

How do migrants in Tenerife experience discrimination?

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The Tenerife Immigration Observatory has conducted a study that shows that discrimination is a common experience for many migrants living in Tenerife. The discrimination they experience varies based on the continent of origin, with the population of African origin expressing the highest levels of discrimination. Other important variables that correlate with origin are race, religion, and social class. The population that identifies as Arab or black/African, the Muslim population, and lower-class individuals are those who report the highest rates of discrimination.

1. Introduction

Equal treatment is a fundamental human right, a principle and norm that is enshrined in international and Spanish law. However, discrimination, from its most subtle forms to its most explicit and violent expressions, is a common experience for many people of foreign origin.

Although there are studies on how immigration is perceived in Tenerife (Buraschi and Godenau, 2020), there are no specific studies on discrimination against the population of foreign origin. To address this, in 2020 the Tenerife Immigration Observatory began an extensive study on the discriminatory experiences of migrants residing on the island (Buraschi, Oldano and Godenau, 2021), the results of which are summarized in this document.

Beyond its legal definition, we interpret discrimination as the unequal and unfavourable treatment of a person or group. This different treatment may be reflected in the conduct of individuals or in laws, regulations and administrative procedures. In the case of this study, discrimination is based on different categorization criteria that often mix, overlap and may not correspond to the real characteristics of a person; for example, a person may be considered a foreigner even if they are not.

People can belong to different groups and can experience multiple forms of discrimination based on different criteria. Specific historical constructs of social domination, such as that based on gender, ethnicity, class, race, and cultural identity, often interact in a particular instance of discrimination. We must pay attention to all these categories, knowing that the relationships between them are variable and are always "situated" in a certain historical and social context; in addition, each category is internally diverse and is the result of a continuous process of construction and reconstruction in which individual, interpersonal, intergroup, institutional, structural and cultural factors intervene.

The study of discrimination entails numerous methodological challenges: due to the diversity of its expression, to its variability as determined by contexts and areas, to access to information, and to the fact that it often involves subtle expressions of discrimination or ambiguous situations.

Cognizant of this complexity, the study by Buraschi, Oldano and Godenau (2021) opted for a mixed design in which the quantitative data from a survey were supplemented with interviews of migrants.

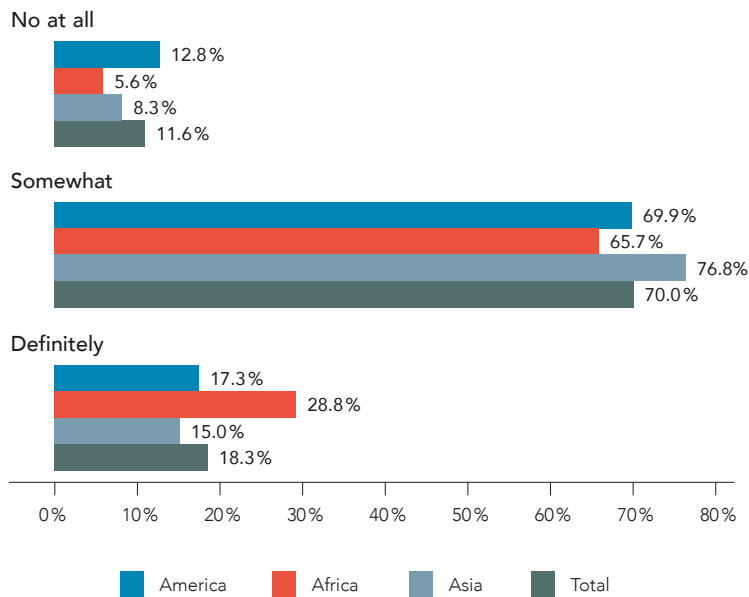
This research analyses both social and institutional discrimination. Social discrimination includes various aspects of daily life, such as job search, working conditions, access to housing, use of entertainment venues and relationships in places of residence. It also refers to threats, insults or harassment from neighbours or on social media, in addition to experiences involving violence, robbery, theft or other aggressions. Institutional discrimination covers all those situations related to government agencies and services and, in general, to bodies or entities, whether public or private, that perform a function of public interest.

The distinction between social and institutional discrimination is useful when thinking about the specifics of certain discriminatory dynamics; however, it is important to remember that many discriminatory experiences depend on the interplay between different factors.

The main results of the study are summarized in the following points.

1. People of foreign origin generally sense that racism has increased and attitudes towards immigration have worsened in recent years

There is a broad consensus among the population born in Africa, America or Asia¹ that racism exists in Tenerife and that attitudes towards immigration have worsened.



Graph 1
Do you think there is racism in Tenerife?
Responses in % by continent of origin.

Source
OBITen. 2020
Discrimination Survey.

The interviews reveal that the reactivation of the *Canarian route* of irregular maritime immigration, the uncertainty due to the pandemic and the use of social media have contributed to this rise. People of African origin are the group that report the greatest increase in racism.

2. Contact with the native population is frequent and, in general terms, is viewed in a positive light, although Africans as a whole express receiving unequal treatment

With regard to how locals treat immigrants, almost half of the people surveyed consider it friendly, while a third feel that they are treated with mistrust. A greater proportion of African immigrants report being treated with mistrust. In addition, a very low percentage of African immigrants (only one out of a hundred) reported being treated “the same as Canarians themselves”.

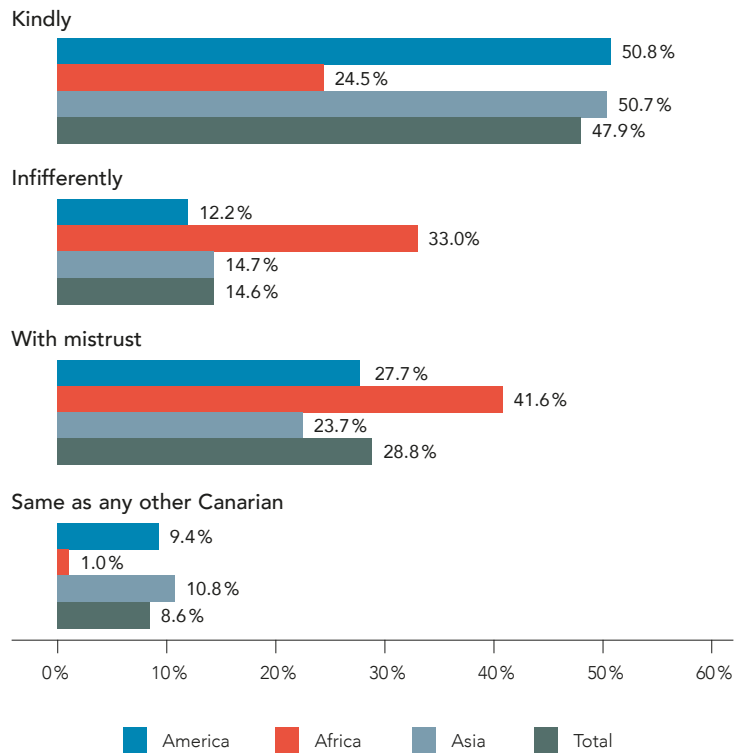
¹ The universe of this research is made up of people living in Tenerife who are of African, American and Asian origin, excluding people of European origin.

Graph 2

How would you say that the Canarian population in general treats immigrants from your country? Responses in % by continent of origin.

Source

OBITen. 2020 Discrimination Survey.

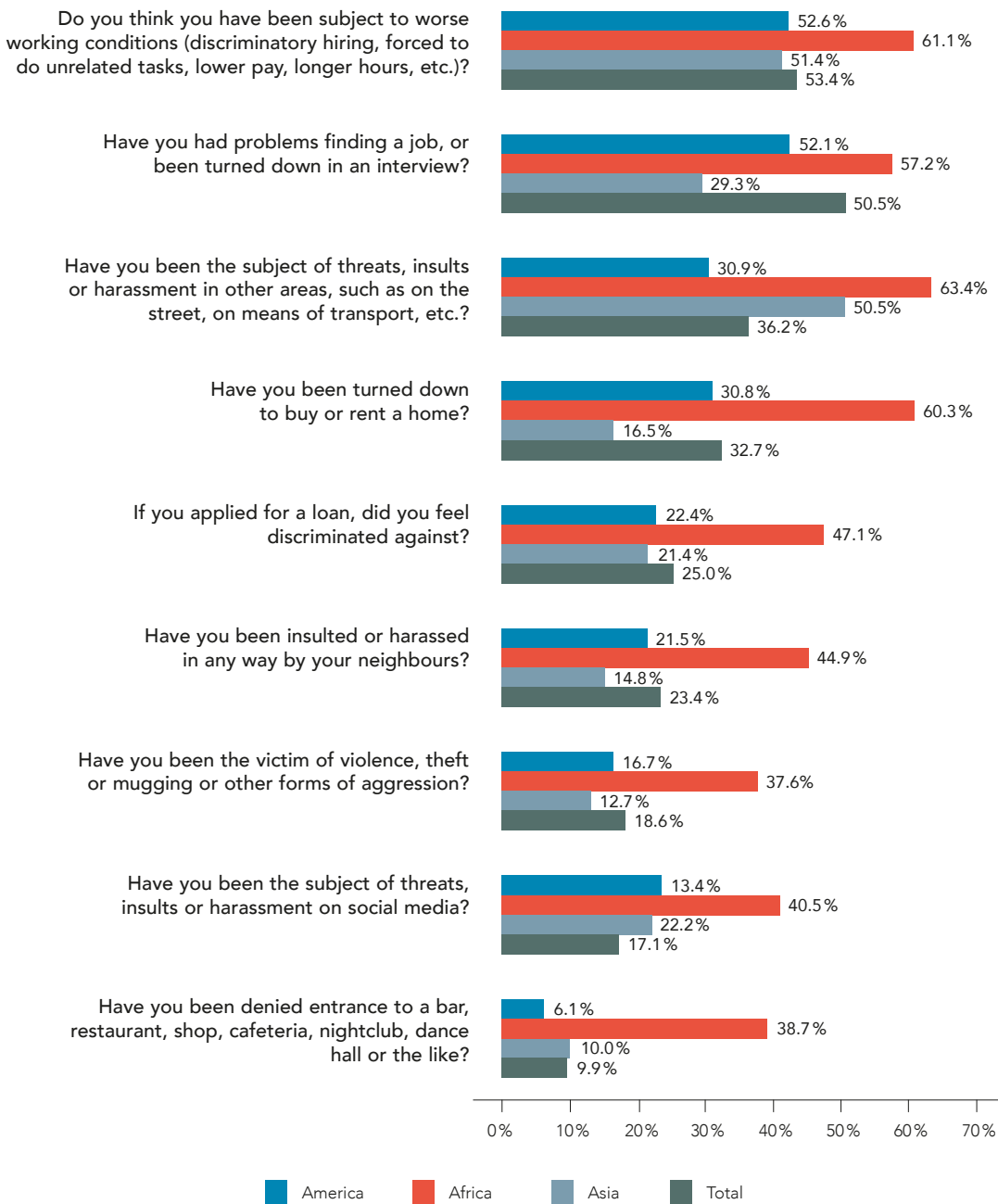


Personal relations with the Canarian population are generally positive, although it should be noted that one in ten Africans reported being treated negatively or very negatively.

3. Workplace discrimination is the most frequent social discrimination among the people interviewed

More than half of people of foreign origin have suffered discrimination related to working conditions and job placement. A third of those surveyed have been subjected to threats, insults or harassment in the street or on public transport. A third of migrants have also been denied the purchase or rent of a home. The African continent stands out due to the greater propensity suffered by people of this origin to experience discrimination, under any of its guises. These differences with respect to all other origins are particularly large in access to housing, credit and hospitality establishments. In turn, immigrants of American and Asian origins stand out due to the lower propensity of Asians expressing having experienced discrimination in the workplace, in contrast to discrimination in public spaces and social media, in which people of American origin are less likely to experience discrimination.

How do migrants in Tenerife experience discrimination?



Graph 3
Affirmative responses when asked if they experienced discrimination in different areas of social life. Responses in % by continent of origin, listed from high to low.

Fuente
OBITen. 2020
Discrimination Survey.

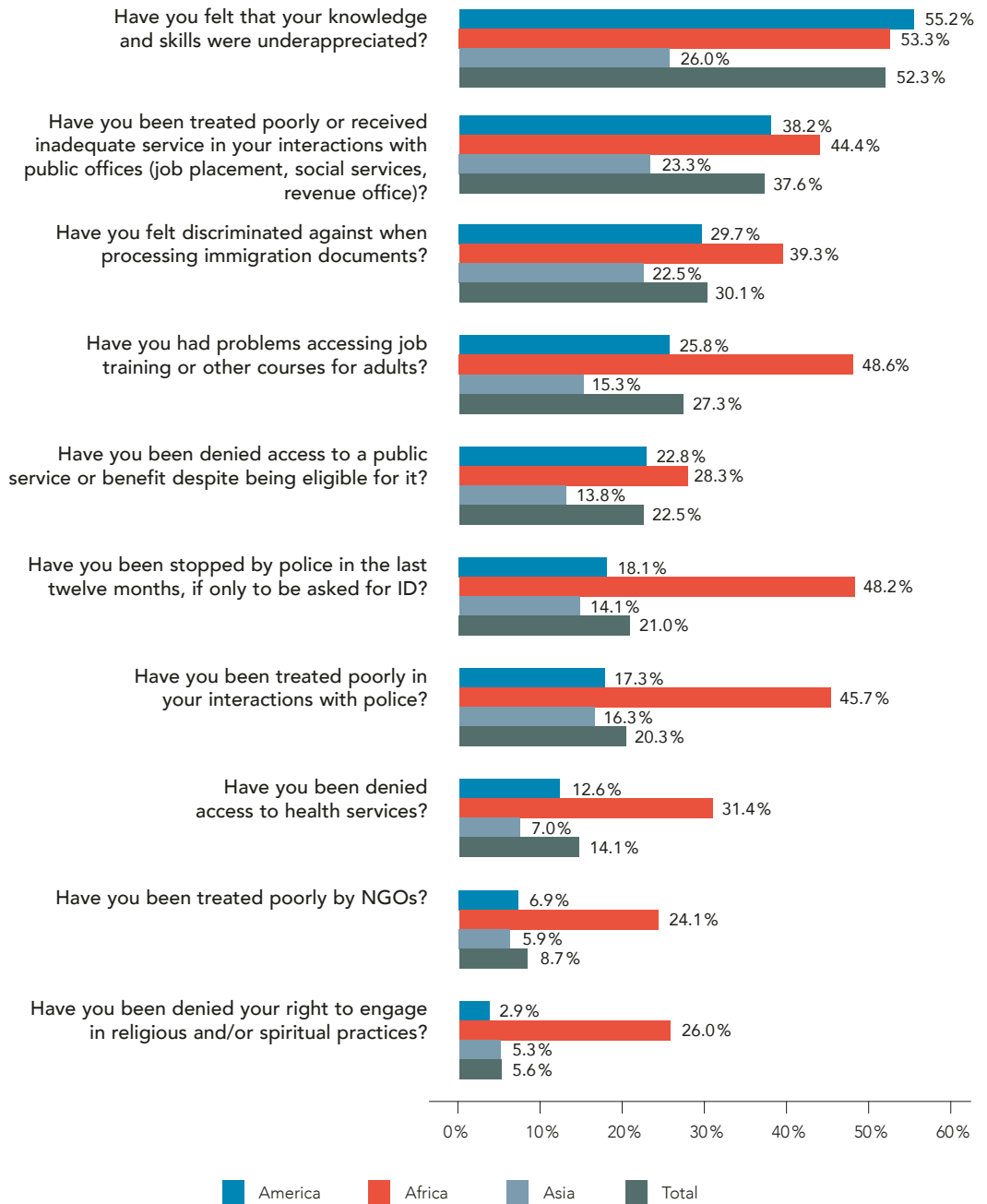
4. A lack of appreciation of the knowledge and skills of migrants and their treatment in public offices are the most frequent experiences involving institutional discrimination

More than half of those stated having felt that their knowledge and skills were underappreciated; and almost four out of ten reported receiving discriminatory treatment in public offices. The other most frequent experiences of institutional discrimination involved difficulties accessing job training or other courses for adults, as well as not having access to public aid despite believing they were eligible for it. In this case, the differences by continent of origin are also significant, particularly due to the greater risk of suffering discrimination among people of African origin. In institutional settings, this increased risk is particularly stark in religious practices, interactions with police, treatment in NGOs, the provision of health services and access to training courses. A comparison

between immigrants of American and Asian origin reveals that the Asian population reports fewer experiences of institutional discrimination than the American population, with the exception of religious and spiritual practices. The discrepancies between these groups are particularly wide in the recognition of knowledge and skills, access to health services, and access to public training and benefits.

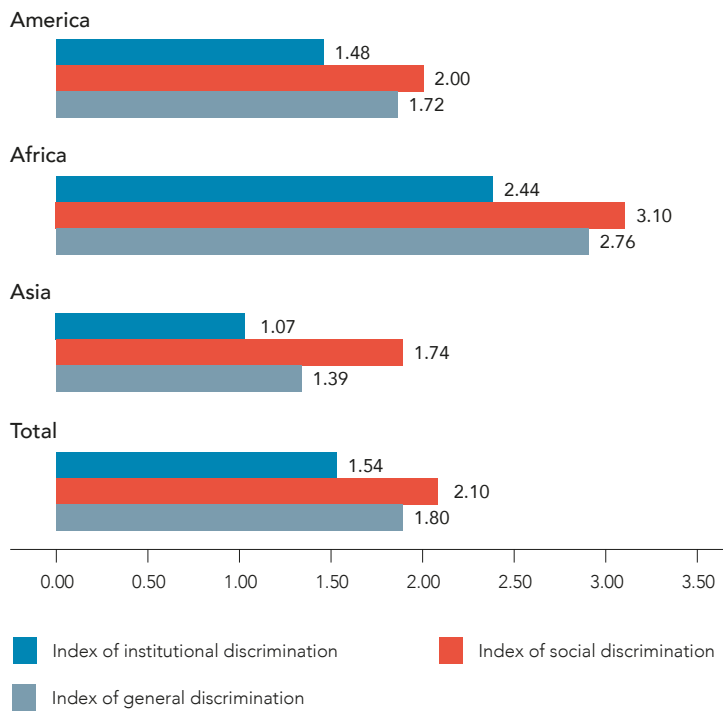
Graph 4
Affirmative responses when asked if they experienced discrimination in different institutional settings. Responses in % by continent of origin, listed from high to low.

Source
OBITen. 2020
Discrimination Survey.



5. The continent of origin, race, social class and religion are the variables that best account for the differences in experiences of discrimination

In the study by Buraschi, Oldano and Godenau (2021), three synthetic indices of experiences of discrimination were constructed, one of them general and two specific (social and institutional). These indices are based on responses to questions involving social discrimination and institutional discrimination. The summaries of each individual's responses in the areas of social and institutional discrimination were rated on a scale from 1 to 10, meaning each synthetic index can reach a maximum of 10 points. People of African origin are at greater risk of suffering both social and institutional discrimination.



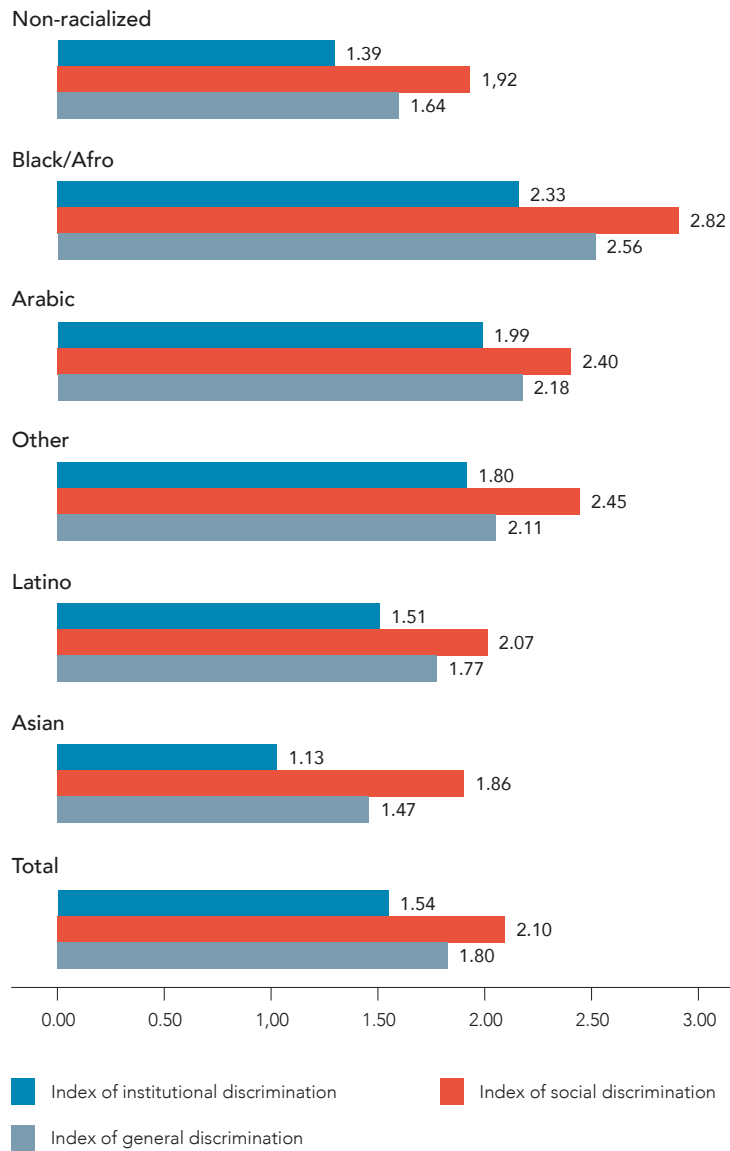
Graph 5
Indexes of institutional, social and general discrimination. Responses in % by continent of origin.

Source
OBITen. 2020
Discrimination Survey.

The origin variable is closely linked to racial self-identification and religious belief: people who self-categorize as "black/Afro" and "Arab", and people who declare themselves Muslim, are clearly affected by higher levels of discrimination.

Graph 6
Indexes of institutional, social and general discrimination as determined by the answer to the question: Into which of the following groups does society usually categorize you?

Source
OBITen. 2020
Discrimination Survey.



Self-identification with the lower social class is also associated with higher levels of discrimination, both social and institutional. The differences introduced by this social stratification variable are, however, smaller than those observed in the racial categories.

6. The gender variable modulates the type of discrimination experienced

There is a clear consensus among the women interviewed that being a woman entails special vulnerability in certain contexts. In the workplace, there are numerous experiences of exploitation and abuse that often include sexual harassment. As concerns access to services, respondents underscore the poor treatment received in public offices.

7. Being in an irregular situation is a vulnerability factor that can increase the likelihood of experiencing discrimination

People in this situation have a greater probability of labour exploitation and face more hurdles to accessing housing, social rights, educational services and health services. Particularly dramatic are the experiences of institutional discrimination suffered by people of African origin who arrived irregularly by sea over the course of 2020.

8. Generally, people who suffer discrimination do not report it

The proportion of migrants who report having been victims of discrimination is low. It is not usually reported due to a lack of information, to not being aware of their own rights, to thinking that it does no good, or to fear of the consequences, especially among people in an irregular administrative situation.

9. The discriminatory experiences of migrants have to be studied, measured and be brought out into the open

Discrimination cannot be fought against if it not measured, and without understanding the social processes that sustain it. In addition, research into discrimination has to acknowledge the factors that influence its externalization. It is also necessary to study discrimination based on various direct and indirect, qualitative and quantitative measurement strategies. Shining a light on discrimination and understanding its dynamics and the variables that influence the different treatment received by migrants are essential elements to the design of effective anti-discrimination policies.

10. Social action and anti-discrimination policy should go beyond attitudes and take into account contextual aspects and give space, visibility and prominence to the actions of migrants

It is important to design intervention strategies based on a preliminary diagnosis and planning that takes into account the specifics of each behavioural context, listens to discriminated people and recognizes the key role of migrants and racialized people in the fight against discrimination. Also relevant is the design of policies that affect the contextual conditions that reduce the probability of discriminatory behaviour. Migrant associations provide an important protection and resistance mechanism, offering emotional support, information and material help. Associations and social movements led by migrants are spaces for awareness in which people learn their rights and recognize more experiences of discrimination than before.

For more information:

BURASCHI, D., OLDANO, N. & GODENAU, D. (2021). *Experiencias de discriminación de las personas migrantes en Tenerife*. Tenerife: Island Council.

BURASCHI, D & GODENAU, D. (coords.) (2020). *La percepción de la inmigración en Tenerife*. Tenerife: Island Council.

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The Tenerife Immigration Observatory is a joint initiative of the Tenerife Council and the University of La Laguna that is intended to provide a permanent and dynamic structure to advance our scientific knowledge of migratory movements. The OBITen carries out its activity by gathering, producing and disseminating knowledge to facilitate qualified opinions and promote the making of decisions that help to better manage migratory phenomena and their implications.

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