OECD's Opportunities module and the prevalence rates derived from FRA's targeted surveys.



**Figure 3.1. Discrimination rates are three to four times higher for minorities than non-minorities**

Self-reported experience of discrimination, selected minority groups (%), EU 27, 2023



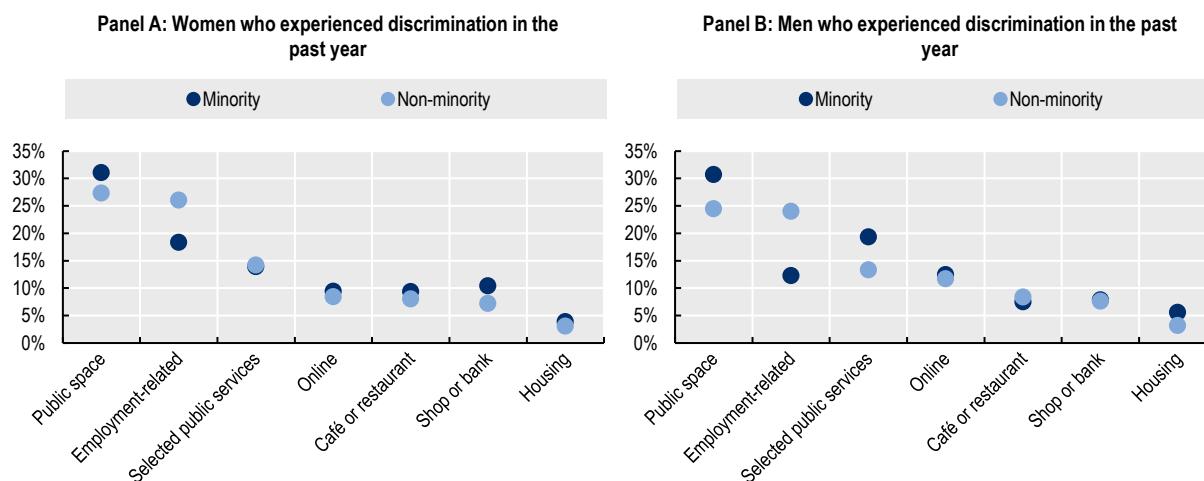
Note: Discrimination rates are based on self-reported experiences of discrimination and harassment in the past 12 months. The EU 27 average is population weighted. LGBTIQ+ includes people who identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or other sexual minorities. 'Non-minority' comprises people who responded that they did not consider themselves to be a person with disability, LGBTIQ+, an ethnic or skin colour minority, a religious minority, Roma or a minority for any other reason.

Source: European Commission 2023, *Discrimination in the European Union*, Special Eurobarometer SP535.

Discrimination occurs in many areas of life – in public space, employment settings, public services, housing, online and in businesses. When zooming in on the most recent experience of discrimination, results from the 2023 *Discrimination in the EU Eurobarometer* highlight that the majority of people experienced discrimination in a public place (Figure 3.2). Almost one-in-three people who identify as part of a minority group based on their ethnicity or skin colour, religion, disability status, sexual orientation or gender identity nominated 'public space' as the setting in which they experienced the most recent episode of discrimination (compared to a quarter of people who do not consider themselves to be part of a minority group). Employment settings were commonly nominated by survey respondents too – except for men who consider themselves to be part of a minority group, who were more likely to report their most recent occurrence of discrimination in a public service setting (e.g. social services, health care or education and university).

**Figure 3.2. Discrimination occurs in a variety of areas of life, as demonstrated by the setting of the most recent incident**

Setting of most recent experience of discrimination (%), EU 27, 2023



Note: Respondents who reported experiencing discrimination or harassment in the past 12 months were asked: “Thinking about the most recent time when you felt discriminated against, under what circumstances did it take place?”, with option categories: “when looking for a job”, “at work”, “when looking for a house or apartment to rent or buy”, “by healthcare personnel (e.g. a receptionist, nurse or doctor)”, “by social service personnel”, “by school or university personnel; this could have happened to you as a student or as a parent”, “at a café, restaurant, bar or nightclub”, “in a shop or a bank”, “in a public space”, “online”, “other” and “don’t know”. “When looking for a job” and “at work” are combined in the figure under the ‘Employment-related’ category, while ‘Selected public services’ comprises health care, social services, and education and university. Minority refers to respondents who consider themselves to be an ethnic minority, a minority in terms of skin colour, a religious minority, Roma, lesbian, gay or bisexual, transgender or intersex, a person with a disability or part of any other minority group; while non-minority includes respondents who does not consider themselves as belonging to any of these groups. The EU 27 average is population weighted.

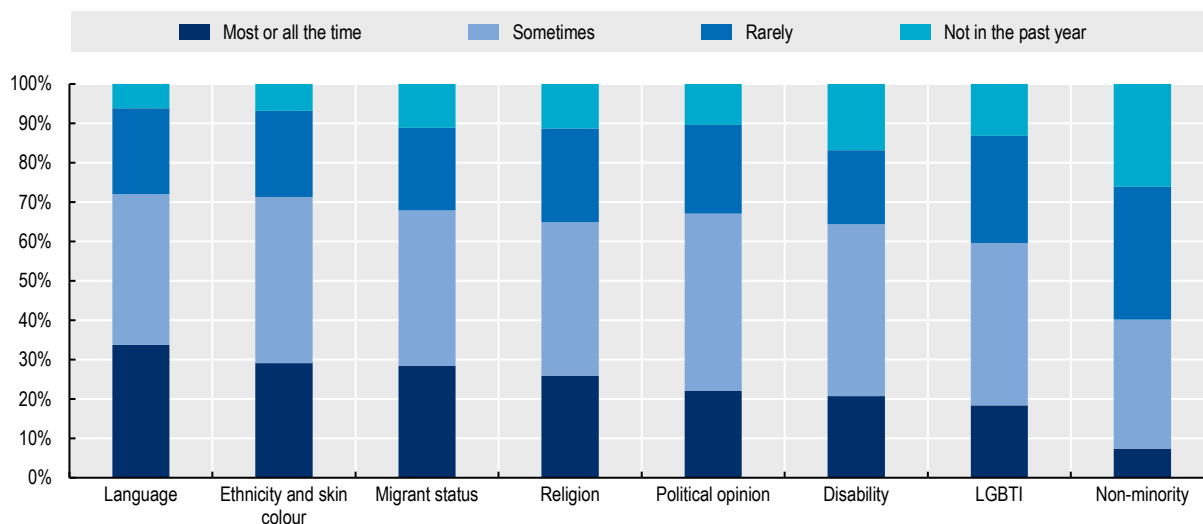
Source: European Commission 2023, *Discrimination in the European Union*, Special Eurobarometer SP535.

The frequency of the experience of discrimination differs across the population, with people who are part of visible minority groups much more likely to report being discriminated against frequently. Almost one-in-three people who experience discrimination and identify as part of a minority group based on their language, ethnicity or skin colour, or migrant status report experiencing discrimination all or most of the time. LGBTI people, who have more scope to conceal their identities, report experiencing discrimination less frequently. However, the act of concealing identities to avoid discrimination can contribute to stress, anxiety, social isolation and depression (Berkley, Beard and Daus, 2019<sup>[29]</sup>).

In contrast, only one-in-twenty people who do not consider themselves to be in a minority group note that they experience discrimination all or most of the time (Figure 3.3). These differences in the frequency of discrimination are concerning, since research shows that experiencing discrimination most or all the time leads to disproportionately worse life outcomes, especially in relation to physical and mental health (as discussed in the next section).

### Figure 3.3. Almost a third of people who self-report discrimination based on ethnic origin, skin colour, language, or migrant status experience discrimination most or all the time

Frequency of discriminatory incidents experienced by people from selected minority groups who self-report discrimination (%), EU 17, 2022



Note: Respondents were asked the question: “Thinking about your personal experiences over the past year (or since you have been in this country), how often have you felt discriminated against or harassed?”, with option categories “almost all of the time”, “most of the time”, “sometimes”, “rarely”, “not in the past year” and “don’t know or refuse to answer”. LGBTIQ+ people include those who identify as part of a minority group based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Data from the Opportunities module include respondents aged 18-64. The EU 17 average is population-weighted and includes the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain.

Source: Opportunities module of the OECD Risks that Matter Survey 2022, <http://oe.cd/rtm/>.

# 4 Discrimination negatively affects many aspects of people's lives

For decades, researchers have observed that people from racialised communities, LGBTIQ+ people and people with disabilities face penalties in labour, housing, credit and consumer markets in the United States, where data is more readily available (Pager and Shepherd, 2008<sup>[19]</sup>). People belonging to minority groups also have worse health outcomes and are at a higher risk of experiencing violence, including at the hands of the police. These results have been consistently found across time and by using various methodologies (Box 4.1).

Evidence from Europe is newer and sparser on account of the lack of national-level official data. The FRA is generating a wealth of evidence on the effects of discrimination on people from racialised communities, LGBTI people and Roma people (2023<sup>[6]</sup>; 2019<sup>[7]</sup>; 2022<sup>[30]</sup>), and academics are conducting experimental studies of discrimination in employment and housing markets. However, gaps in the evidence base remain. In particular, little is known about how the well-being of groups at risk of discrimination compares with the general population in many domains of life – such as economic insecurity, safety and civil engagement, for example – and the role that discrimination plays in shaping people's well-being. This section presents new analysis to contribute to closing these research gaps.

This section primarily analyses self-reported discrimination survey data to examine gaps in selected well-being outcomes for various groups based on their experience of discrimination. The outcomes that are assessed are based on the *OECD Well-Being Framework*, although the framework is adapted to reflect data availability and to incorporate outcomes that are relevant for people at higher risk of discrimination, such as satisfaction with public safety services. Well-being outcomes for people who identify as part of a minority group are then compared to the general population who have or have not reported discrimination, which helps to identify the effect of discrimination on various groups (after a range of other relevant factors are controlled such as sex, age, employment status, place of residence and country). Given the limitations with using self-reported data for these purposes (Box 4.1), this section supplements its findings with evidence from other European sources, including experimental studies.

### Box 4.1. Empirical approaches for studying the effects of discrimination

There are three broad approaches for estimating the effects of discrimination on individuals, all with advantages and limitations. The first approach is to compare outcomes of people at risk of discrimination with the rest of the population (e.g. wage levels or health outcomes). These studies typically use census and social survey data with rich demographic and economic variables to compute the gap in outcomes between the minority group of interest and the general population. After controlling for a range of additional factors that contribute to people's outcomes (such as age, sex, education and location), the remaining gap could indicate discrimination, although discrimination is not directly observed and cannot be measured with certainty (OECD/European Union, 2015<sup>[31]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>). Moreover, this type of analysis is limited in Europe to the outcomes of people with disability, migrants, women and people at risk of age discrimination, given the paucity of census and social survey data on other groups at risk of discrimination.

Alternatively, self-reported discrimination survey data can be used to examine the effects of discrimination on individuals. Discrimination surveys have the benefit of asking people about their identities and experiences of discrimination, and some include a wide range of information on outcomes of interest such as income, housing, safety and health, along with demographic variables. This information enables the effect of discrimination to be observed, after controlling for other explanatory factors. Nevertheless, this approach is not without limitations. It is likely that not all people disclose their identities or experiences of discrimination, while some others may not be aware they experienced discrimination. Further, some people may identify treatment as discriminatory even where this is not the case (OECD/European Union, 2015<sup>[31]</sup>), although evidence suggests that under-reporting is more common than over-reporting (Habtegiorgis and Paradies, 2013<sup>[33]</sup>).

Finally, experimental approaches (e.g. correspondence and audit studies) have been developed to measure the effect of discrimination more objectively. These approaches develop fictional people who are identical in all ways spare for some indication of their minority status (e.g. their name or skin colour). These fictional people then apply for jobs or rental properties, and researchers examine whether there are differences in success rates based on names or skin colour or on other markers of minority status. While these approaches can confidently attribute differences in outcomes to discrimination, they can only feasibly be conducted in a few settings, such as job recruitment or rental applications (OECD, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>), and it can be difficult to scale them up for population-level analysis.

## Material conditions

As shown in Figure 4.1<sup>10</sup>, people who have experienced discrimination in the previous year are more likely to be at the bottom of the income distribution and to be worried about their financial position and housing

<sup>10</sup> Note to Figure 4.1: The outcomes presented are a subset of indicators from the OECD's Well-being Framework and cover the economic and social aspects that are important for living meaningful lives. The probabilities are derived from logistic models predicting the likelihood of: being in the bottom income quintile; concern about household's financial situation; concern about housing; concern about being a victim or violence; dissatisfaction with public safety services; or believing that governments do not listen to people like themselves. The income model uses household disposable income and controls for experience of discrimination in the previous year, minority identity, sex, age, employment status, occupation, industry, educational level, partner's employment status, place of residence, country, and number of children. In addition to these controls, the models of concern about household's financial situation and housing concerns control for household income. The model of concerns about being a victim of crime or violence controls for

affordability over the long term. These results hold for all groups – including people who do not identify as part of a minority group – although some groups, such as people with disabilities face a high likelihood of having poor material conditions across all indicators.

Results for people with disability are in line with OECD (2022<sup>[34]</sup>) research, which shows persistent disability gaps in employment, unemployment and poverty. Moreover, correspondence studies, which compare the effects of discrimination on various groups, reveal that people with disability face high levels of discrimination in hiring – receiving 40% fewer callbacks than people without disabilities, according to one study (Lippens, Vermeiren and Baert, 2023<sup>[35]</sup>). Other correspondence studies find that hiring discrimination against people with disability is comparable to other at-risk groups, such as people from racialised communities (L'Horty et al., 2022<sup>[36]</sup>; Lippens, Vermeiren and Baert, 2023<sup>[35]</sup>).

There is evidence to suggest that people who experience discrimination – particularly people who identify as part of a minority group – face higher levels of job insecurity in terms of fear of losing their jobs and being in non-standard work. According to the 2022 wave of the OECD Risks that Matter survey, 50% of people who have experienced discrimination and identify as part of a minority group based on their language, ethnicity or skin colour are concerned about losing their jobs in the next year compared to 40% of people who do not report discrimination but identify as part of these groups). Almost 30% of minority women who self-report discrimination are in non-standard work compared to 20% of other women and minority men who experience discrimination. In turn, being in a low socio-economic position may itself be a reason why people are discriminated against. The 2023 *Discrimination in the EU Eurobarometer* indicates that 13% of respondents who experienced discrimination in the past year stated that it was due to their socio-economic status.

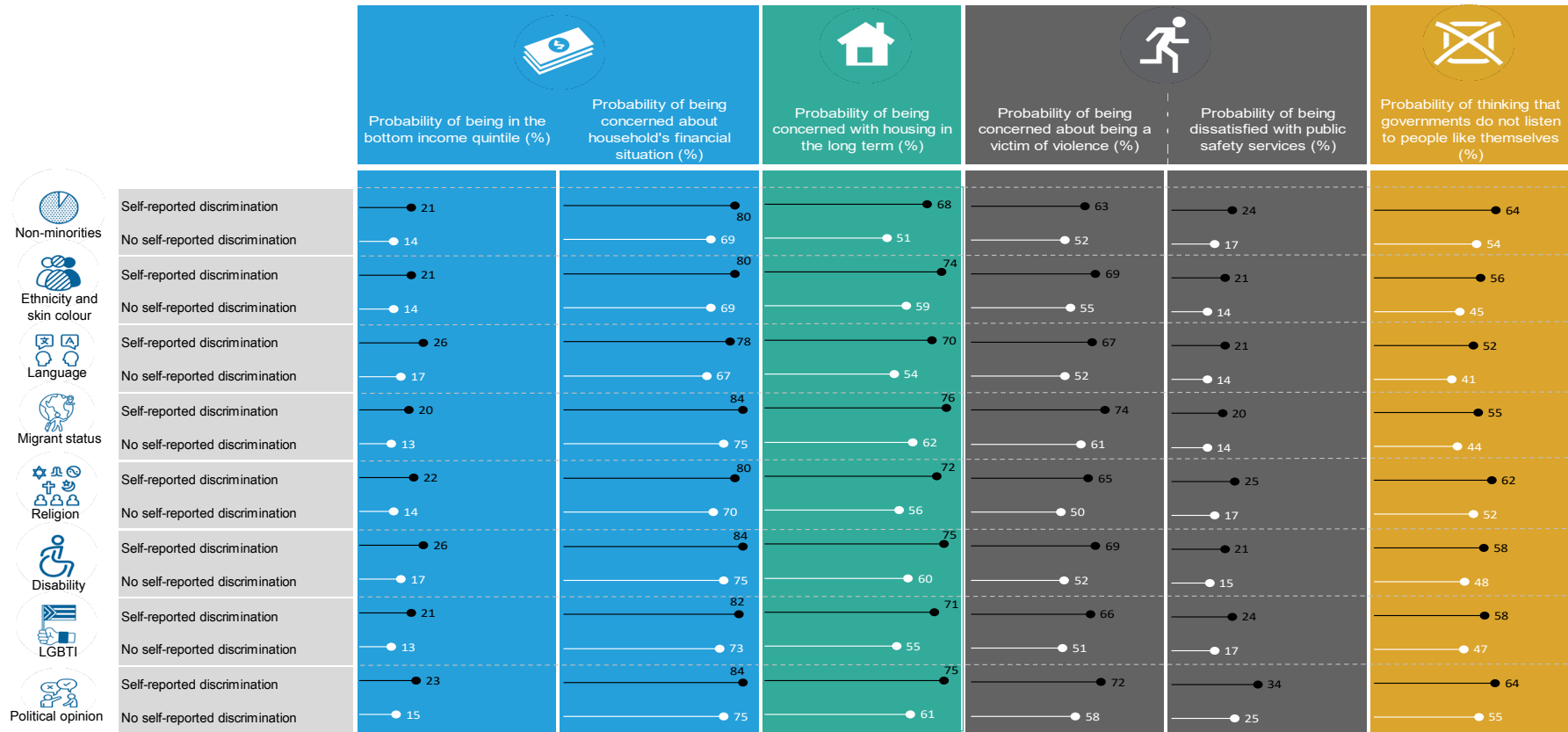
Other notable differences in outcomes are found in concerns about housing. People who identify as a migrant, belonging to a racialised community or a political minority, are more likely than the general population to be concerned about housing costs (Figure 4.1). A recent correspondence test from Belgium found that people of North African descent face discrimination when trying to find an apartment to rent, particularly when looking for apartments in higher socio-economic and less ethnically diverse areas – indicating that people from racialised communities can get 'locked into' disadvantaged areas (Ghekiere and Verhaeghe, 2022<sup>[37]</sup>).

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experience of discrimination in the previous year, minority identity, age, sex, willingness to pay an addition 2% in taxes for public safety services, household income, education, number of children and country. For the dissatisfaction with public safety services model, the dependent variable is disagreement with the statement 'I think that my household and I have/would have access to good quality and affordable public services in the area of public safety (e.g. police)', and the independent variables are experience of discrimination in the previous year, minority identity, age, sex and country. Finally, in the model of perceptions about voice counting, the dependent variable is disagreement with the survey question: 'I feel the government incorporates the views of people like me when designing or reforming public benefits and services' and the control variables are experience of discrimination in the previous year, minority identity, sex, age, household income, number of children and country. In all models, minority identity refers to respondents who consider themselves to belong to a minority group based on their language, ethnicity and skin colour, migrant status, religion, political opinion, disability and sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBTI). Data include respondents aged 18-64. The EU 17 average is population weighted.

**Figure 4.1. People who report experiencing discrimination have poorer outcomes across many well-being dimensions**

Outcomes for minority and non-minority groups split by their experience of discrimination in the previous year, EU 17, 2022



Note: Probabilities are derived from logistic regressions described in footnote 11. All differences in outcomes between those who do and do not exp discrimination are statistical significance at the 10% level except for ethnicity and skin colour minorities at the bottom of the income distribution, ethnic and skin colour minorities who are dissatisfied with public safety services and ethnic and skin colour minorities who do not believe their voice counts.

Source: OECD calculations based on OECD Risks that Matter Survey 2022, <http://oe.cd/rtm>.

Discrimination may also affect people's economic opportunities in ways that are difficult to observe. For example, the systemic barriers that at-risk groups face in participating equitably may require them to work harder to achieve similar results as the majority of the population. A field experiment in Sweden revealed that Arab women needed to be more qualified (by having one to three years more experience) than their non-Arabic counterparts to receive the same number of callbacks for advertised jobs (Arai, Bursell and Nekby, 2015<sup>[38]</sup>). Similarly, religious Muslims face barriers when applying for jobs in France unless they are 'outstanding' in terms of graduating from high school with honours, professing a level of mastery of key employment skills, and English fluency (Valfort, 2020<sup>[39]</sup>).

On the other hand, the systematic barriers faced by groups at risk of discrimination may also lead to a feeling of being less in control of their future and deprived of opportunities and rewards, which may in turn negatively affect their motivation to engage with the employment sector to their fullest potential. For instance, according to the *Opportunities module*, people who identify as a minority are more likely than others to believe that factors outside of a person's control are important for getting ahead in life such as skin colour and ethnicity, disability status and parents' socio-economic position (OECD, 2023<sup>[40]</sup>).

Finally, the effects of discrimination are likely to have long-term, cumulative and even inter-generational effects on material conditions. Qualitative evidence from the 2017 *Fairness, Inequality and Inter-generational Mobility Eurobarometer* suggests that, across the income distribution, people who experience discrimination are more likely to have a lower socio-economic status than their parents. For instance, people in the bottom income quintile who experience discrimination have a 40% chance of having a lower status than their parents compared to 25% for people in the bottom quintile who do not report discrimination. For people in the top quintile, the probabilities are 23% and 13% respectively.

While data limitations prevent the long-term effects from being examined extensively in Europe, studies from countries with decades of data, such as the United Kingdom and the United States show the lasting consequences of discrimination. For example, a meta-analysis of American correspondence studies finds the persistence of racial discrimination in recruitment has not changed since the late 1980s (Quillian et al., 2017<sup>[41]</sup>). Further, the unequal distribution of resources rooted in racism and discrimination manifests as inadequate access to health care and well-funded schools for ethnic and racial minorities, housing insecurity and exposure to toxins, and lower household income, wealth and neighbourhood resources (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2023<sup>[42]</sup>). Indeed, children from racialised communities enter school already at a disadvantage to other children – a disadvantage that grows throughout their education and as they enter the labour market (Carneiro, Heckman and Masterov, 2005<sup>[43]</sup>).

## Feelings of safety and involvement in shaping government policies and services

Beyond material conditions, discrimination is associated with a range of negative quality-of-life indicators such as feeling unsafe or perceiving that governments do not listen to people like themselves (Figure 4.1). People who have experienced discrimination and identify as a religious or a political minority or not part of a minority group have the highest likelihood of feeling like governments do not listen to them. Meanwhile, people who experience discrimination believe they have at least a two-in-three chance of being the victim of crime or violence – much higher than people who do not report experiencing discrimination. Safety concerns are particularly high for migrants and people from racialised communities, especially if they experienced discrimination before. Further, people self-reporting discrimination are much more likely to be dissatisfied with public safety services (including the police) – especially if they are part of a religious or political minority, LGBTIQ+ people or not part of a minority group.

Surprisingly, racialised people report low rates of dissatisfaction with public safety services, despite their exposure to racial profiling by the police. Lower-than-expected rates of dissatisfaction may reflect a drop in the share of racialised people being stopped by police, as documented by FRA between 2016 and 2022



for people of African descent (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023<sup>[6]</sup>). Alternatively, low dissatisfaction rates may be a sign that racialised people may have become accustomed to poor treatment by law enforcement (and thus are not shocked when they have negative interactions).

## Mental health and negative coping strategies such as heavy alcohol consumption and smoking

American studies have consistently shown that people who have experienced discrimination have worse health outcomes than others. Self-reported discrimination has been linked to a range of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety, psychological distress, poor self-reported health, hypertension, breast cancer, and health risk factors including obesity and substance use (Remes, Mendes and Templeton, 2021<sup>[44]</sup>; Pascoe and Richman, 2009<sup>[45]</sup>; Williams et al., 2019<sup>[46]</sup>; Paradies et al., 2015<sup>[47]</sup>).

Undertaking similar analysis in Europe has been constrained to date by limited data, but new evidence drawing on the AXA (2023<sup>[48]</sup>; 2023<sup>[8]</sup>) *Mind Health Survey* indicates that people who report experiencing discrimination in the past year are more likely to experience poor mental health and engage in smoking and heavy alcohol consumption, particularly if they identify as part of a minority (Figure 4.2).

Discrimination appears to have a compounding effect on mental health, as people who experience multiple forms of discrimination report higher rates of depression, anxiety (and symptoms characteristic of these conditions), as well as eating disorders. For instance, depression rates are 14% for minorities who have not been exposed to discrimination, 24% for minorities who have experienced a single form of discrimination and 33% for minorities who have experienced two or more forms of discrimination.

While discrimination harms people's health regardless of the minority status, there are apparent differences in how minorities and the general population cope with discrimination – as indicated by alcohol consumption and smoking patterns. For the general population, rates of smoking and excessive alcohol consumption do not vary by discrimination experience. However, minorities who experience discrimination have higher rates of smoking and excessive alcohol consumption than minorities who do not self-report discrimination. This result is consistent with findings from the United States that smoking and heavy alcohol consumption are common coping strategies for racial and ethnic minorities when dealing with discrimination (although less is known about the coping strategies used by other minority groups because there are fewer studies on the effects of discrimination against other groups) (Chavez et al., 2015<sup>[49]</sup>; Gilbert and Zemore, 2016<sup>[50]</sup>). At an individual level, heavy alcohol consumption by people from racialised communities is a way of managing the anger, post-traumatic stress, and depressive symptoms stemming from discrimination (Gilbert and Zemore, 2016<sup>[50]</sup>). More broadly, heavy alcohol consumption has also been found to be a way of coping with the historical and collective traumas of colonialism and slavery, for example, experienced by racialised communities in the United States (Whitbeck et al., 2004<sup>[51]</sup>).

Stress and trauma have been proffered as reasons for explaining the compounding effects of discrimination on the health of people who identify as part of a minority group. Experiencing discrimination or stigmatisation (including internalised stigma<sup>11</sup>), especially if it occurs regularly or is severe, can trigger chronic stress responses that increase the risk of mental ill-health and vulnerability to physical illness (Pascoe and Richman, 2009<sup>[45]</sup>; Meyer, 2015<sup>[52]</sup>; OECD, 2023<sup>[53]</sup>). Indeed, psychological problems were the most commonly selected response (61%) among people who reported being the victim of racial violence, according to FRA's recent survey of people of African descent (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023<sup>[6]</sup>). Discrimination causes neurobiological stress responses (e.g. chronically elevated cortisol levels, elevated heart rate, blood pressure), which in turn can affect the immune and metabolic systems, mood and cognitive functioning (Berger and Sarnyai, 2015<sup>[54]</sup>). Sustained stress also

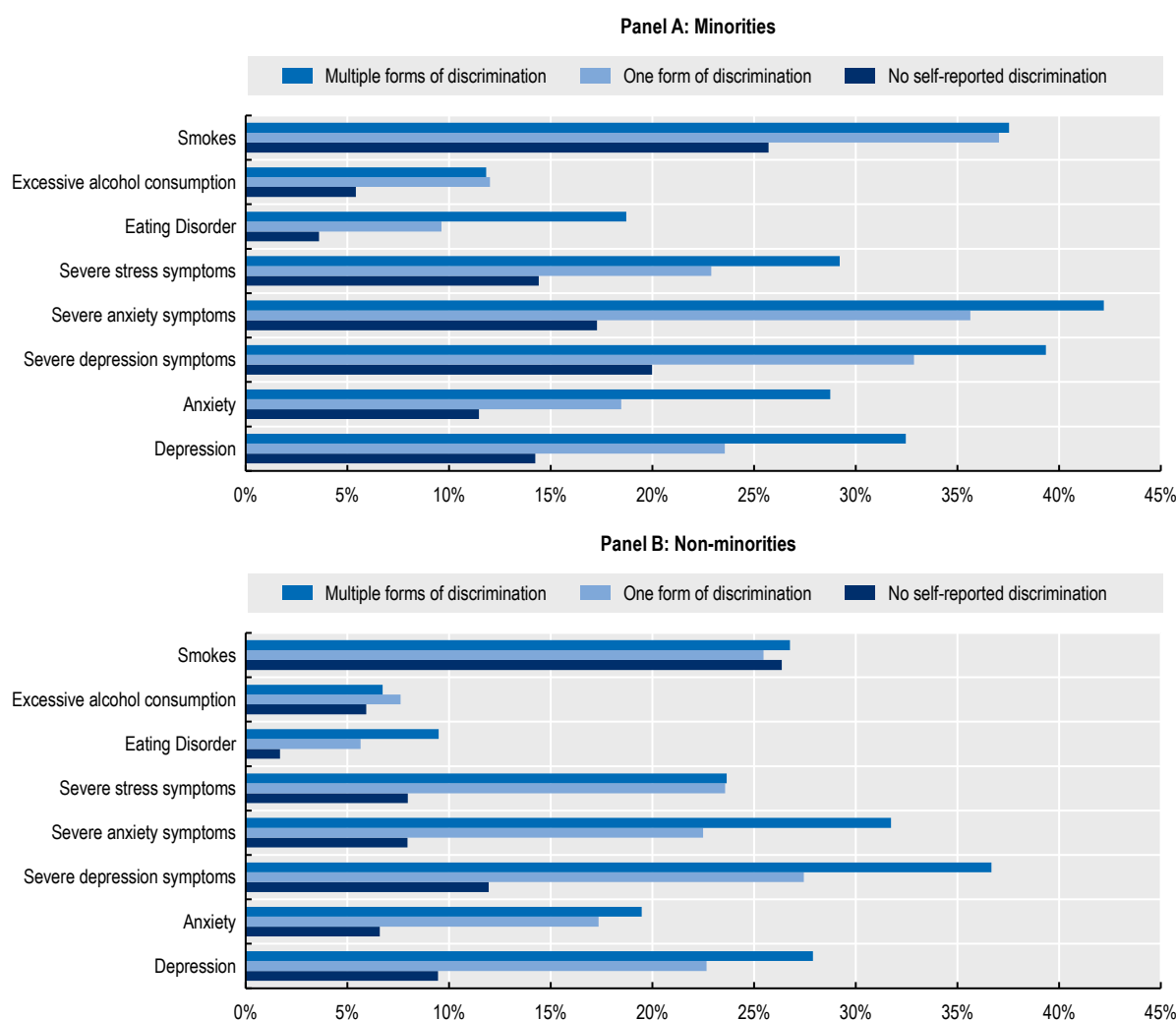
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<sup>11</sup> Internalised stigma occurs when a person has negatively biased views about their own identity or group.

erodes self-control, which can contribute to the uptake of unhealthy behaviours such as smoking and using alcohol and drugs excessively (Pascoe and Richman, 2009<sup>[45]</sup>). In turn, substance use may also be used as a strategy for coping with discrimination (Goreis et al., 2020<sup>[55]</sup>).

**Figure 4.2. People who experience multiple forms of discrimination are more likely to have poor mental health, smoke and drink heavily, particularly if they belong to minority groups**

Share of population with various mental health conditions and symptoms, who smoke and/or consume alcohol excessively by minority status and self-reported experience of discrimination, EU 6, 2023



Note: Depression and anxiety are diagnosed conditions, while severe depression, anxiety and stress symptoms are based on nine questions from the Depressive, Anxiety and Stress Scales (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995<sup>[56]</sup>). Heavy alcohol consumption is measured as more than seven standard drinks for women and over 14 standard drinks for men per week (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2022<sup>[57]</sup>). The EU 6 average is population weighted and includes the following countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Spain. Minority includes respondents who consider themselves to be part of a minority group based on their sexual orientation, religion, race/ethnicity or other. Source: OECD calculations based on AXA (2023<sup>[8]</sup>), *Toward a New Understanding: How We Strengthen Mind Health and Wellbeing at Home, at Work and Online*, AXA Group, <https://www.axa.com/en/about-us/mind-health-report>.

Structural inequalities can also exacerbate mental and physical ill-health, in addition to causing stress. Indeed, discrimination and inequalities in opportunities have been called ‘the causes of the causes’ of disease as they shape many health risk factors (Compton and Shim, 2015<sup>[58]</sup>). For instance, discrimination in employment, education and housing can constrain economic opportunities and lead to people living economically disadvantaged lives where they are at risk of food insecurity and other deprivations that increase the risk of poor health (OECD, 2023<sup>[53]</sup>; Shim and Compton, 2020<sup>[59]</sup>; Compton and Shim, 2015<sup>[58]</sup>). Poor-quality housing, for example, is associated with negative health outcomes via the heightened exposure to environmental toxins (for example, from pollution, mould or lead), and overcrowding, which can make it easier for disease to spread, as was the case with COVID-19 (Williams, 2012<sup>[60]</sup>; Lewis, Cogburn and Williams, 2015<sup>[61]</sup>; Williams et al., 2019<sup>[46]</sup>).

In addition, the health system may be a site of discrimination, particularly in terms of a lack of access to care and lower quality of care. Research by FRA (2019<sup>[7]</sup>; 2022<sup>[30]</sup>) shows that 16% of LGBTI people in Europe and 14% of Roma and Travellers experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months in healthcare settings. Similarly, the AXA (2023<sup>[8]</sup>) *Mind Health Survey* reveals that people who experience discrimination are less likely to believe the health system provides timely support in treating mental health conditions, and are slightly less likely to feel they know how to access health care if they need it than people who have not experienced discrimination.

Discrimination in health care may result in people not receiving correct diagnoses or adequate treatments, or feeling stigmatised. In a recent survey of over 11,000 people from marginalised communities in France, Brazil, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States revealed that 66% of LGBTIQ+ people and 73% of people from racialised communities and people with disability had healthcare experiences that damaged their trust in the system (compared to 56-58% of the general population) (Sanofi, 2022<sup>[62]</sup>). Maternal mortality for black women is almost four times higher than for white women in the United Kingdom and 2.6 times higher in the United States (House of Commons 2023, 2023<sup>[63]</sup>; NCHS Health E-Stats, 2023<sup>[64]</sup>). In the case of the health inequities faced by LGBTIQ+ people, a review of studies found that some LGBTIQ+ people have been denied medical treatment, and have had healthcare providers make assumptions (and being judgmental) about their sexual practices, and not show respect for trans people’s names or pronouns (Medina-Martinez et al., 2021<sup>[65]</sup>). Poor treatment contributes discourages people from engaging with the health system unless their medical issues become severe.

Taken together, this evidence indicates that discrimination is associated with negative outcomes in a number of important areas of life. But the effects of discrimination reverberate beyond the individuals directly affected, most notably in terms of lost economic potential and social cohesion.

# 5 The consequences of discrimination spread beyond those personally affected

While individuals bear the brunt of discrimination, the costs to society are also large. This section explores existing literature on the broader economic costs of discrimination in the EU and then presents new analysis of the relationship between the social acceptance of minorities and countries' economic progress. Finally, the section examines the relationship between various country-level social cohesion indicators and the level of anti-discrimination engagement in society – where social cohesion indicators include the level of social acceptance of minorities, trust in institutions and people, political action, and the diversity and strength of social networks. The evidence presented in this section is intended to be demonstrative of the types of economic and social costs of discrimination, in the face of data limitations, which prevent a comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, the analysis highlights the broad, ripple effects of discrimination in the EU.

## Economic costs

Section 4 showed that discrimination is associated with a range of poor material outcomes, from income to weaker attachment to the labour market, and downward social mobility. In short, discrimination limits economic opportunities. At a societal level, a lack of equality of opportunity translates to lower productivity and economic growth, since vulnerable and marginalised groups are not necessarily able to work in roles that are commensurate to their talents (van Ballegooij and Moxom, 2018<sup>[66]</sup>). People at risk of discrimination may drop out of the labour market or not invest in their education, as they feel like it will not pay off in terms of higher-paying jobs (see for example (OECD, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>) for LGBTI and (OECD/European Union, 2015<sup>[31]</sup>) for immigrants). Lost production and lower wages, in turn, affect public finances in the form of lower taxation receipts and higher social benefit payments. Finally, the higher risk of worse mental or physical health outcomes (see Section 4) and violence for people at risk of discrimination creates economic losses.

While data limitations make it difficult to robustly measure the economic costs of discrimination, a few studies have provided estimates for groups at risk of discrimination in the EU as a whole and in a number of its Member States by quantifying the effect of closing economic gaps in, for example, earnings and employment. However, such studies tend to assume that differences in outcomes between disadvantaged people and the general population are wholly attributable to discrimination (due to a lack of data on other explanatory factors, such as the level of education, occupation and years of experience). Further, these studies often do not account for the investments that countries need to make to achieve parity, for example, increases in funding for educational and training, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Further, they do not account for the required time to implement these changes and assume that parity can be achieved immediately. On the other hand, only the costs that can be easily quantifiable are included, which could

lead to an underestimation. As such, it is difficult to precisely measure the level of over/underestimation, and thus estimates should be interpreted as giving a ‘ball park’ indication of the costs of discrimination.

At the EU level, estimates suggest that GDP could be boosted and tax revenue increased by hundreds of billions of euros if discrimination were eliminated (Table 5.1). The estimated benefits are largest for closing sex-, age- and disability-based gaps, which reflects the self-reported size of these groups and the types of costs that could be counted, and in no way minimises the value of pursuing equality for other at-risk groups. The comparability of the economic costs by group is also limited by the availability of data and the academic and political attention each group receives, for instance, only the estimated loss due to discrimination on the basis of sex includes an additional calculation of the cost of violence.<sup>12</sup> Further, small fractions identify as part of a group at risk of discrimination in the European Social Survey, which forms the basis of these estimates. For example, only 4% of people identify as part of a group at risk of discrimination based on their skin colour or ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity in the European Social Survey, compared to 9% in the 2023 Discrimination in the European Union Barometer. As a result of the small samples of minorities and the inability to quantify all relevant costs, the estimates are likely to reduce (some of) the overestimation that may occur in these types of studies (set out above).

**Table 5.1. Discrimination is associated with large GDP losses (EUR, 2022 price levels)**

	Sex	Race and ethnicity	Religion and belief	Sexual orientation (not including gender identity)	Age	Disability
GDP	640 billion (including projected losses by 2030)	2.8-12.7 billion	234 million	30-89 million	289-364 billion	0.84-1.42 billion
Tax revenue	138-217 billion	1.1–4.6 billion	84 million	11-33 million	104-130 billion	302-493 million

Note: The discrimination on the grounds of sex includes a GDP loss of €286 billion (2022 price level) due to the gender pay gap by 2030, whereas the other costs are calculated for the most recent available year. The GDP losses across different grounds of discrimination are not perfectly comparable due to different methodologies in calculation and costs considered.

Source: van Ballegooij and Moxom (2018<sub>[66]</sub>), estimates have been adjusted from 2016 to 2022 price levels using the average annual HICP index of Eurostat (18.6% increase over the period), Eurostat (2023) ‘HICP - all items - annual average indices’ available at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tec00027\\_\\_custom\\_8273662/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tec00027__custom_8273662/default/table?lang=en) (Accessed on 2 November 2023).

While it is difficult to assess whether the monetary values in Table 5.1 over- or under-estimate the costs of discrimination, national studies point towards an underestimation being more likely. National studies consider the flow-on effects of discrimination, such as the reduction in consumption that would follow from lower employment and wages, which add a considerable amount to the cost estimation. For example, in Spain, the cost of workforce exclusion of persons with a disability is estimated to stand at 4% of GDP once

<sup>12</sup> Lost GDP is calculated (1) for sex, by considering the gender gap in tertiary education, labour force participation, gender pay gap, mental health costs, and gendered violence, (2) for race and ethnicity, by considering gross earning lost (poorer health status and lower employment) and mental health costs (3) for religion and belief, by considering gross earnings lost (poorer health status and lower employment), (4) for sexual orientation, by considering gross earnings lost (poorer health status and assault), (5) for age, by considering gross earnings lost (lower employment and poorer health status), and (6) for disability, by considering lower employment and a lower level of post-secondary education. Note that some of these costs use estimates from different studies, whereas others are solely based on the European Social Survey. Lost earnings due to lower employment are calculated by multiplying the number of people affected by discrimination that are unemployed and the average wage. Health costs are calculated by considering the number of people affected by discrimination and the subsequent increased probability of assault and its effect on health. The lost tax revenue is calculated by assuming a tax rate of 36% on labour (OECD average in 2017). A full methodology of the calculation can be found in Appendix 2 of the original study (van Ballegooij and Moxom, 2018<sub>[66]</sub>).

flow-on effects are added (compared to 2.4% of GDP when only the direct effects are estimated) (Cámara, Martínez and Santero-Sánchez, 2020<sup>[67]</sup>).<sup>13</sup> Further, GDP could be 3.6% to 14.1% higher in France if discrimination on the basis of sex, disability status, residence, and migration status was eliminated (Bon-Maury et al., 2016<sup>[68]</sup>).<sup>14</sup> Finally, the cost of discrimination against LGBTI people could amount to 0.21%-0.43% of GDP in Poland, 0.14-0.23 % of GDP in Hungary, and 0.63%-1.75% of GDP in Romania (Perlov et al., 2020<sup>[69]</sup>).<sup>15</sup>

## Social cohesion

Given the limitations on placing a monetary value on the cost of discrimination, an alternative way of assessing the economic effects of discrimination is to investigate the relationship between economic progress and social cohesion – which involves accepting all members of society and fighting exclusion and marginalisation, as well as working towards the well-being of all, creating a sense of belonging and trust, and providing opportunities for upward social mobility (OECD, 2011<sup>[70]</sup>; OECD, 2011<sup>[71]</sup>). In addition, social cohesion is often signified by social networks that break down boundaries between different groups, also called bridging social capital or intergroup cohesion (Schiefer and van der Noll, 2017<sup>[72]</sup>). For example, this happens when people that are part of the majority religion have persons in their social networks with a different religion (see Figure 5.2 Panel A for an estimated measure of this concept).

Social cohesion, and specifically the acceptance of minorities in an inclusive society, can affect economic development in a few ways. Less socially cohesive societies are less trusting, which may fuel discrimination and hate, as a lack of close social bonds with people from different communities and a lack of belonging can lead to the othering of marginalised and vulnerable groups (Schiefer and van der Noll, 2017<sup>[72]</sup>). In turn, unequal treatment of people can sow seeds of mistrust of those who are different, and cause people who are subjected to discrimination to feel like they do not belong in their country or place of residence (van Ballegooij and Moxom, 2018<sup>[66]</sup>). Mistrust of others can thwart efforts to cooperate economically, such as by inhibiting business ventures and lending. A lack of social cohesion can also erode trust in institutions too, which can make it difficult to govern effectively (Easterly, Ritzen and Woolcock, 2006<sup>[73]</sup>), and contribute to an unwillingness to support public investments in infrastructure, schooling and health. For instance, religious prejudices are associated with lower levels of trust in national governments and the EU (Ekici and Yucel, 2015<sup>[74]</sup>).

Various studies have tried to empirically measure the contribution social cohesion makes to economic growth, given the various ways in which a breakdown in social cohesion and its components can affect trust and support for public investments. For example, there is a positive and significant effect of intergroup cohesion – defined as the absence of ethnic, linguistic, religious or any identity-based conflict in multicultural, liberal countries – on GDP per capita (Pervaiz and Chaudhary, 2015<sup>[75]</sup>). Multicultural and liberal values that are widely shared across different groups in society have proven to raise the trust and solidarity that are required to reap the economic benefits of social cohesion (Breidahl, Holtug and Kongshøj, 2018<sup>[76]</sup>).

One way to assess social cohesion is to measure to which extent the general population supports each minority group in various social, political, and economic settings. In this paper, social acceptance is

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<sup>13</sup> Estimates are calculated by removing the employment and wage gap, by adding the subsequent intermediate demand from other economic sectors, and by adding the increased consumption from households.

<sup>14</sup> Estimates are based on closing differences in salary, employment status, number of hours worked and the level of education to the national average.

<sup>15</sup> Estimates are calculated by considering a wage gap using a 3% LGBT+ incidence rate and a 15% loss of productivity, and by attributing a cost to the excess prevalence rate due to LGBT+ discrimination.

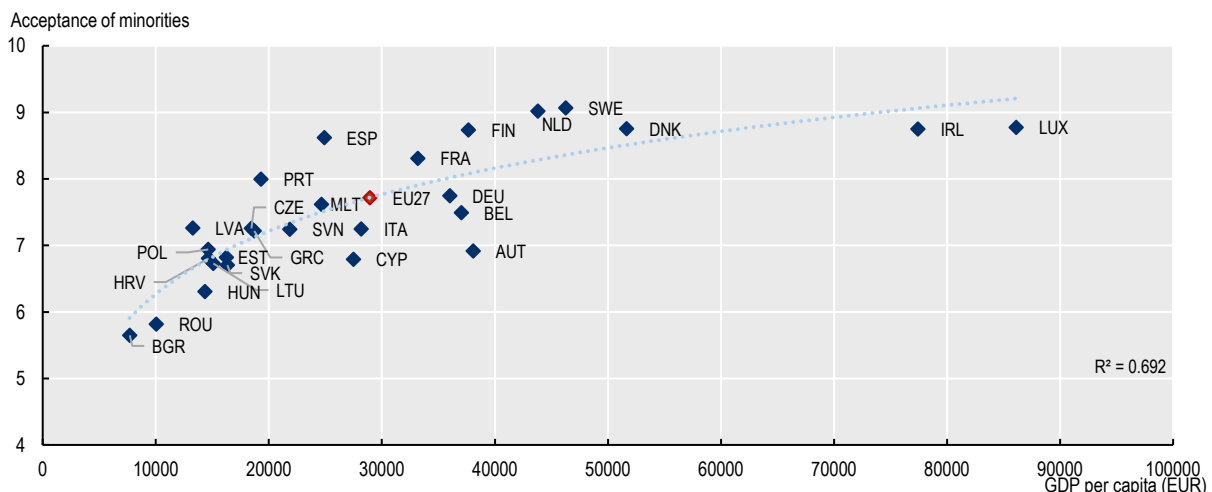
measured as the level of support – measured on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 stands for “not at all comfortable” and 10 stands for “totally comfortable” – people have for:

- being in close working relationships with people from minority groups
- people from minority groups being in political leadership positions
- their children being in romantic relationships with children from minority groups
- information on diversity included in school lessons.

Figure 5.1 shows that in the EU, countries with higher GDP per capita also tend to be more accepting of people from minority groups. Moreover, EU countries that report higher rates of people having a friend or acquaintance that belongs to a group that is at risk of discrimination, also have a higher GDP per capita. In other words, GDP per capita is generally higher in societies with less prejudice against racialised communities, LGBTIQ+ people, religious minorities and people with disability – although the direction of causality cannot be determined.

### Figure 5.1. Countries where people are more accepting of minorities have a higher GDP per capita

Real GDP per capita (2022) and acceptance of minorities (2023) by country

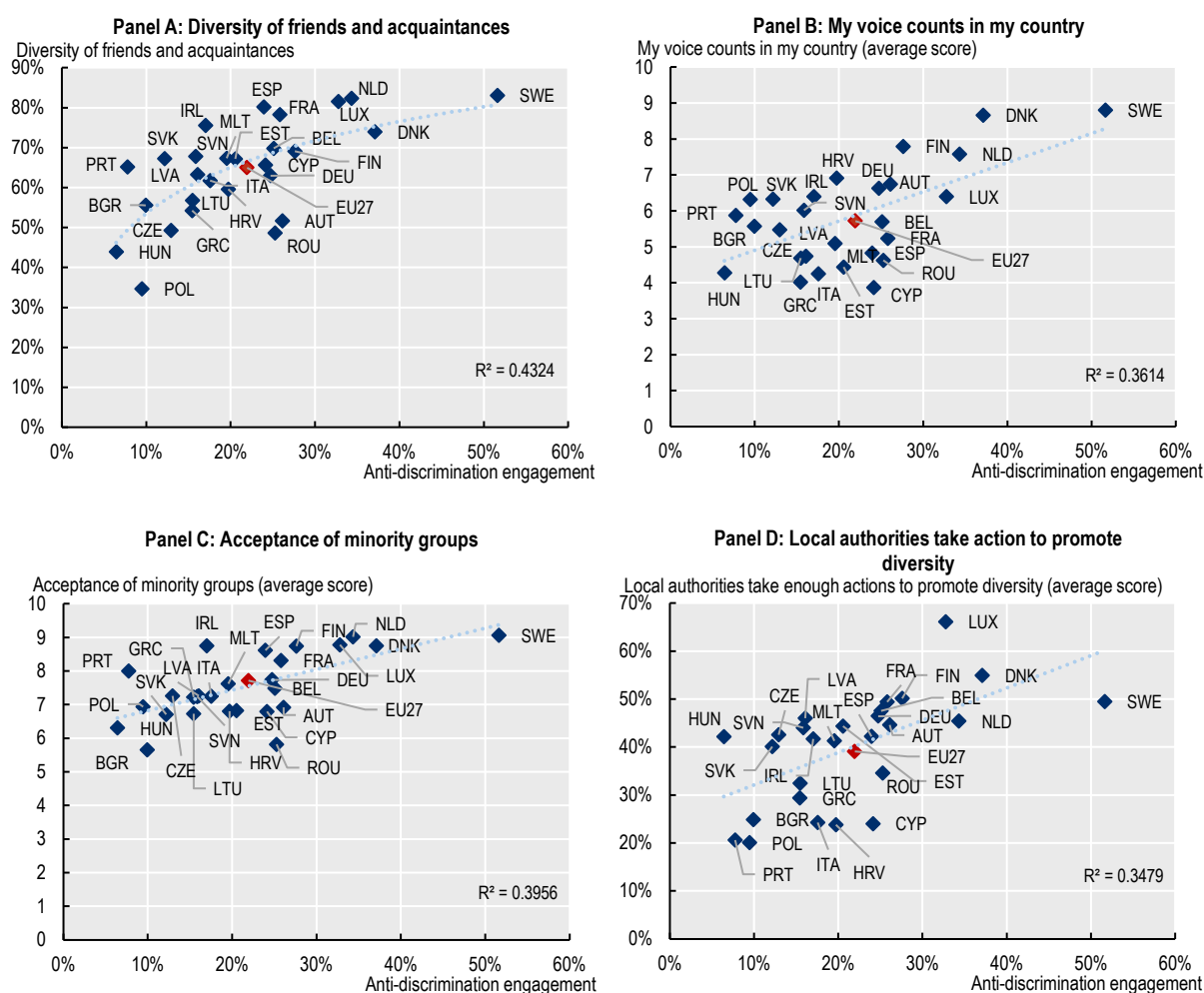


Note: The acceptance of minorities index is constructed by taking the average acceptance in four different settings: how comfortable one is to have a minority in the highest elected political position, at work with whom they are in daily contact, as a partner of one of their children in a romantic relationship, and to which extent one thinks school lessons and materials should include information about diversity. The acceptance for five minority groups (people with a disability, racialised people, Roma people, people from a religious minority, and LGBTIQ+ people) is aggregated, with each group equally weighted: The EU 27 is the population-weighted average of the countries shown in the figure. Sources: OECD calculations based on European Commission 2023, *Discrimination in the European Union, Special Eurobarometer SP535* and Eurostat (2024), Real GDP per capita (online data code sdg\_08\_10). [https://doi.org/10.2908/SDG\\_08\\_10](https://doi.org/10.2908/SDG_08_10) (Accessed on 29 February 2024).

Regardless of whether social cohesion improves economic performance or vice versa, social cohesion is a desirable end in itself – one that is supported by citizens. For example, surveys indicate that ‘tolerance and respect for other people’ and ‘sense of responsibility’ are the most important qualities people value in their children, well above other individualistic traits such as hard work (OECD, 2011<sup>[71]</sup>). This paper finds that more cohesive countries are more aware of discrimination and willing to fight against it (Figure 5.2). In EU countries where people are more willing to take action to raise awareness and fight discrimination, they also have more diverse networks of friends and acquaintances (Panel A) and think that their voices count (Panel B). Moreover, they exhibit higher levels of acceptance of minority groups (Panel C) and think that local authorities take enough actions to promote diversity (Panel D).



**Figure 5.2. There are strong positive relationships between social cohesion indicators and anti-discrimination engagement**



Note: Panel A: The index for the diversity of people’s friends and acquaintances is constructed from the question “Do you have friends or acquaintances that are...?”. The index is the unweighted average of whether the respondent has a friend or acquaintance for each of the following five groups: people with disability, ethnicity or skin colour different from the respondent, Roma people, religion different from the respondent, and LGBTIQ+ people. This score is then aggregated at the country level. Panel B: Shows the percentage of people who indicate that their voice counts in their country. Panel C: See Figure 5.1 for the construction of the acceptance of minorities index. Panel D: Shows the percentage of people that responded “yes” to the question “Do you think enough is being done to promote diversity in the area where you live by your local authority?”.

Sources: OECD calculations based on European Commission (2023), Discrimination in the European Union, Special Eurobarometer SP535.

Despite the benefits of social cohesion, levels vary greatly across EU countries, as measured by the acceptance of minority groups (Figure 5.3). Low acceptance is concentrated for specific minority groups: LGBTIQ+ and Roma people have the lowest acceptance score in the EU, whereas support is higher for people with disability and an ethnicity different from the majority. The average level of support for LGBTIQ+ people, in particular, is pulled down markedly by a few countries, namely Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and the Slovak Republic.

In most EU countries, people have become more accepting of minorities in the period from 2019 to 2023, with the largest overall increases taking place in the Czech Republic, Finland, and Lithuania – with gains seen for all minority groups. EU countries are also slowly converging to higher levels of acceptance, as

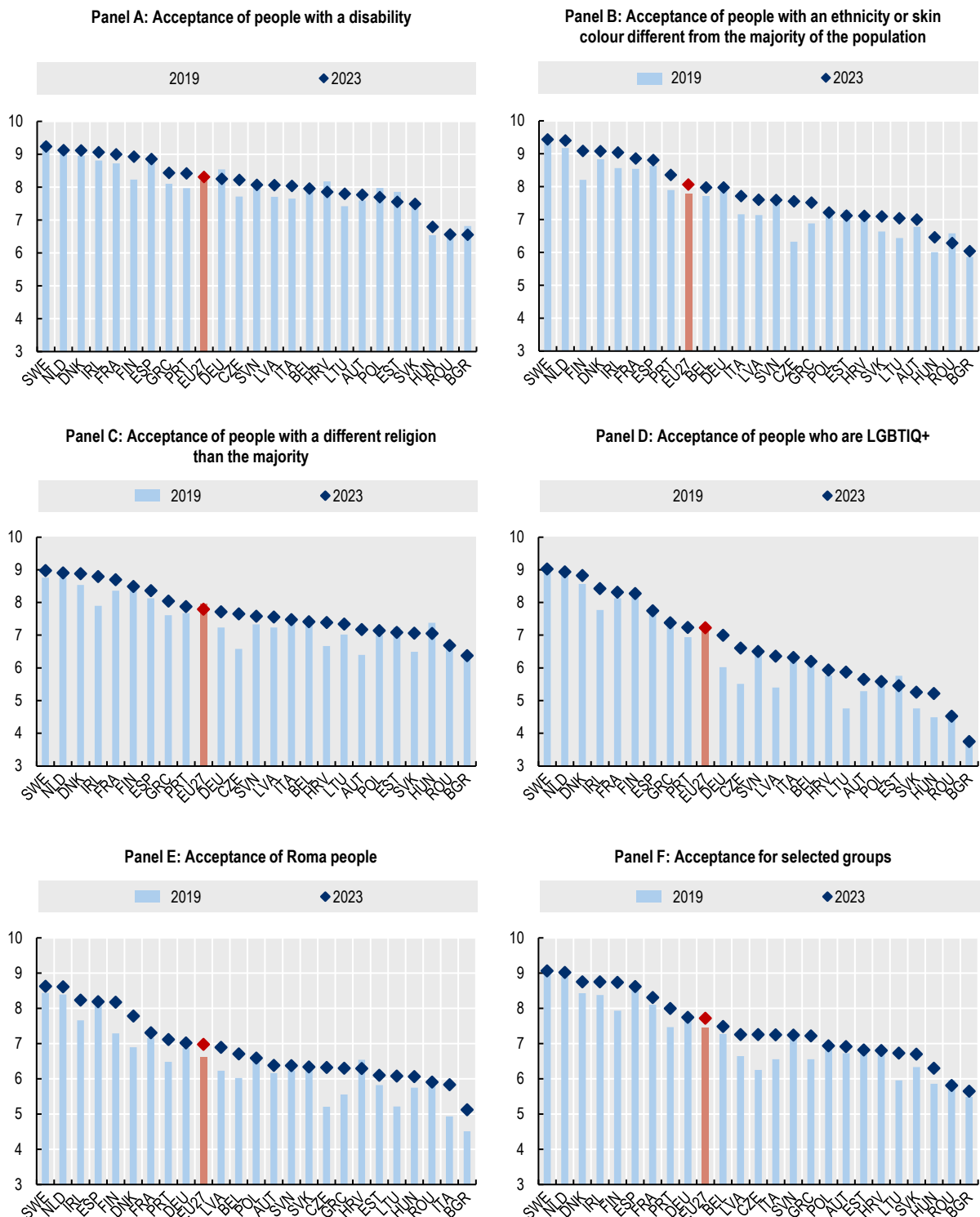


differences between them become smaller, especially for LGBTIQ+ people. However, the level of acceptance in some countries remained somewhat unchanged and even decreased in Romania (mainly due to a decrease in the acceptance of people with an ethnicity different than the majority) and in Poland (lower support for people with disability and a religion different than the majority).

While personal and policy efforts to raise awareness and fight discrimination are more likely to occur in countries that are more socially accepting of minorities, it is also possible for pro-inclusion policies and laws to promote social acceptance. The introduction of pro-inclusion policies and laws has been shown to increase the level of social acceptance across OECD and EU countries, for example through workplace policies (OECD, 2020<sup>[16]</sup>), the introduction of legal protections (OECD, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>) and migrant integration policies (Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2020<sup>[77]</sup>). Indeed, the Migrant Integration Policy Index (2020<sup>[77]</sup>) notes that 'integration policies are one of the strongest factors shaping the public's willingness to accept and interact with immigrants,' while evidence shows that legal changes to promote LGBTI equality improve people's attitudes towards LGBTI people (OECD, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>). People perceive legal changes as a reflection of what is socially acceptable, and many are willing to adopt these norms (Tankard and Paluck, 2017<sup>[78]</sup>; OECD, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>). This is exemplified by the rapid increase in acceptance of homosexuality in European countries after the passage of same-sex marriage laws (Aksoy, 2020<sup>[79]</sup>).

Evidence also suggests that there is public support for governments to pursue pro-inclusion policies, notably in countries that are lagging. For example, the 2023 *Discrimination in the EU Eurobarometer* reveals that, in countries with low levels of social acceptance, a majority of people believe not enough is being done to promote diversity in the workplace. Given demands for pro-inclusion policies, and their effectiveness at boosting social cohesion, EU countries have an impetus to continue to combat discrimination. This impetus is especially strong in light of the high costs of discrimination to individuals and societies, as outlined throughout this paper.

Figure 5.3. Acceptance of minority groups varies across countries, but is slowly converging



Note: The construction of the acceptance measure is explained in the note of Figure 5.1. Panel F includes the acceptance for all minority groups (equally weighted). Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta are not presented in the chart due to small sample sizes, but they are included in the population weighted European Union average, which is represented as EU 27.

Source: OECD calculations based on European Commission (2023), Discrimination in the European Union, Special Eurobarometer SP535.

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