

## Chapter 9

# Discrimination

*Across OECD countries, several indicators suggest persistent disadvantages for the integration of immigrants and their offspring when comparing their outcomes with those of the population without a migration background. Such disadvantages become manifest, for instance, in different employment prospects or housing conditions. Only part of these disadvantages can be explained by differences in socio-economic characteristics such as age, educational attainment, income or work experience. Disadvantage persist even after accounting for such factors, including for the children of immigrants who were born and educated in the receiving country and who should, in principle, not face the same obstacles as their immigrant parents (see OECD, 2007; OECD, 2008a; OECD, 2012).*

*One possible source of such persistent disadvantages may be discrimination against immigrants and their offspring. This chapter is an overview of the main concepts and available statistics related to discrimination that may affect immigrants and their offspring.*

### 9.1. What is discrimination?

Across OECD countries, several indicators suggest persistent disadvantages for the integration of immigrants and their offspring when comparing their outcomes with those of the population without a migration background. Such disadvantages become manifest, for instance, in different employment prospects or housing conditions. Only part of these disadvantages can be explained by differences in socio-economic characteristics such as age, educational attainment and income or work experience. Disadvantages persist even after accounting for such factors, including for the children of immigrants who were born and educated in the receiving country and who should, in principle, not face the same obstacles as their immigrant parents (see OECD, 2007; OECD, 2008a; OECD, forthcoming).

One possible source of such persistent disadvantages may be discrimination against immigrants and their offspring. Ethnic discrimination is generally understood as differential treatment that disfavours an individual or a certain group of people owing to their ethnicity, race or nationality. It can come in various forms and may be inherent in individual behaviour or in institutional structures and practices.

Immigrants and their offspring can be subjected to discrimination by individuals such as employers when applying for jobs (see OECD, 2008b, for a comprehensive discussion of labour market discrimination), landlords or housing agents when looking for a place to live or credit officers when requesting a loan or mortgage. With respect to discrimination in such market situations, a distinction is generally made between *taste-based* discrimination that stems from ethnic or racial prejudice and *statistical discrimination*. The latter occurs, for example, where employers lack information about a job candidate's expected productivity or where landlords have doubts about the liability of a potential tenant. In a rational attempt to choose the best suited candidate, they resort to making assumptions about the candidate's suitability based on observable characteristics such as the migration background. In practice, it is often difficult to distinguish among the two types of discrimination, since discrimination of the statistical kind is often based on prejudices about migrants.

Disadvantages can also arise from institutional structures that favour the population without a migration background when it comes to access to certain services and goods. Structural/institutional discrimination may, for instance, occur where public sector employment is restricted to nationals or where immigrants without host country nationality are not eligible for community housing.

Regardless of the form that it may take, ethnic discrimination can hamper the access of immigrants and their offspring to jobs, housing or loan facilities and thereby contribute to a perpetuation of phenomena such as segregation in housing or overqualification. Apart from socio-economic consequences for immigrants and their offspring there is also evidence that the experience of discrimination might have negative effects on physical and mental health (e.g., Greene et al., 2006; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2007; Williams and

Mohammed, 2009). Finally, in circumstances where certain groups risk marginalisation in the long run, discrimination becomes a threat to social cohesion.

Tackling discrimination is thus of crucial importance for promoting integration at large. From an economic perspective, ethnic discrimination leads to a waste of resources (migrants' skills) and to a non-optimal allocation of goods, services and opportunities. Many OECD countries therefore maintain legal provisions to sanction unequal treatment and targeted anti-discrimination policies. Sound statistics on discrimination are important to ensure that such policies work efficiently and reach their goals. Yet the measurement of discrimination is still at an early stage of development in many OECD countries and even more so at the cross-country level.<sup>1</sup>

## 9.2. How can discrimination be measured?

The measurement of discrimination is less straightforward than that of other indicators for the integration of immigrants and their offspring. Essentially, three approaches to assessing discrimination in international comparison can be distinguished.<sup>2</sup>

The first approach has already been mentioned and is based on econometric analyses of already existing datasets. Discrimination is measured as the residual difference in employment rates, housing conditions, income or educational outcomes, which remains after accounting for a range of observable characteristics. Most datasets contain information on major socio-economic characteristics such as gender, age or educational attainment, whereas other characteristics – most notably those concerning language proficiency and other skills – are not directly measured. Even surveys that include measures of language and skills – such as the International Adult Literacy Survey or the OECD Programme for the International Assessment for Adult Competencies (PIAAC, the data for which are not yet available) – do generally not provide objective measures of additional, unobservable factors that influence integration, such as differences in personal networks, knowledge about relevant administrative or working procedures, or personal motivation and aspirations. As a consequence, the extent to which residual unexplained gaps in outcomes are driven by these unobservable factors instead of genuine discrimination remains largely unclear.

A second approach often used to measure discrimination is to ask immigrants and their offspring about their personal experiences and views regarding the incidence of unequal treatment. Respective questions about *perceived* discrimination are included in a number of social surveys such as the European Social Survey, the Eurobarometer, or the General Social Surveys in Canada and New Zealand (see also further down). While some of these surveys, such as those for Canada and New Zealand, ask the respondent to recall if he or she has ever actually felt personally discriminated against, other surveys, such as the *European Social Survey*, employ a more abstract approach. The latter asks if respondents generally consider themselves members of a group that is discriminated against based on ethnicity, race or nationality. This is a slightly ambiguous measurement of *perceived* discrimination as it blurs the distinction between personal experience and general perceptions about the situation of one's ethnic group overall. Individuals might not have been subject to discrimination themselves but still consider their ethnic group to be affected, while persons who felt personally exposed to unequal treatment might, in turn, project this experience on their whole community.

Measuring *perceived* discrimination has some general weak points that arise from its inherent subjectivity: victims might not always detect discrimination where it occurs or, on the contrary, prematurely attribute certain obstacles or disadvantages to discrimination that are actually a result of other factors. Indeed, the extent to which immigrants and their offspring perceive ethnic discrimination varies with a range of socio-economic characteristics such as gender, age, educational attainment and employment status (see the next section). In addition, the public discourse about immigration and integration in the receiving country as well as norms prevailing within different immigrant groups may influence perceptions of discrimination. Isolated but highly mediatised events might also play a role in shaping perceptions about discrimination. The measurement of self-reported *perceived* discrimination is thus prone to over or understate its actual extent.

A third method that aims to measure discrimination as objectively and rigorously as possible is so-called *correspondence testing*, which has become increasingly widespread over the past two decades (Pager and Shepherd, 2008). To single out discrimination in the moment when it occurs, applications are submitted to job or housing advertisements in the name of two fictitious applicants. The profiles of these applicants are largely equivalent with the only distinctive attribute being the ethnic background, which is usually indicated by the first and last name. Discrimination is then assessed as the difference in call-back rates or invitations to personal interviews or property viewings that both candidates receive. This approach allows manipulating all information that is sent out with the application and reduces the risk of employers or landlords making their decision on the basis of any other factor but the given, observable ones.

### 9.3. Evidence on discrimination from testing studies

Testing studies have examined discrimination in the labour market, in the housing market as well as in sales of consumer goods and insurances (for a review, Riach and Rich, 2002). Virtually all studies that were carefully designed show a considerable incidence of discrimination against applicants of immigrant origin. A testing study in the Swedish housing market, for instance, found that applicants with Arabic-sounding names had to write almost twice as many applications as candidates with Swedish-sounding names to be invited for a property showing (Ahmed *et al.*, 2010). Discrimination of a similar magnitude against immigrants of Moroccan origin was found in the Spanish housing market (Bosch *et al.*, 2009).

Testing studies on discrimination in the labour market were conducted in a wide range of OECD countries – namely Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States – following a standard procedure for correspondence testing developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1992 (Bovenkerk, 1992). These studies focus on different immigrant groups and also differ strongly with respect to the occupations under examination. Their findings are therefore not directly comparable. Nevertheless, they predominantly come to the same conclusion that labour market discrimination against immigrants and their offspring exists and significantly reduces their chances to be hired.

A particularly strong case of unequal treatment in hiring was observed through a testing study in France. Job applicants with a migration background from an origin country in Sub-Saharan Africa had to write more than four times as many applications to be invited for a job interview as candidates of French origin (Cediey and Feroni, 2007). Discrimination

was found to be less pronounced in Belgium (Arriijn *et al.*, 1998), Canada (Oreopoulos, 2009) and Sweden (Carlsson and Rooth, 2007), although job applicants with foreign sounding names still had to write 15 applications on average to be invited for a job interview while ten applications were sufficient for candidates without a migration background.

Two Dutch studies that looked at hiring procedures for highly skilled (Altintas *et al.*, 2007) and low-skilled occupations (De Graaf-Zijl *et al.*, 2006) found no significant incidence of discrimination in hiring whatsoever. However, other studies from the Netherlands produced different observations. Dolfing and van Tubergen (2005), for instance, found that applicants of Moroccan origin were three times more likely to be rejected than persons without immigrant background when applying for internships in low-skilled occupations over the phone.

The Dutch case of several testing studies from the same country yielding contradictory results underscores that findings from studies of this type need to be interpreted with caution. The magnitude of discrimination observed in testing studies is bound to the examined immigrant group, occupation and point in time. As measurement remains, in this sense, punctual and context-bound, findings from testing studies cannot be generalised for the labour market at large and international comparisons are made particularly difficult. For a cross-country testing study, immigrant groups and occupations would need to be chosen very carefully in order to ensure a certain level of comparability from one labour market to another. Finally, testing studies are also subject to some additional limitations, most notably, they do not allow for assessing the full magnitude of discriminatory treatment, as usually only the final turnout is observed in terms of a “yes/no” response.

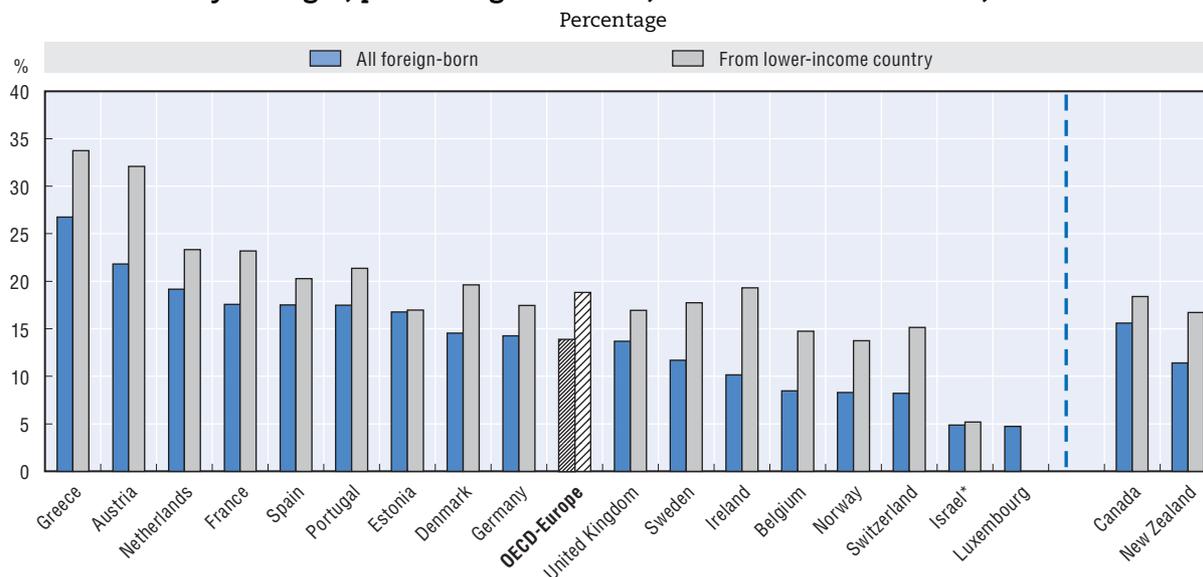
#### 9.4. Comparative evidence on perceived discrimination against immigrants and their offspring

Testing studies are rather demanding with respect to their design and realisation. They require both time and resources and, hence, careful preparation. In addition, there are certain limitations to the comparability of findings across countries, which have been discussed above. With respect to these considerations, an analysis of *perceived* discrimination appears more straight forward.

As mentioned above, the Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey both provide easily accessible data on perceived discrimination in European countries. While the Eurobarometer regularly includes questions on discrimination in its survey rounds, it does not survey citizens from non-EU countries, although this group can be expected to be particularly affected by ethnic discrimination. The European Social Survey (ESS), in turn, considers residents of European countries regardless of their nationality and includes some questions on perceived discrimination in all five rounds that were conducted between 2002 and 2010.

Beyond the European context, information on perceived discrimination is available for Canada and New Zealand. Both countries included a question about personal experience with discrimination in their General Social Surveys in 2009 (Canada) and 2008 (New Zealand). When looking at the subjective experiences with discrimination reported by immigrants who were surveyed in Europe, Canada and New Zealand, a heterogeneous picture emerges across OECD countries (see Figure 9.1).

**Figure 9.1. Share of immigrants who consider themselves members of a group that is discriminated/have been discriminated against based on ethnicity, nationality or race, by country of origin, persons aged 15 to 64, selected OECD countries, 2002-10**



Note: These shares were calculated excluding non-response and “don’t know”. Data from the European Social Survey (ESS) refer to the perception of generally belonging to a group that is discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnicity or nationality. Canadian data include foreign-born who, in the past five years, have experienced discrimination or being treated unfairly by others in Canada because of their ethnicity or culture, race or colour. New Zealand data include foreign-born who report to have been treated unfairly or to have had something nasty done to them within the prior 12 months because they belong to a certain ethnic/racial group or nationality.

\* Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

Source: Canadian General Social Survey, cycle 23, 2009; European Social Surveys (ESS), 2002-2010; New Zealand General Social Survey (NZGSS) 2008.

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The incidence of perceived ethnic discrimination is highest in Greece, where 26 % of the foreign-born population consider themselves members of a group that is discriminated against based on the above-mentioned grounds. In general, all southern European receiving countries have shares above the 14% average of European OECD countries under comparison (see Figure 9.1). Perceived discrimination is relatively low in Belgium, Norway, Switzerland and finally Luxembourg where less than 5 % of the foreign-born deem their peer group subject to ethnic discrimination. In Canada and New Zealand, where participants in the General Social Survey were asked about actual personal experience of discrimination, the levels of perceived discrimination roughly correspond to the European OECD average.

Across all OECD countries under comparison, the incidence of perceived discrimination is significantly higher among immigrants from lower-income countries than in the overall immigrant population. Austria and Greece stand out with roughly one third of foreign-born from lower-income countries considering that their ethnic group is subject to discrimination, compared with an average of less than 20 % in the overall comparison group of European OECD countries.

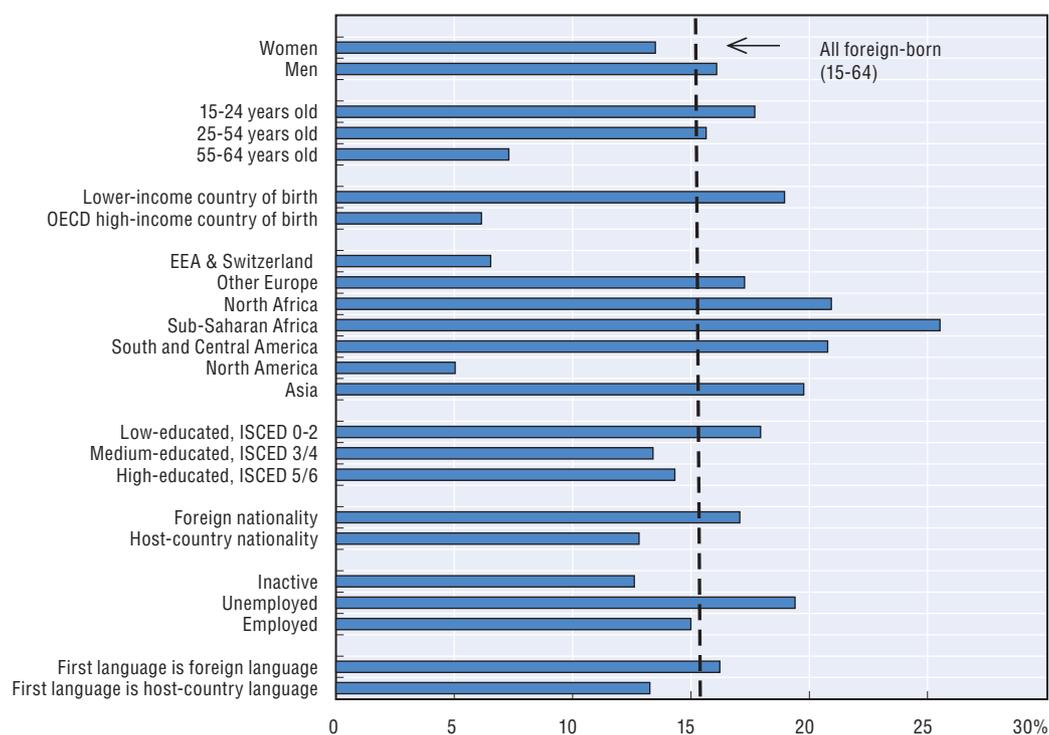
However, figures from the European Social Survey need to be interpreted with caution because the number of foreign-born respondents in the country samples (containing, in total, between 1 000 and 2 000 respondents per survey round and country) is small. A more detailed analysis of factors related to the perception of discrimination in the European

context is therefore only possible at the aggregate level of all countries that participated in the survey.

When scrutinising perceived discrimination in Europe in relation with the respondents' major socio-economic characteristics immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa emerge as the group most likely to perceive discrimination, followed by immigrants from North Africa, Latin America and Asia (see Figure 9.2a). Apart from the region of origin, a range of other socio-economic characteristics shape the extent to which immigrants perceive discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, race or nationality. Across European OECD countries as well as in Canada and New Zealand (see further down) the incidence of perceived discrimination reported by immigrants is higher among men than among women and tends to affect younger age cohorts more strongly than older migrants.

In European OECD countries, low-educated immigrants are more prone to feeling discriminated against than medium and highly educated persons as are unemployed persons compared with those in employment. Immigrants outside the labour market appear to be even less concerned.

Figure 9.2a. **Share of immigrants aged 15 to 64 who consider themselves members of a group that is discriminated against based on ethnicity, nationality or race, by socio-economic characteristics, European OECD countries, 2002-10**



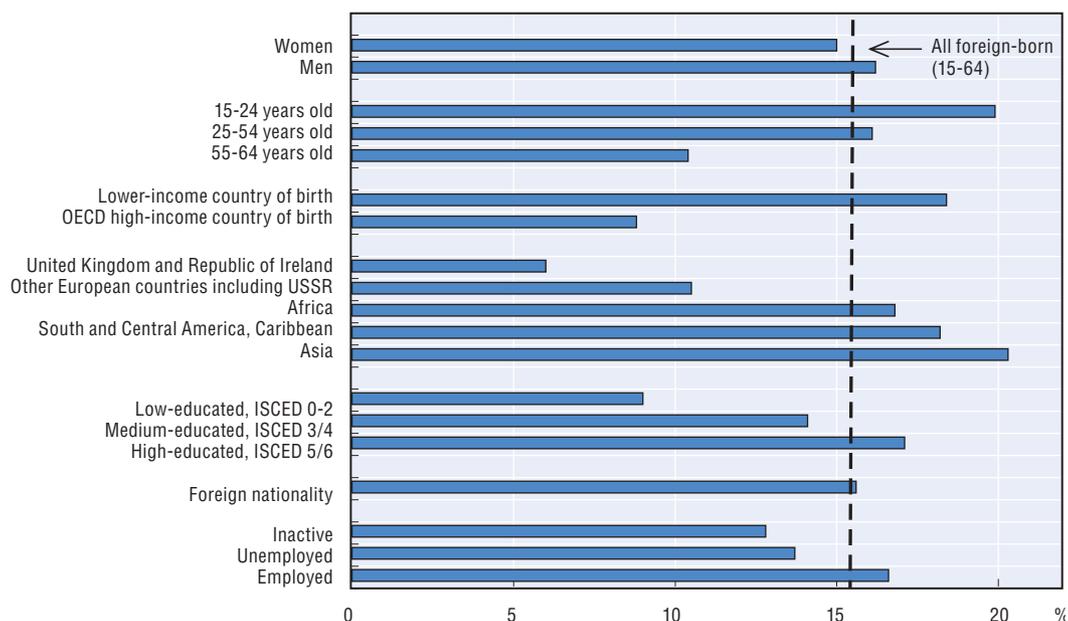
Note: Data include European countries stated in Figure 9.1 plus the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Turkey, for which sample sizes are too small to allow reporting country results individually.

Source: European Social Survey, 2002-2010.

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Immigrants who have been naturalised and obtained the receiving country nationality are less likely to feel discriminated against than immigrants who remain foreign nationals. The same holds for immigrants who mainly communicate in the receiving country language at home, compared with those who speak a different primary language.

Figure 9.2b. **Share of immigrants aged 15 to 64 who report to have been discriminated against based on ethnicity or culture, race or colour within the five prior years, by socio-economic characteristics, Canada, 2009**



Source: Canadian General Social Survey, cycle 23, 2009.

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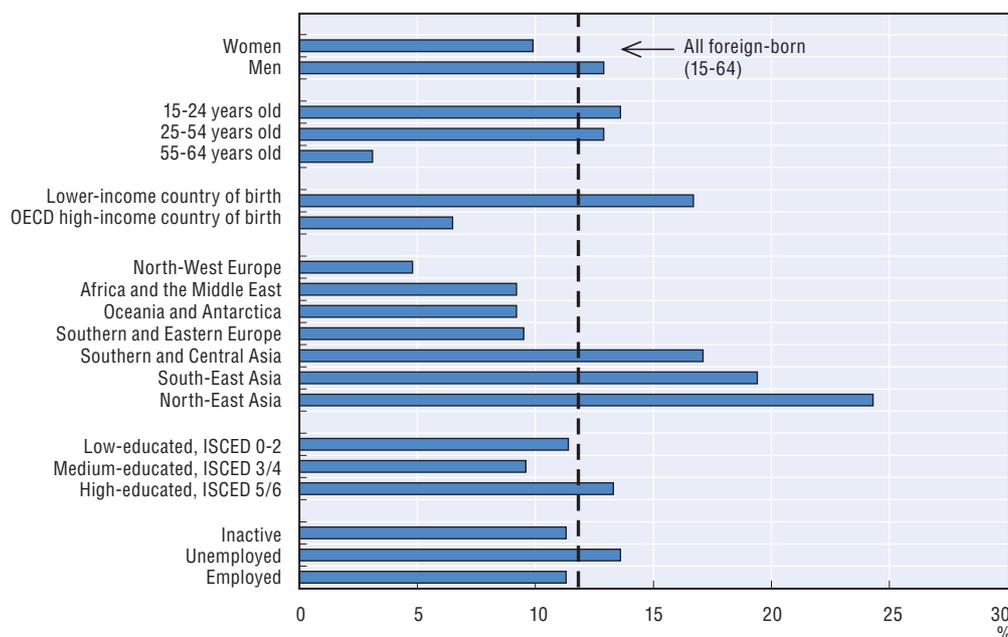
In Canada, immigrants from Asia, more than those from Sub-Saharan Africa, report the highest incidence of perceived discrimination. Highly educated immigrants in Canada tend to feel discrimination more often, whereas in the European OECD area it is the low-educated. While employed immigrants report lower incidences of discrimination than the unemployed and the inactive in Europe, in Canada, the reverse is true.

In New Zealand, perceived discrimination also tends to be particularly widespread among immigrants from Asia, and specifically from North-East Asia. Similar to Europe, perceived discrimination is elevated among the unemployed, but as in Canada, it is more often reported by the highly educated than by the low-educated.

Native-born immigrant offspring should, in principle, not encounter the same integration hurdles as their parents. Having been educated in the host country, they have better access to knowledge about the functioning of social institutions and the labour market. Moreover, they are often more proficient in the host country language than their foreign-born parents. Some factors that might stir discrimination such as language deficits or lack of social capital should therefore be less pertinent for the native-born children of immigrants than for their immigrant parents.

However, on average across European OECD countries, the feeling of belonging to a discriminated group is even more frequent among native-born offspring of immigrants

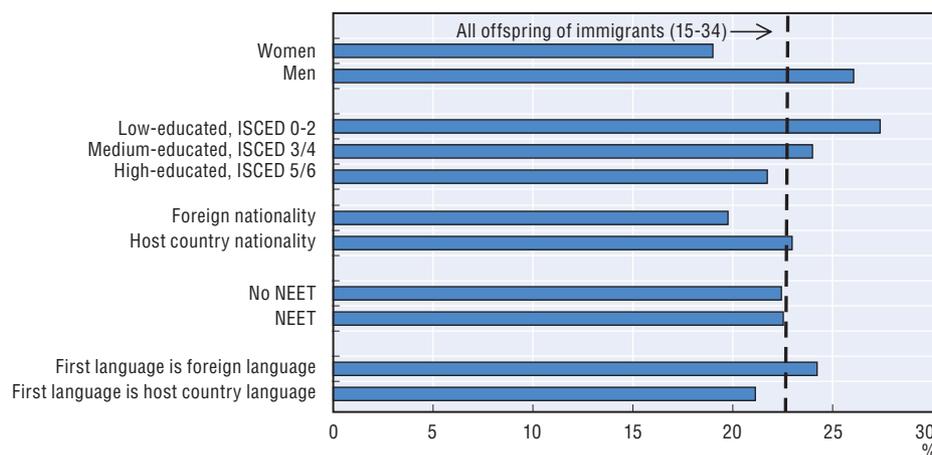
Figure 9.2c. **Share of immigrants aged 15 to 64 who report to have been discriminated against within the prior twelve months because they belong to a certain ethnic/racial group or nationality, by socio-economic characteristics, New Zealand, 2008**



Source: New Zealand General Social Survey (NZGSS) 2008.

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Figure 9.3a. **Share of native-born offspring of immigrants aged 15 to 34 who consider themselves members of a group that is discriminated against based on ethnicity, nationality or race, by socio-economic characteristics, European OECD countries, 2002-10**



Note: Data include European countries stated in Figure 9.1 plus the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Turkey, for which sample sizes are too small to report country results individually.  
Source: European Social Survey, 2002-2010.

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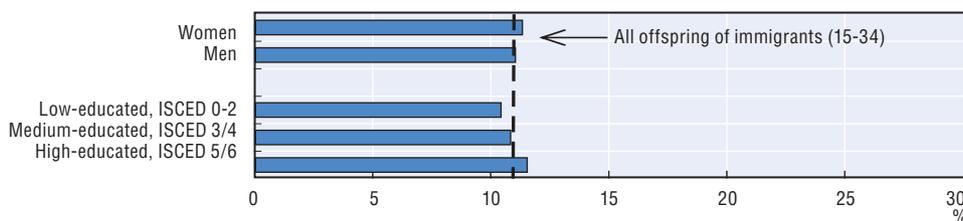
than among persons who were born abroad (see Figure 9.3a). While 14% of foreign-born consider their ethnic group to be subject to discrimination, 23% of native-born offspring of immigrants aged 15 to 34 report the same. This share is largely driven by youth whose

parents have migrated from *lower-income countries*. Among this group, 27% consider themselves members of a group that is treated unequally. In turn, such perceptions appear to be much less frequent among youth with at least one parent from an OECD high-income country.

Similar to perceptions among the foreign-born in European OECD countries, *perceived* discrimination is particularly pronounced among young men born in the host country to immigrant parents (26%) and at lower levels of educational attainment. However, there does not seem to be a significant relation between speaking mainly the receiving country language and the perception of discrimination. Moreover, no significant difference in perceptions can be observed for the group of youth who are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET).

These pooled findings from the European Social Survey demonstrate a need for more in-depth analysis about the particular experiences and perceptions of native-born offspring of immigrant who seem to differ from those of their parents. However, native-born offspring of immigrant currently represent only a small group of survey respondents in many European OECD countries and would need to be targeted more explicitly to allow for analysis of a larger scope.

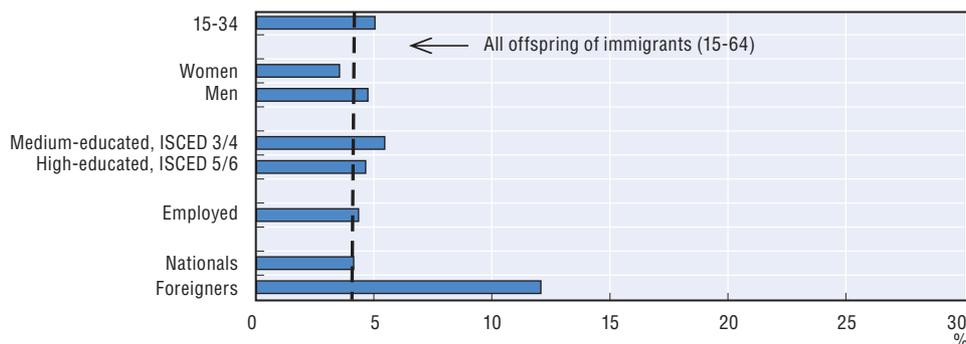
**Figure 9.3b. Share of native-born children of immigrants aged 15 to 34 who report to have been discriminated against based on ethnicity or culture, race or colour within the five prior years, by socio-economic characteristics, Canada, 2009**



Source: Canadian General Social Survey, cycle 23, 2009.

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**Figure 9.3c. Share of native-born children of immigrants aged 15 to 64 who report to have been discriminated against within the prior twelve months because they belong to a certain ethnic/racial group or nationality, by socio-economic characteristics, New Zealand, 2008**



Note: For sample size issues, data by socio-economic characteristics are presented for the native-born offspring of immigrants aged 15 to 64.

Source: New Zealand General Social Survey (NZGSS) 2008.

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In Canada and New Zealand, the General Social Surveys count a sufficient number of native-born offspring of immigrants among their respondents to be able to scrutinise the perceptions of this group separately in both countries. In contrast with perceptions of native-born offspring of immigrants in European OECD countries, native-born children of immigrants in Canada and New Zealand tend to feel less concerned by discrimination than persons who migrated themselves. Differences between young men and women are small, as are differences in perceived discrimination by level of educational attainment. Only having foreign citizenship is associated with a particularly strong perception of discrimination in New Zealand.

The aggregate picture of associations between perceived discrimination and the socio-economic characteristics of immigrants and their children found at the level of European OECD countries differs from those found in Canada and New Zealand. There are some common aspects such as the relatively low incidence of perceived discrimination reported by the oldest cohort of immigrants of working age. Yet there is variation with respect to the groups of immigrants who feel most concerned by discrimination, which highlights the importance of scrutinising the individual socio-economic context of receiving countries as well as their major immigrant groups when analysing discrimination in international comparison.

In conclusion, there are different methodological approaches to measuring discrimination against immigrants and their children and each of them has advantages as well as shortcomings. In general, discrimination is a challenging topic for cross-country comparative analysis because the particular characteristics of an immigrant population in a given country play an important role for their perception of discrimination. Such characteristics can be accounted for when working with survey data, but are harder to control for in testing studies that would otherwise offer the most rigorous assessment of discrimination. These challenges notwithstanding, measuring discrimination remains crucial in its own right to shed light on unequal treatment, to raise public awareness about this issue and to identify fields of intervention for anti-discrimination and diversity policy.

### Notes

1. For a comprehensive discussion of discrimination statistics as a tool for policy making, see Simon (2005).
2. For an in-depth discussion of techniques to measure racial and ethnic discrimination, see Blank *et al.* (2004).

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