

Chapter IV

Prejudice and discrimination: barriers to social inclusion

Key messages

- *Significant progress has been made in repealing discriminatory policies and laws but formal discrimination persists in many countries.*
- *Prejudice and negative stereotypes are expressed in subtle ways. Measuring their reach empirically is therefore difficult.*
- *The existing evidence suggests that discriminatory practices remain widespread and continue to affect the way people work, the opportunities they have, the quality and nature of the relationships they forge, their health and well-being, as well as their sense of agency.*

The examples presented in chapter III add evidence to the fact that societies continue to make distinctions based on ethnicity, race, sex or gender and other characteristics that should have no bearing on people's achievements or on their well-being. The unjust or prejudicial treatment of people on the basis of their identity or their ascribed characteristics is not the only driver of exclusion, but it is a particularly pervasive one. Discrimination constrains the ability of individuals to participate meaningfully in society. It affects the opportunities that people have, the choices they make and outcomes that define their overall well-being. Assessing the impact of discrimination, which plays out in law, policy and practice, and isolating its effect from that of other factors that affect participation and overall well-being is challenging, as mentioned in chapter III. The present chapter contains an overview of research on discrimination. Although the main aim is to summarize the research findings, the chapter also contains analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of the different sources of data and methodologies used to measure discrimination.

The United Nations addresses discrimination as a human rights concern. The Charter of the United Nations reflects the determination of the signatories to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, [and] in the dignity and worth of the human person", including through practising tolerance. Among the purposes of the United Nations is "to achieve international cooperation... in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion"

(United Nations, 1945). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁶⁶ further stipulated the right of all human beings to equality before the law and to equal protection of the law against discrimination or any incitement thereto. It elaborated the prohibited grounds of discrimination by specifying that all persons are entitled to the rights and freedoms that it set forth “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”.⁶⁷ The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has since elaborated on these points: “The nature of discrimination varies according to context and evolves over time. A flexible approach to the ground of ‘other status’ is thus needed...”.⁶⁸ It also laid out a definition of discrimination as constituting “...any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference or other differential treatment that is directly or indirectly based on the prohibited grounds of discrimination and which has the intention or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of Covenant rights”.⁶⁹

The principle of non-discrimination applies throughout international human rights law and legally obliges Governments to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. That principle is inherent in all major human rights treaties, and is the primary focus of several conventions, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,⁷⁰ the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,⁷¹ the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families,⁷² and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.⁷³

A. Formal discrimination as a barrier to social inclusion

Historically, many laws and policies have been explicit in singling out specific groups for favourable treatment and limiting or denying rights to others (see example in box IV.1). Additionally, there are laws that are not discriminatory but may be applied in ways that have negative impacts on disadvantaged

⁶⁶ General Assembly resolution 217 (A) III.

⁶⁷ Ibid., art. 2.

⁶⁸ E/C.12/GC/20, para. 27.

⁶⁹ Ibid., para. 7. “Covenant” here refers to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which is monitored by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

⁷⁰ General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX).

⁷¹ General Assembly resolution 61/106, annex I.

⁷² General Assembly resolution 45/158, annex.

⁷³ General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.

Box IV.1**Jim Crow laws in the United States**

In the United States in the late 1800s, southern state and local governments, resisting federal law, adopted a discriminatory system of laws known as “Jim Crow”. These laws mandated the strict separation of persons of African descent and white people in all facets of life, thus resulting in the segregation of schools, restaurants, transport vehicles, marriage, parks, housing and employment, thereby essentially creating a secondary class of citizenship (American RadioWorks, 2016; McKanders, 2010). Furthermore, the imposition of such barriers as literacy tests and poll taxes for all voters disproportionately disenfranchised men of African descent as well as poor white men who could not meet their requirements.

These laws and measures largely went unchallenged by the federal Government. In 1896, the Supreme Court (*Plessy vs. Ferguson*) institutionalized the principle of “separate but equal”. This principle, employed as justification of Jim Crow laws, belied the inferior spaces and services permitted to persons of African descent and their often brutal treatment at the hands of – or overlooked by – the law (McKanders, 2010). It was not until 1954 that the Supreme Court overturned the principle (*Brown vs. Board of Education*) (Library of Congress, 2011). Yet Jim Crow laws remained in place until 1964 when the final blow against them was delivered with the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which banned discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, religion, sex and national origin in multiple areas, including places of public accommodation and employment. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was aimed at overcoming any legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented persons of African descent from exercising their right to vote under the 15th amendment (1870) to the Constitution of the United States.

groups, reinforcing their exclusion. The negative effects of such grievous legal provisions often persist long after they have been rectified.

While in recent decades numerous discriminatory laws and policies have been repealed and protective ones promulgated, formal discrimination has deep roots and persists to this day. With regard to gender inequality, for example, the World Bank (2015) reported that, of 173 countries and areas examined, more than 150 have at least one law that discriminates against women. In 18 countries and areas in the world, women cannot get a job if their husbands feel it would not be in the family’s interest to do so. Female surviving spouses in 35 countries or areas do not enjoy the same inheritance rights as male surviving spouses, and in 32 countries married women cannot apply for passports in the same way as married men (World Bank, 2015). Moreover, more than 50 countries have discriminatory nationality or citizenship laws. For example, married women in 48 countries cannot extend their citizenship to foreign spouses on an equal basis with their male counterparts, nor can married mothers in 18 countries pass on citizenship to their children born in the country on par with married fathers. These restrictions can result in denial of social benefits, such as public health care, limited access to jobs and restricted freedom of movement (Equality Now, 2016).

Similarly, many religious and ethnic minorities continue to face formal barriers to citizenship, voting and access to justice. The Minorities at Risk

project at the University of Maryland reported that, as of 2006, there were 196 major ethnic or religious minorities in the world facing some form of overt political discrimination – with such discrimination occurring in 108 of the 126 countries and areas considered by the project to be home to substantial ethnic minority groups (University of Maryland, 2015). Likewise, persons with disabilities are formally disadvantaged in employment in some countries where the minimum wage may be lowered or waived for persons in this group (ILO, 2014e).

Discrimination in law according to sexual orientation and gender identity is particularly widespread. The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association lists 75 countries that have criminal laws against sexual activity by lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, transgender or intersex people, and 8 countries where the death penalty can be imposed for such activity (Carroll and Itaborahy, 2015). Furthermore, 60 per cent of Governments in 2012 reported the existence of laws and policies that present obstacles to effective prevention, treatment, care and support for people living with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and 44 countries still impose restrictions on the entry, stay or residence of people living with HIV (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2013).

While the number of overtly discriminatory laws and policies is declining, Governments are increasingly implementing laws and policies designed to prevent discrimination as well as policies to promote the well-being of and give voice to disadvantaged groups. Where protective laws are in place, their enforcement poses challenges and is often inadequate. For example, some countries have legislation that mandates that the physical environment be made accessible to people with disabilities. Yet in France, where all public and private establishments open to the public are required to be physically accessible, just 15 per cent of establishments were accessible to persons with disabilities as of 2012 (United Nations, 2015b). Effective implementation calls for judicial and related institutions to have sufficient administrative, financial and other capacity. This entails thorough knowledge of the law, clear lines of responsibility and appropriate resources and coordination mechanisms, among other things. Moreover, officials must have the will to fully respond to violations and be subject to oversight. At the same time, low awareness among the public of their rights and the legal system governing them is also an impediment to implementation, as many individuals – in particular those who are excluded – do not know that they are legally protected from discrimination or, if they do know, may not be aware of how to report acts of discrimination, which can involve complex, poorly accessible and even costly procedures. Victims may also avoid pursuing legal cases for fear that doing so would subject them to scrutiny, stigma or reprisal. Some people are unable to provide documentation proving their identity, which may be necessary to claim their rights, including to legal services.

Even in countries with non-discriminatory and protective laws in

place, prejudice, stereotypes and discriminatory practices prevail. Despite legal protection, some individuals and groups are subject to bias, negative attitudes and stereotyping, including among public officials. For example, the Public Report on Basic Education in India (PROBE Team, 1999) cited cases of teachers banning lower-caste children from enrolling in school, while Hanna and Linden (2012) found that lower-caste children – and males in particular – are more likely than other students to have teachers negatively assess their academic performance. Measuring prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours is therefore necessary to provide a fuller picture of the kind of unfair treatment meted out every day to people on the basis of, among other things, their age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability status.

B. Measuring interpersonal discrimination

Much like the broader process of social exclusion, the prevalence of discrimination varies depending on the way in which it is measured. In general, research suggests that perceived discrimination is underreported (Kaiser and Major, 2006). Publicly registered incidents of discrimination, such as legal cases brought against employers or public authorities, reported incidents of hate crimes, or complaints registered with non-governmental organizations, are of limited use for cross-country comparisons or to examine trends in the prevalence of discrimination. People's willingness to report such cases depends on the policy environment – whether discrimination is prevented by law – the challenges involved in reporting complaints and the perceived effectiveness of the police and judiciary in addressing and sanctioning such cases. In general, few cases are reported unless policies and institutions are favourable to the pursuit of discrimination claims (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009). As policies and institutions vary over time and between countries, official figures must be interpreted with caution. In many cases, incidents of discrimination simply do not enter into official data. For instance, a study of selected regions and cities in nine countries found that only about 10 per cent of women who had been physically abused sought assistance from legal or social services (World Bank, 2011).

Beyond official statistics, research methods employed to measure discrimination include studies of perceptions, attitude surveys, econometric studies, laboratory experiments and field experiments. Perception studies, attitudinal surveys and experimental techniques usually measure prejudicial attitudes, that is, negative and stereotypical views of persons based on their membership in certain groups. Discriminatory acts – behaviours directed against persons because of their membership in a particular group – are frequently measured by field experiments. The following sections provide an overview of these methods and illustrate how each has been used to detect the presence and extent of discrimination.

1. *Indirect evidence of discrimination through statistical analyses*

As shown in chapter III, inequalities across social groups can often be observed even after controlling for the distinct composition of each group, including differences in educational levels and other human capital endowments. These “residual” inequalities are often attributed to the impact of discrimination. In statistical analyses of intergroup differences in intergenerational mobility, race, for instance, remains a significant variable once differences in initial socioeconomic conditions are accounted for.⁷⁴ Research on Brazil would suggest, however, that race plays a stronger role in explaining differences in upward social mobility among individuals from lower socioeconomic strata than among the upper classes (Ribeiro, 2006).

In Europe, education alone has not been sufficient to deliver upward mobility for children of migrants, implying that other barriers are blocking the access of this second generation to opportunities in the labour market (Glastra, 1999; Gowricharn, 1989). A growing body of empirical evidence indicates that social mobility is significantly lower among non-European than among European migrants (Altzinger and others, 2015; Attias-Donfut and Wolff, 2009). Beyond discrimination, some of the residual differences in the labour market situation and social mobility of migrants as compared with non-migrants are due to unequal language skills and undervalued educational credentials, including those acquired by migrants in their countries of origin⁷⁵ (Rooth and Saarela, 2007; Bengtsson, Lundh and Scott, 2005; Roberts and Campbell, 2006). In order to control for language and other “nation-specific” forms of human capital, Rooth (2002) assessed differences in the probability of being employed between foreign-born individuals adopted as children and natives in Sweden. Holding constant age, sex, education and age at adoption, the study found that differences in the probability of employment between adoptees with visibly non-Nordic looks (darker skin colour, different ethnic groups) and natives were significant, while those between adoptees from Northern Europe and natives were not significant, suggesting the presence of discrimination on the basis of skin colour (Rooth, 2002).

The main limitation of statistical analyses is that prejudice and discriminatory behaviours are not measured directly, but only inferred. Any difference that is not explained by the model used is assumed to be the result of discrimination, yet the results may simply reflect the influence of variables omitted from the analyses, other than discriminatory norms and practices.

⁷⁴ For the case of Brazil, see, for instance, Marteleto and Dondero (2016); Hasenbalg and Silva (1988); Caillaux (1994); Telles (2003); and Ribeiro (2010 and 2006).

⁷⁵ The question is also whether lack of recognition of academic degrees and other qualifications earned in the country of origin is a legitimate form of differential treatment or whether it is a form of discrimination. An increasing number of countries have formal pathways to assess and recognize formal qualifications acquired abroad (see, for instance, International Organization for Migration, 2013). However, formal recognition does not necessarily translate into fair assessment by employers.

The inability to account for all possible sources of unmeasured causes limits scholars' ability to make strong causal claims.

2. Perceived experiences of discrimination

An alternative approach to measuring discrimination is inquiring about perceptions, including situations in which individuals feel that they have been treated unfairly, either through surveys or qualitative studies. While data on people's perceptions and values are still scarce, they are increasingly being collected in both developed and developing countries.

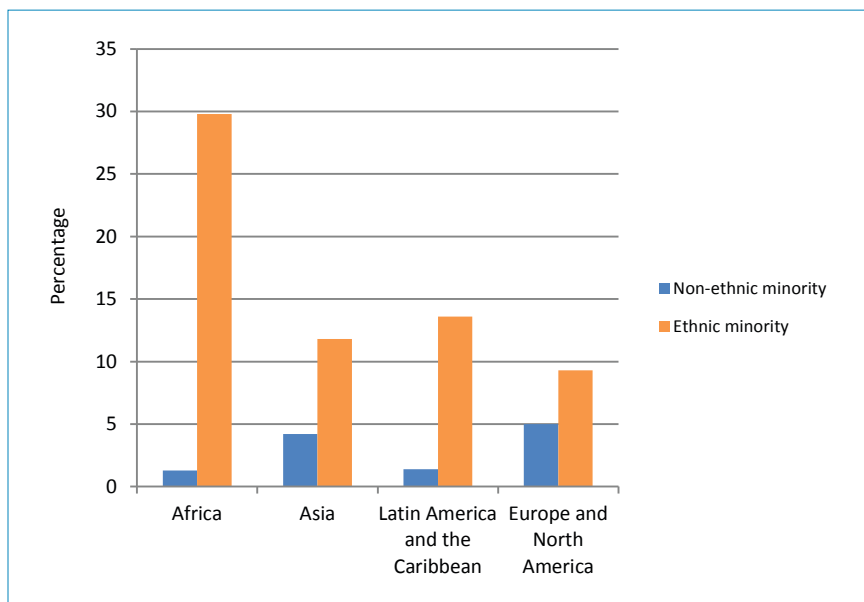
Based on such studies, members of racial or ethnic minority groups in many countries have been found to perceive that they face discrimination in day-to-day encounters, although perceived discrimination varies greatly depending on context as well as on the source of information used. One of the largest surveys aimed at measuring perceived discrimination and racial victimization was conducted in 2008 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. In that survey, 23,500 immigrants and members of ethnic minorities in all 27 European Union Member States were interviewed. Among other questions, respondents were asked about perceptions and personal experiences of discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, immigrant background or on multiple grounds in nine areas of everyday life, including at work, at school and by health-care and social service personnel. The results showed that 1 in 4 respondents reported feeling discriminated against in the previous 12 months on at least 2 of the following grounds: ethnic or immigrant origin, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or "other" reasons (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009). Place of work and job searches emerged as the most frequent areas of discriminatory treatment. Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or immigrant origin was found to be more significant than discrimination on other grounds, including age and gender. In particular, individuals whose ethnicity or race is more visible vis-à-vis the majority population feel discriminated against more frequently and on a broader range of grounds than other minorities; close to 50 per cent of Roma and more than 40 per cent of persons of African origin reported experiencing discrimination in the previous 12 months, as compared with 10-15 per cent of persons of Eastern European background (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009). However, sex, age and socioeconomic disadvantage were still shown to be important factors in experiencing discrimination. An average of 46 per cent of respondents who reported discrimination on different grounds were in the lowest income quartile in their host country (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009).

Measures of perceived discrimination have been included in other surveys. In the 2010-2014 round of the World Values Survey, respondents were asked whether they had perceived racist behaviour occurring in their

neighbourhood. Figure IV.1 shows the percentage of respondents reporting that racist behaviour occurs “frequently” or “very frequently” in their neighbourhood, by ethnic group – ethnic minorities or members of the majority population – and by region of the world. As should be expected, perceptions of racist behaviour are stronger among ethnic minorities in all regions and particularly in Africa.

Figure IV.1

Percentage of survey respondents reporting frequent racist behaviour in their neighbourhood by region, 2010-2014



Source: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2010-2014).

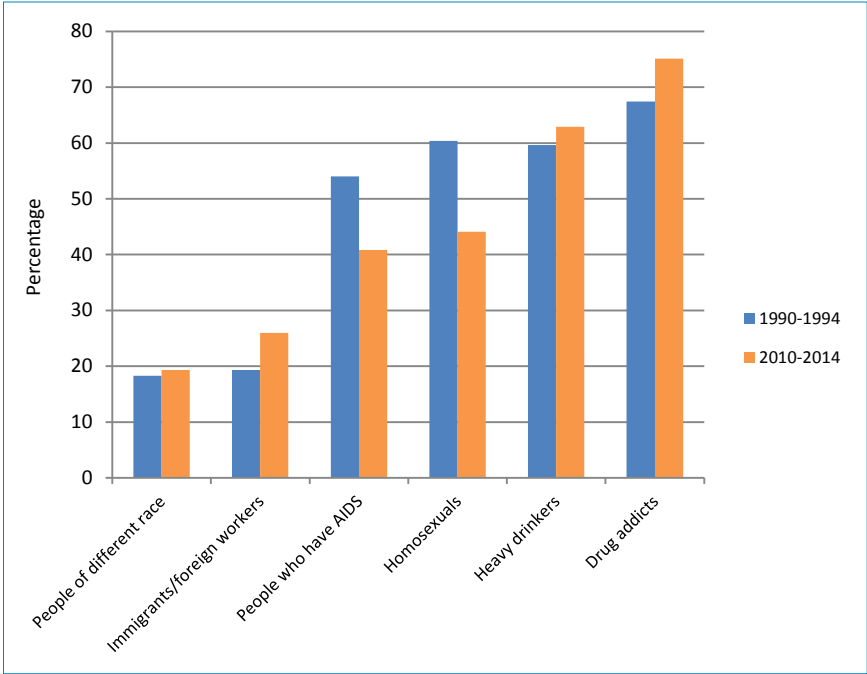
Notes: Regional averages based on data for 12 countries in Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe), 31 countries and areas in Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, China, Cyprus, Georgia, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Taiwan SAR of China, Thailand, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Yemen), 12 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela) and 40 countries in Europe, North America and Oceania (Albania, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Macedonia (The Former Yugoslav Republic of), Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America).

3. Attitudinal studies

One of the shortcomings of subjective perception data is that they measure the views of those subject to discrimination and may therefore not be representative of discriminatory intent. While measuring discrimination through lived experiences can be an effective tool for diagnosing perceived marginalization, it is more valid when complemented by measures of prejudicial attitudes among dominant groups.

World Values Surveys assess prejudicial attitudes through a set of questions on whether respondents would object to having certain groups of people as neighbours. As shown in figure IV.2, the majority of respondents in 18 countries with data objected to having as neighbours persons suffering from

Figure IV.2
Percentage of survey respondents who object to having each of the groups shown as neighbours¹ in selected countries,² 1990-1994 and 2010-2014



Source: World Values Survey, 1990-1994 and 2010-2014 waves.

¹ The figure shows the percentage of respondents who mentioned each of the groups listed in their response to the following question: “On this list are various groups of people. Could you please mention any that you would not like to have as neighbours?”

² Average percentage for 18 countries with data: Argentina, Belarus, Brazil, Czech Republic, Chile, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey.

addictions. According to these data, prejudice against migrants and people of a different race increased from the period 1990-1994 to 2010-2014, while bias against homosexuals and persons living with AIDS declined during the period. Attitudes towards migrants often become more negative in periods of economic insecurity or following large waves of immigration. The perceptions that most often lead to such negative attitudes are that migrants take away jobs from natives; that they commit illegal acts; that they are ungrateful to the host country and do not assimilate, learn the language or adhere to the rules; and that they drain the welfare system (World Bank, 2013, table 5.2, p. 163). Additional research conducted mainly in countries with economies in transition indicates that, while sociodemographic characteristics, such as levels of education, income, employment status and individuals' social capital, have influence on the levels of tolerance towards these groups, country context is the most important determinant of prejudicial attitudes (Lakhani, Sacks and Heltberg, 2014).⁷⁶ In other words, a country's institutions, history and overall values matter more for tolerance and respect of others than levels of education or employment in the countries examined.

4. *Experimental survey techniques*

While surveys are useful in detecting how widespread discriminatory attitudes are, one of the limitations of surveying prejudicial beliefs is the prevalence of social desirability response bias, or the pressure on participants to give responses that they believe to be consistent with prevailing social norms, instead of those that reflect their own true beliefs. Differences between countries as well as within the same country over time may be attributable to variation in the social acceptance of prejudicial views, rather than the actual prevalence of such opinions. Moreover, personally held prejudices and stereotypes may result in unintentional bias and more subtle, unconscious discriminatory behaviour of which the individual may be unaware (Hebl and others, 2002). In order to overcome social desirability response bias, social scientists have developed experimental survey techniques which provide the opportunity to gauge differences in views or attitudes towards various social groups without requiring any direct comparisons between groups. In-depth interviews have been shown to be highly effective in eliciting candid discussions about sensitive hiring issues, for instance (Kirschenman and Neckerman, 1991; Moss and Tilly, 1996; Newman, 1999; Wilson, 1997).

In the early work of Schuman and others (1988) in the United States, individuals were asked about the right of a community to prevent families

⁷⁶ Findings from this research are based on the second Life in Transition survey, conducted in 2010 by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in 29 countries with economies in transition and in 5 other European countries in order to assess people's views and attitudes in the context of political change. For more information about the survey, see www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/economic-research-and-data/data/lits.html.

from moving into their neighbourhood based on their race. While respondents did not show prejudice against persons of African descent or other ethnic groups when asked about the right of a family to move to a particular area, they were more willing to express opposition to government attempts to introduce anti-discrimination laws when reference was made to protecting the right to move of families made up of persons of African descent, relative to other groups. Discriminatory attitudes were influenced by perceived income and social class: opposition to having a neighbour from a minority ethnic group declined if such a neighbour belonged to the middle class (defined in terms of income or occupational category).

Survey experiments have also been used to reveal the prevalence of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in the social and political life of developing countries. Bhavnani (2013), for instance, presented voters in India with fictional candidates having different names which were designed to reflect upper- or lower-caste backgrounds, and then registered their willingness to vote for that candidate as their representative. He found that potential voters vastly discriminated in favour of upper-caste candidates. Non-scheduled (higher) caste candidates averaged 10.3 per cent of the votes, while scheduled (lower) caste candidates averaged just 1.5 per cent. Such discriminatory responses not only reflect prejudicial attitudes, but are also a consequence of living in a discriminatory society where upper-caste politicians are perceived as having better chances to secure benefits for their constituents (Bhavnani, 2013).

5. Field experiments to detect discriminatory practices

Field experiments combine experimental methods with field-based research and help stimulate real-world interactions. For instance, instead of asking respondents to assess the quality of two hypothetical job applications in a laboratory setting, a field experiment would present two equally qualified job applicants to real employers within the scenario of an actual job hunt. Since an open preference for members of a specific social group or prejudice against members of other groups is often both legally and socially undesirable, institutions usually mask their discriminatory actions behind non-racial justifications.

Studies based on experimental methods have most often been used to detect labour market discrimination. Large inter-ethnic differences in callback rates for job applications, for example, were detected by Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) in the United States during fieldwork regarding employment advertisements in two newspapers. After having randomly assigned résumés of similar quality and postal addresses, it was observed that a name associated with the white population yielded as many more callbacks as did an additional eight years of experience on a résumé. Furthermore, applicants living in higher-income neighbourhoods with a white majority had a higher probability of being asked back for an interview.

In the United States, while the Age Discrimination in Employment Act 1967 makes it unlawful to consider the age of an applicant in hiring and remuneration decisions, experimental studies have found such a bias to exist. Older workers are subject to worse hiring outcomes than their younger counterparts, although it is usually difficult to determine whether the delays in hiring are due to discrimination, higher reservation wages or clustering in “sick” industries (Hirsch, Macpherson and Hardy, 2000). Lahey (2006), however, showed that a younger job seeker needed to file, on average, only 18 applications before landing an interview call, whereas older job seekers needed to file 25.

Similarly, Hebl and others (2002) found discrimination in hiring on the basis of sexual orientation. Applicants entered a shopping mall to apply for the job of storekeeper, with the applicant’s sexual preference made evident via statements professionally printed on baseball hats. Interpersonal discrimination was detected through the length of the total time of interaction – with employers engaging less with applicants that they may have assumed to be homosexual, through the level of attention paid to questions asked by the stigmatized test group and through perceived negativity in remarks and attitudes. In addition, those applicants appearing to be homosexual were hired at a rate that was 75 per cent that of the control group (Hebl and others, 2002).

In Sweden, Ahmed and Hammarstedt (2008) found ethnic discrimination in the housing market. Three fictitious tester profiles, one with a typical male Swedish name (“Erik”), one with a typical female Swedish name (“Maria”) and one with a typical male Arabic or Muslim name (“Ali”), applied for vacant rental apartments advertised on the Internet. Using the “Maria” profile, 53 per cent of applications led to positive callbacks and 19 per cent to invitations to showings. As for the “Erik” profile applications, 41 per cent received invitations to make further contact, and about 10 per cent led to invitations to showings. By contrast, applications under the “Ali” profile received an 18 per cent response rate, with only 4 per cent leading to invitations to viewings. Similar differences were found with respect to the neighbourhoods where the housing units were located, with the Swedish-sounding profiles having received more responses in wealthier urban areas (Ahmed and Hammarstedt, 2008).

The evidence cited in this section indicates that the use of field experiments, though still in its infancy, provides the best evidence yet of the actual existence and prevalence of discriminatory practices. However, while they demonstrate conclusively that such norms exist, field experiments are still small in size due to their cost.

C. Internalized stigma and reduced sense of agency

Persistent exposure to discrimination can lead individuals to internalize the prejudice or stigma that is directed against them. Such internalization may be manifested in shame, poor self-esteem, fear and stress, as well as poor mental and physical health (Williams, Neighbors and Jackson, 2003). Beyond these debilitating effects, discrimination may also impede individuals' achievement and their capacity to make decisions and act on them, that is, their agency. In other words, individuals sometimes effectively behave in ways that conform to how others perceive them.

A survey regarding HIV-related stigma and discrimination conducted among people living with HIV in nine countries in the Asia-Pacific region found that a significant percentage of respondents reported feelings of shame (ranging from 54 to 76 per cent) and guilt (from 43 to 76 per cent) as well as low self-esteem (from 22 to 81 per cent) (Global Network of People Living with HIV and others, 2011). Many respondents isolated themselves, avoided accessing needed health-care services and chose to withdraw from work, education or training, or to not apply for a job or promotion. A positive association between shame and poverty has also been well established in the context of discrimination (Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, 2014).

Discrimination and exclusion are correlated with negative physical and mental health effects as well. Discrimination has, for instance, been associated with self-reported poor health, psychological distress, anxiety and depression, hypertension as well as potential disease risk factors, such as obesity and substance abuse (Pascoe and Smart Richman, 2009). In particular, the perception of discrimination increases the likelihood of participating in unhealthy behaviours, such as smoking and overeating, and reduces participation in behaviours that foster good health, such as disease screening and management (Pascoe and Smart Richman, 2009). A survey in the United Kingdom, for instance, found that lesbian, homosexual and bisexual adults have a higher prevalence of poor mental health and low well-being when compared with heterosexuals (Semlyen and others, 2016). In New Zealand, a study found that both deprivation and perceived discrimination contribute to health inequalities between Māori and persons of European descent, with the Māori disproportionately reporting poor or fair self-rated health, low physical functioning, low mental health and cardiovascular disease (Harris and others, 2006). That mental illness is itself subject to stigma creates the potential for additional discrimination.

Internalized discrimination can be further manifested in other ways, too. Studies have shown that women often ask for less money than do men in seeking jobs and are more likely to accept initial wage offers without negotiation (Babcock and Laschever, 2003; Moreno and others, 2004). A related effect of discrimination can be triggered when an individual's identity is cued or emphasized in a context that has relevance to a stereotype of that identity,

such as intellectual ability. This phenomenon, termed “stereotype threat”, is defined as “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (Steele and Aronson, 1995). Such stereotypes and their impacts take hold at a young age. In recent experiments in India, low-status and high-status groups of children and youth were asked to solve mazes; monetary incentives were provided. In control treatments, Indian boys in both high-caste and low-caste groups solved mazes equally well when their caste was not publicly revealed. However, when social identity was made public in mixed group sessions, low-caste participants performed significantly worse (Hoff and Pandey, 2006). An experiment focused on children aged 5-13 years in the United States addressed two stereotypes simultaneously: that Asian students perform better than other ethnic groups, and that women perform worse than men. Asian girls as young as five years old performed better on a test when their ethnic identity was “activated” – through a pre-test questionnaire that emphasized ethnicity – and worse when their gender identity was activated (Ambady and others, 2001). The fact that negative stereotypes and feelings of powerlessness negatively affect performance helps to explain why historical inequalities often persist once progressive reforms have been implemented.

Although agency is also difficult to measure (see box IV.2), qualitative research suggests that lack of agency is central to the perceived ill-being of women and of people living in poverty. As thoroughly illustrated in the three publications produced by the World Bank, entitled *Voices of the Poor*, feelings of impotence and powerlessness are expressed persistently in explaining poverty; “you know good but you cannot do good”, as described by a study participant in Ghana (Narayan and others, 2000, p. 32). Much of the sense of powerlessness is attributed to experiences with employers, landlords, bankers and public officials and institutions that, in the view of people living in poverty, undermine and exclude them (Narayan and others, 2000). For women, discriminatory social norms affect key decisions that shape agency. Specifically, the inequitable allocation of household resources between boys and girls has often resulted in less education and nutrition for girls, as described in chapter III of the present report. Gender norms that attribute submissive qualities to women and that assign domestic and breadwinning roles to female and male identities, respectively, continue to influence people’s sense of agency and their willingness to exercise it. Although values evolve, findings from a field study in 20 countries would suggest that gender norms have not changed drastically over time or across cohorts, but tend to evolve slowly (Muñoz Boudet and others, 2013). The softening of gender norms often comes with increases in education and in women’s participation in the labour market, which have also strengthened women’s collective agency and contribute to further relaxing of gender roles.

Research on agency also shows that the ability to make choices varies across groups in a range of spheres: a woman may have control over income

Box IV.2

The challenges of measuring agency

Agency, which is often defined as the ability to envisage and act upon one's goals or to make meaningful choices, is a crucial component of social inclusion. However, measuring levels of individual agency and comparing these across groups, places and times is particularly challenging. Agency is a relative concept, as the range of meaningful choices available to one person within a reference group, such as a country or community, is usually defined relatively according to the range of choices available to another person within that group. Typically, measures of female agency in a community are devised considering the range of choices available to men within that community; the sense of agency among ethnic minorities is measured relative to ethnic majorities and that of people with disabilities relative to those without disabilities. It is also a subjective and context-specific phenomenon – in practice meaning different things to different people.

Often, attempts at measuring agency have been focused on observable actions in concrete domains, such as one's freedom of movement, or control over financial resources (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). The importance of each domain varies by context. As Mahmud, Shah and Becker (2012) pointed out in their study on women's empowerment in Bangladesh, an indicator of freedom of mobility is more relevant in a patriarchal context, where women are traditionally confined to the home, than in a Western context. Even within the same community, agency may be experienced and exercised in different ways depending on an individual's wealth and age, which would also affect the relative weight put on specific indicators. Moreover, a person's sense of agency is influenced by cognitive processes of reflection and analysis, and attitudes to or rejection of subordination, which are even more difficult to measure objectively (Kishor and Gupta, 2004). Kabeer (1999), for instance, argued that many women's internal acceptance of their own subordinate status within a household makes the exercise of agency much more difficult in claims on household resources and reproductive decisions. Similarly, recent research has shown the psychological pathways through which a life in poverty and the associated feelings of shame and inadequacy can limit agency, for example preventing some people living in poverty from accessing services (Lakhani, Sacks and Heltberg, 2014).

The concept of agency therefore has significance within a concrete community or country. While cross-country opinion polls and surveys, including the Gallup World Poll and the World Values Survey, contain questions aimed at assessing the perceived sense of agency among respondents, context-dependent measures should complement general, internationally comparable ones (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007).

or decisions in her household but may be hesitant to participate in political meetings or engage in collective action because of her sex, her ethnicity or social status, and may be excluded from the labour market due to these or other attributes (Alkire, 2005). The exercise of agency is therefore most often assessed in concrete domains or through multiple indicators, even though the majority of studies highlight the links among different domains (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; World Bank, 2011). In other words, participation in the labour market broadens networks and sources of information and can therefore give political voice to members of ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities or women. Such participation has also been found to promote women's agency within the household (World Bank, 2011).

D. Conclusions

In recent decades, much has been done to end legally imposed discrimination against individuals and groups and policies that sustain unfair treatment in economic, social, cultural and political spheres of life. However, while formal institutions may have become fairer, formal discrimination nonetheless persists. What is more, based on the ample anecdotal and comparatively limited empirical evidence that exists, discriminatory norms and interpersonal instances of discrimination remain widespread and continue to structure group-based differences in societal outcomes. Yet while formal institutional barriers faced by marginalized groups are easy to detect, informal barriers are frequently more subtle, and authors of studies on discrimination have long grappled with the challenge of empirical measurement.

Studies of perceptions, attitude surveys, statistical analyses and field experiments have shown that discriminatory behaviours can be quantified across countries and over time. Multiple indicators and sources of evidence demonstrate the persistence of both prejudicial attitudes and norms in societies. In other words, discrimination remains a fundamental problem in the world today. National institutions, both formal and informal, play a large role in attitudes towards specific social groups and on overall levels of tolerance. The literature reviewed is testimony to the tangible as well as the intangible impact that discriminatory behaviours and prejudicial attitudes have on the way people work, the opportunities they have, the quality and nature of the relationships they forge, their health and well-being and the decisions they make. Field experiments make the effects of prejudiced decision-making clear in terms of the social exclusion of marginalized groups. They also show that prejudice is deeply entrenched and can limit the impact of laws, services and income for those groups that suffer from discrimination.

While discrimination is decried around the globe and legal obligations and guidelines exist to fight it, much work remains to be done to achieve the goal of a world free of discrimination and prejudice. Continued efforts to capture the extent of discrimination and better understand its effects are a necessary step towards realizing this goal. As the next chapter shows, ending discrimination and removing other obstacles that hinder the capacity of disadvantaged groups to participate in society and to engage in decision-making is a long-term process. It requires several processes: reforming institutions, investing in human capital and influencing certain norms and behaviours that often have historical roots. However, failure to create the conditions for the empowerment and participation of those who are socially, economically or politically excluded comes with high costs.