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The ARCHERIF study on racism in French Higher Education and Research Institutions

Results of the survey conducted at seven HE institutions



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Without these agreements and support, this key part of the ARCHERIF project concerning the state of racism in higher education and research could not have been successfully completed, nor could the findings and insights into this phenomenon within the academic community been obtained.

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Content

The ARCHERIF project has four main objectives:

1. To conduct an international review of best practices in policies and education aimed at combating racism in Higher Education and Research Institutions (HERIs) (Objective 1).
2. To conduct a field survey on racial discrimination among students, administrative staff and teaching staff in French HERIs (Objective 2).
3. To design innovative educational resources and tools for students, teaching staff and administrative staff to combat racism more effectively (Objective 3).
4. Lay the foundations for an anti-racism charter for French HERIs (Objective 4).

This report presents the findings of Objective (2), namely the field survey on the prevalence of racism in French HERIs. The survey was conducted between January and August 2025 at seven university sites. The ARCHERIF survey is innovative in several respects:

- It is one of the few surveys in France to study racism in HERIs that does not focus solely on students but looks at the wider academic community.
- It combines quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) methods.
- Its objectives go beyond the mere description of the phenomenon to produce policy recommendations and educational resources that the HERI community can leverage.

This report is divided into four sections:

The first section outlines the survey methodology. It is divided into six sections: an executive summary of the main findings (§1.1); the survey methodology (§1.2); the structure of the questionnaire (§1.3); the nature of the variables and data (§1.4); the challenges and obstacles involved in conducting a survey on racism and finally, a description of the survey population (§1.5).

The second section presents the results of the quantitative phase (QUANT) of the survey. It is divided into three parts: univariate statistical analyses (§2.1); bivariate statistical analyses with tests for dependence (Chi-square and Pearson) (§2.2); and multivariate statistical analyses using multinomial logistic regression (§2.3).

A third section presents the results of the qualitative phase (QUAL) of the survey, which consisted of semi-structured individual interviews organised around the themes that emerged from these interviews.

Finally, in the fourth section, we will highlight the points of convergencies in the results of the two phases of the survey.

I. Survey methodology

1.1 Executive summary

The support provided by the governing bodies of Higher Education and Research Institutions (HERIs) and by those responsible for anti-discrimination policies had a direct impact on the response rate to the ARCHERIF survey. Although we approached nearly thirty HERIs, the survey could only be done in seven of them. For many, the fact that the survey was disseminated via official mailing lists was perceived as a sign of the importance it attached to combating racial discrimination, which is often overlooked or ‘forgotten’ in institutional discourse. On the sites where the survey was disseminated through institutional channels, the participation rates were proportionally higher, with significant participation from students (63.91% of respondents), who proved to be the group most exposed to racism. The majority of respondents were women — 54.76% (2,506), compared with 40.91% of men (1,872). Those identifying as non-binary accounted for 2.97% (136) of respondents. This raises the question of women higher sensitivity to issues of social injustice and racism. Those who self-identified as ‘white’ made up two-thirds of the respondents (63.67%, n=2,233), whilst 30.31% (n=1,063) of the respondents self-identified as ‘racialised’ or as “people of colour”.

Whereas the issue of racism is often overlooked in institutional discourse, the majority of respondents (63.26%) said they felt comfortable discussing it. Indeed, since the racist murder of George Floyd in the United States in 2020, and the global *Black Lives Matter* movement, racism has become a subject of debate and controversy in the public sphere. However, more than half of respondents (53.22%, or 2,201 people) did not know who to turn in case of racist incidents within their institution. The vast majority of respondents (79.05%, or 2,992 people) were unaware of any activities or training offered by their institution on racism. This result highlights the invisibility of racism compared to other forms of discrimination that receive wider media coverage and more substantial institutional resources (gender equality, sexual and sexist violence, disability, etc.). The invisibility of racism produces a domino effect: it leads to a lack of trust in institutional mechanisms for reporting, automatically resulting in a lower reporting rate for racism than for other types of discrimination. However, 52.6% of respondents cited racism as the cause of the discrimination they had experienced or witnessed. **This finding is consistent with the general rise in racism, which goes hand in hand with the rise of the far right in France and the West. It also aligns with the results of previous studies which showed that around 45% of people of colour reported experiencing racism frequently** (Licra & IFOP, 2026); (Bergamaschi *et al.*, 2026); (CNCDDH, 2024), (Hardy & Schraepen, 2024). However, only 9.17% (n=172) of victims or witnesses of racism made a complaint. This low reporting rate is consistent with the findings of previous studies, which showed that official complaint and redress channels are largely ineffective and that victims have no confidence that they will be heard, understood or protected against the insidious reprisals to which they are exposed if they denounce the perpetrators of racist remarks or behaviour. As the ‘Cadre de Vie et Sécurité’ (CVS) survey showed, racist violence and discrimination are often underestimated in official reports, hence the importance of listening to those affected in order to better grasp the scale of this phenomenon (CNCDDH, 2024).

Whilst racism affects all categories of staff within HERIs, including people from outside the institution, **Faculty (lecturers and researchers) are cited as the main perpetrators of racism at 41.03%, whilst students are over-represented among the victims.** This finding, observed across all our survey sites regardless of sample size and composition, reinforces the robustness of the observation. **This is indeed a recurring pattern where one’s position in the institutional hierarchy influences experiences of racism.** This result is all the more worrying given that the academic staff enjoys a certain authority within the HERI structure. They are expected to ensure the fairness of institutional procedures and to set an example for the students that they teach. This suggests that institutional measures, training and sanctions are needed that target this group of people, and not just students. The lack of firmness on the part of HERI governing bodies which are reluctant to apply

the sanctions provided for by law, is a factor that explains the persistence of racism and gives perpetrators a sense of impunity.

Racist remarks and behaviour tended to occur in institutional settings where lecturers and researchers exercise discretionary power (lecture theatres, examination board meetings, promotion committees and governing bodies, selection panels, etc.). This finding suggests that there is a higher probability (76.6%) of being a victim or a witness, of discriminatory behaviour or remarks in closed, private or secret settings, out of public view. This is also the conclusion of previous surveys on discrimination in higher education and research (Weiss & Blassel, 2023).

41.9% of people from racialised backgrounds have been direct victims or witnesses of racism, confirming that racism is the primary cause of discrimination affecting these groups of people. **There is therefore almost a one-in-two chance that a person of colour will face racism at some point during their trajectory in HERI.** This finding is consistent with those of previous studies (Druez, 2016), (Weiss & Blassel, 2023). This experience of latent racism is compounded by other forms of discrimination suffered, thus confirming the relevance of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), according to which forms of discrimination do not simply add up mechanically but intersect and reinforce one another taking into account other factors such as gender, race, class, etc. Thus, racialised women may be subject to specific stereotypes or microaggressions at the intersection of sexism and racism. Similarly, racialised non-binary people may experience more diffuse forms of marginalisation, combining racial prejudice, transphobia or gender non-conformity.

With regard to proposals for raising awareness of racism, **more than two-thirds of the respondents would like their institution to launch awareness-raising campaigns and offer targeted training courses on racism aimed at all staff (academic staff, administrative and technical staff) and students.** However, they remained divided on whether such trainings should be compulsory or optional. The proposals put forward by our respondents align in several respects with the recommendations of the *'National Plan to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism and Discrimination Based on Origin 2023–2026'* (Borne, 2023), which have largely gone unheeded. The development of training materials on the different levels of racism is all the more relevant given that the majority of our respondents could not differentiate between the different levels and forms of racism, namely individual, structural, systemic and institutional racism, and racial microaggressions, which are insidious, tacit and deeply rooted in institutional cultures. Awareness campaigns coupled with a zero-tolerance policy were the two most widely supported measures for combating racism more effectively, not only in HERI but more broadly in the society. Indeed, the problem extends beyond the sphere of higher education and research: anti-racist education must begin in childhood, within family circles, at school and in the media.

1.2 Mixed methodology

We adopted a mixed methods approach due to the interdisciplinary nature of the topic and also because of the diverse range of stakeholders interviewed (students, administrative and technical staff, academic staff, and anti-discrimination officers). By transcending the traditional dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative methods, mixed methods enable the description, analysis and understanding of complex phenomena (Nagels, 2022). These mixed methods, also known as combinatory or integrative methods, are widely used in the humanities and social sciences, particularly in Education and Training Sciences (ETS) as well as in the field of health (Nagels, 2022). A mixed-methods approach in the humanities and social sciences therefore combines quantitative and qualitative approaches; this type of methodology is often seen as a means of maximising the richness and depth of the data whilst increasing the robustness and relevance of the results (Nagels, 2022).

The quantitative component (QUANT) of the survey is very important; without falling into a kind of *fetichisation* of numbers, the approach based on univariate, bivariate and multivariate descriptive statistics provides an immediate and concise overview. Given that the ultimate aim is to propose educational resources and contribute to a discussion on anti-racist policies, obtaining statistics is essential to demonstrate the prevalence of the phenomenon. The qualitative component (QUAL) enables a more nuanced understanding of the realities of discriminatory situations experienced by people from ethnic minorities and documents the subjective experiences of victims or witnesses of racial discrimination. Indeed, the use of a qualitative approach allows for the reproduction of discourses, representations, feelings and emotions. The two phases of the survey are conducted separately. At the participating sites, the QUANT survey was carried out before the QUAL phase, as participants were recruited primarily after completing the questionnaire. However, in theory, the two phases can be conducted in parallel as they are independent of one another. But, as the subject matter is the same, some of the questions from the questionnaire were included in the interview guides to give respondents the opportunity to deepen their testimonies. We developed five interview guides that took into account the different profiles across the various categories of respondents. Regarding the combination of the QUANT and QUAL phases, the literature suggests several possibilities. The diagram by Pluye and Hong (2016) below summarises the most common arrangements.

Mixed methods research designs (primary research)

DESIGN	DESCRIPTION
SEQUENTIAL EXPLORATORY QUAL→QUAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QUAL results inform QUAN data collection/analysis* • Integration between/after the 2 phases • E.g., grounded theory followed by a survey
SEQUENTIAL EXPLANATORY QUAN→QUAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QUAN results inform QUAL data collection/analysis* • Integration between/after the 2 phases • E.g., RCT followed by a qualitative case study
CONVERGENCE QUAL + QUAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative (QUAL) and quantitative (QUAN) • Integration during/after data collection/analysis • E.g., validation of instruments*
VARIANTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiphase and multilevel designs

Figure 1. Source. Pierre Pluye & Quan Nha Hong (2016), *MIXED STUDIES REVIEWS*. University of McGill, ASIS&T webinar, June 20, 2016.

Our approach follows the so-called “CONVERGENCE” method, but in this order: QUANT + QUAL.

Figure 2 below illustrates how the two phases, QUANT and QUAL, are linked.

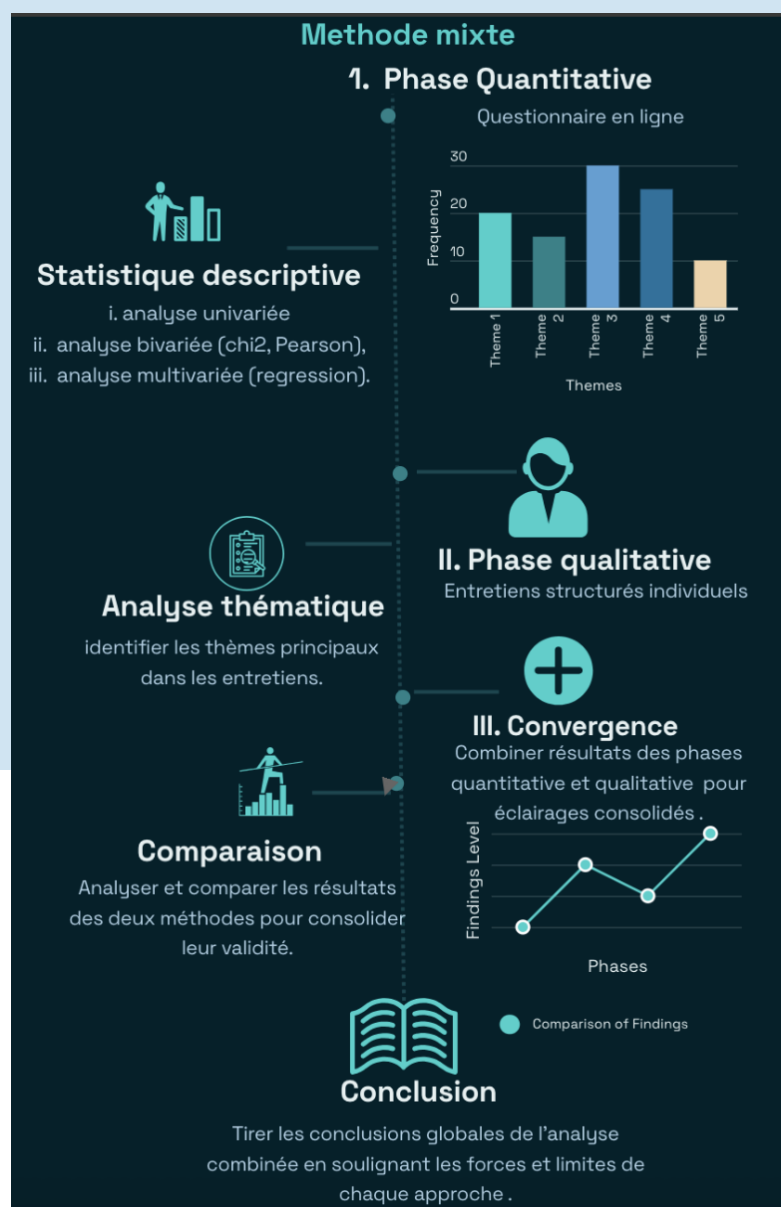


Figure 2. Overall approach to the survey and analysis method of the results.

This report presents an analysis based on the responses collected via the questionnaire across the seven participating institutions, with the aim of providing an overall picture of the situation regarding racism within these institutions (QUANT phase). Fifty-four (54) semi-structured individual interviews were conducted across the seven participating sites (QUAL phase). Their analysis provided further insight into the results obtained in the quantitative phase by adding a locally situated and comprehensive dimension.

1.3 The structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire developed as part of the ARCHERIF project addresses both quantitative and qualitative aspects (to a lesser extent) in order to assess respondents' perceptions and experiences of racism in HERIs. The questionnaire was distributed via LimeSurvey, a German online survey platform that complies with the European GDPR. Furthermore, the version hosted by Aix-Marseille University (AMU) was used to ensure the security and confidentiality of the data collected. Consequently, all

survey data was hosted on secure AMU servers, access was restricted solely to the ARCHERIF project team.

The questionnaire aimed to capture the complexity of the phenomenon by examining its various components and their interactions. Each question was designed to explore a specific aspect of the subject under study. The aim was to address concrete situations as well as respondents' perceptions; the questionnaire was therefore designed to use a supportive and inclusive wording, enabling respondents to speak about their experiences and knowledge regarding racism (various definitions) and possible actions to be implemented to combat racism within their institutions. The terminology used refers primarily to the experience of victims. The questions were designed using both factual statements (e.g. 'Have you ever reported...?') and subjective questions (e.g. 'How would you rate...?'), as it is quite difficult to separate the factual from the subjective. Only three questions were mandatory, and there were multiple choice responses.

The questionnaire consisted of 44 questions, divided into eight thematic sections. Module 1 covered 'Socio-demographic information' (section A), Module 2 focused on 'Reports and support' (section B), and Module 3 dealt with 'Experiences of racism' (sections C, D, E and F). Module 4 examined "Individual and family ethnic and racial information" (section G) and, finally, Module 5 allowed participants to provide their "Contact details for the qualitative interview" (section H). Furthermore, the questionnaire followed a conditional logic, i.e, the appearance of certain questions depended on the answers provided in the previous question. Thus, depending on a participant's answer to a question, certain questions may not be available, or conversely, additional questions may be posed. This type of logic allowed the survey path to be tailored to respondents' experiences and opinions. Furthermore, this conditional logic offered the advantage of making the questions more relevant, as participants only answered those that directly concerned them. This conditional logic determined the path taken by respondents, particularly from question C3 onwards in 'Block C: Experiences of racism in HERI'. Thus, the third part, "Experiences of racism", comprised the four blocks C, D, E and F. In response to question C3, if a respondent stated that they were a "victim of racism", they will be directed to block D, "Experiences of racism in HERI – victim". If they stated that they were only a "witness", the questionnaire directed them to Block E, "Experiences of racism in HERI – witness". If they stated that they are both a victim and a witness, they will be directed straight to Block E, "Experiences of racism in HERI – witness and victim". The questions in these three sections are broadly the same and the response options are almost identical. To facilitate the presentation of the results and ensure they are better understood, we grouped the responses provided in each conditional section where relevant. Figure 3 below illustrates the structure of the questionnaire:

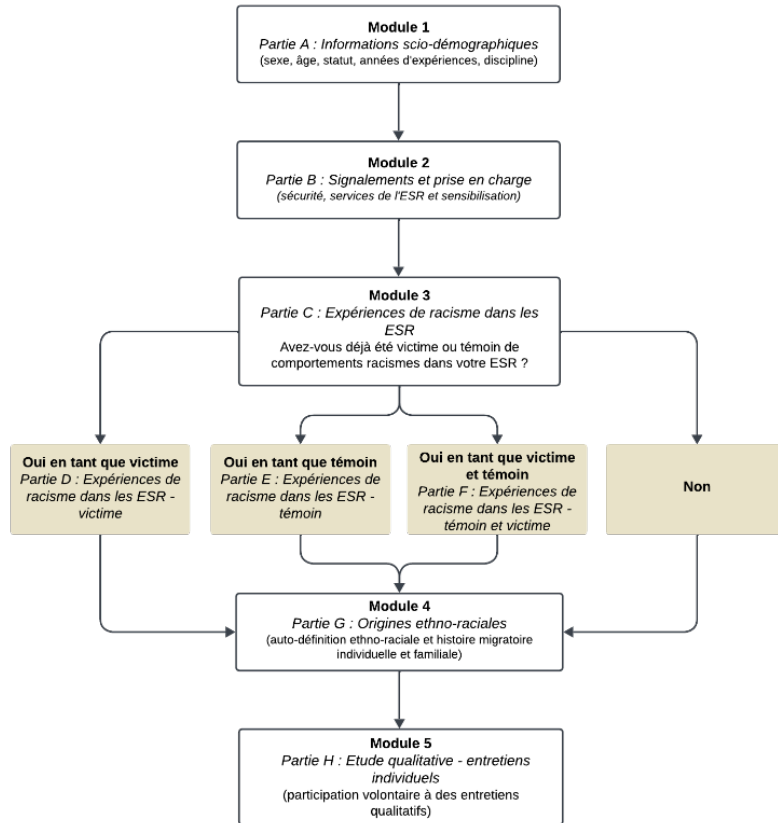


Figure 3. Structure of the ARCHERIF questionnaire on racism in higher education and research institutions.

1.4 Description of variables and data

The questionnaire items were categorised according to the nature of the variables they measured and the response options: binary (yes/no), single or multiple-choice (several possible responses), ordinal (perception or frequency scales) and open-ended (comments). As previously stated, the responses obtained in sections D, E and F regarding three situations involving racism (victim, witness, victim and witness) were grouped together to better summarise the results. The data collected is primarily quantitative. The responses collected in the comment fields were subjected to manual qualitative analysis using the thematic analysis.

Table 1. Nature of the variables in the ARCHERIF questionnaire

Type of variable	Number	Percentage
Binary	2	6,90 %
Binary + comment	3	10,34 %
Categorical	6	20,69 %
Multiple categorical	9	31,03 %
Multiple categorical + comment	3	10,34 %
Ordinal	6	20,69 %
Grand total	29	100 %

Thus, multiple categorical variables – whether or not they included the option to add a comment (via the open-ended response field) – accounted for the largest proportion of the questions at 41.37%, thus reflecting a desire to capture the diversity of experiences and perceptions through non-exclusive response options. The data collected on the nature, frequency, locations and perpetrators of racism, as well as on the reactions and consequences for victims, provide a rich basis for cross-tabulation. Ordinal variables meanwhile, enable the assessment of levels of perception, evaluation or frequency. Closed-ended variables allow for structured statistical analysis, whilst open-ended questions offer a different understanding of participants’ experiences, perceptions and suggestions. This structure enabled the cross-referencing of statistically analysable quantitative variables (frequencies, bivariate analyses and multivariate analyses) with qualitative data that can enrich the interpretation of the results. The table detailing each variable (title, type, response options) is provided in the appendix 1.

Our survey protocol was submitted to the Data Protection Officer at Aix-Marseille University, who, after review, issued us a certificate of compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the amended French Data Protection Act of 6 January 1978.

1.5 The challenges and obstacles to investigating racism

The ability to disseminate our questionnaire within participating university sites depended on the willingness of the governing bodies and their central services to allow the survey link to be sent to everyone. Indeed, they are the only ones with access to generic email addresses enabling them to reach their entire population (teachers, researchers, students, and administrative and technical staff). From the outset of the project, 23 HERIs spread across the whole of France (including the overseas departments) were preselected with the aim of ensuring that the whole country was represented. Over 200 contacts were established, including with the Permanent Conference of Equality and Diversity Officers (CPED), a body that brings together all the representatives of Equality, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination units within HEIs. After six months of contacts and follow-ups, only seven institutions took part in our survey. Appendix 2 provides a map of the 23 preselected institutions as well as a table of the 28 institutions ultimately approached, and the responses we received.

Regarding the seven sites that took part in our survey (Sciences Po Lille, ENS de Lyon, University of New Caledonia, University of Haute-Alsace, Claude Bernard University Lyon 1, ISARA and AMU), we first approached the Vice-Presidents or the Equality, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Officers in order to secure their support for the survey as the subject matter fell within their remit. These individuals then approached their governing bodies to convince them of the value of participating in the ARCHERIF survey. Once consent was obtained, we provided them with a unique link per institution, which they were responsible for circulating to their community member three times (an initial dissemination followed by two reminders at regular intervals).

Our efforts to convince the Vice-Presidency for Equality, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination and Aix-Marseille University’s (AMU) governing body to facilitate the dissemination of the survey link was not successful. This was all the more surprising given that the ARCHERIF project itself is funded by AMIDEX¹, this same university’s foundation for research Excellence. Consequently, for the AMU site, we were forced to seek alternative means of disseminating the survey. After various contacts, we secured the assistance of three of AMU’s staff unions who circulated the survey link using their mailing lists. However, these lists only reach staff members (not students) who did not unsubscribe from them. Additionally, we contacted the deans and directors of all AMU’s academic departments, asking for their assistance in sharing the questionnaire link with their students, but with no guarantee that they would do so. This explains the low response rate (696 respondents) relative to the AMU’s total

¹ <https://www.univ-amu.fr/fr/public/la-fondation-amidex>.

population (80,000 students and 10,000 staff members) and, above all, the low student participation rate (123 out of the 696 respondents, out of a total of 80,000 students). By contrast, in HERIs where the survey was publicised by official channels and promoted by their Equality, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination departments, participation rates were considerably higher, with a much greater involvement of students who, according to our findings, are the group most exposed to racism. For instance, at the ENS of Lyon, out of a total population of 3599 people, 812 responded to our questionnaire and 38 agreed to be contacted for individual interviews. At Claude Bernard Lyon 1 University, out of a total population of 50 601, more than two thousand people (2,146) responded to the questionnaire and 76 people expressed a willingness to be contacted for individual interviews. This shows that the support of the university administration and those officially in charge of implementing anti-discrimination policies in a survey on a sensitive subject directly impact the level of participation of the community concerned. Some people saw the dissemination of such a survey via institutional channels as a sign of their institution's engagement with the subject matter. Despite the difficulties encountered in disseminating the survey on the AMU's site, the lists of the three unions (CFDT-AMU, CGT-AMU and SUD-AMU) enabled nearly 700 people to express their views on the subject of racism within their institutions, and nearly 40 people furnished their contact details in order to be contacted for an individual interview, despite the unfavourable timing (the interviews took place during the summer of 2025).

The difficulty encountered at the Sciences Po Lille site was of a different nature. Although the governance of this institution had agreed in principle to participate in the ARCHERIF survey, the questionnaire was ultimately distributed only to students. This explains the absence of teaching and administrative staff among the respondents and the extended period during which the questionnaire remained open at this site. Consequently, the results for Sciences Po Lille reflect only the experiences and perceptions of the students regarding racism on their campus.

1.6 Population of the survey sites

The total population of the seven universities participating in this survey is estimated at 144 901 students and 15 323 staff members (teachers, researchers and administrative staff). The questionnaire was distributed in each institution over a six-week period, with two reminders sent out. The survey ran from 30 January to 11 July 2025. 4 707 people filled the questionnaire, with 3 274 complete responses and 1 433 partial responses (see Table 2 below for details by institution).

The 1 433 partial responses corresponded to respondents who abandoned the questionnaire without completing it. Nevertheless, this completion rate (69.53%) remains satisfactory for a survey dealing with a subject classified as sensitive under the CNIL and the GDPR. To give due consideration to every response, partial responses were retained for the descriptive analysis (§2.1). Consequently, the sample sizes used to calculate the proportions vary depending on the question. However, in the bivariate analyses (§2.2) and multivariate analyses (§2.3) which required cross-tabulation of variables, incomplete responses were excluded for the variables concerned. Indeed, for statistical reasons, it is not possible to include an absent or missing response in a cross-tabulation or when performing correlation tests.

The following figure provides some key figures on survey participation, as well as the geographical location of the participating institutions.



The ARCHERIF survey

Towards anti-racism certification for higher education and research institutions in France

7 participating institutions

4707 respondents

56 qualitative interviews

Categories of respondents

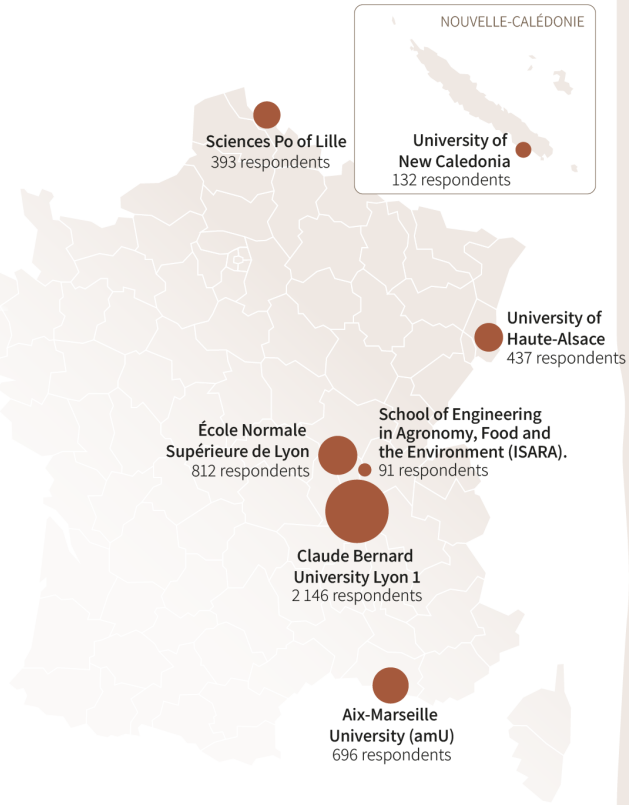
Student
64%

Admin staff
17%

Faculty – Teaching staff
14%

Post-doctoral - Adjuncts
3%

No response
2%



Source: ARCHERIF survey on racism, conducted via an online questionnaire with seven French universities between January and August 2025

Table 1 Population of the seven sites and number of questionnaire respondents per institution

Institution	Students	Staff	Number of respondents	Incomplete answers	Complete answers
Sciences Po Lille	2 050	113	393	139	254
ENS Lyon	2 457	1142	812	239	573
University of Haute-Alsace	10 224	1087	437	136	301
University of New Caledonia	3000	250	132	34	98
ISARA	1 203	155	91	17	74
UCB Lyon 1	46 000	4601	2146	645	1501
AMU	80 000	8000	696	223	473
TOTAL	144 901	15 232	4707	1433	3274

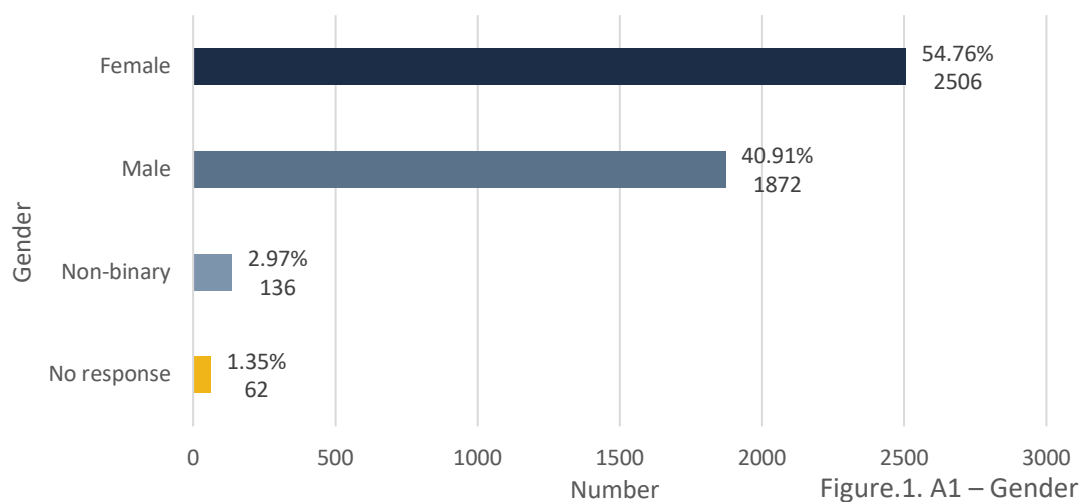
II. Quantitative survey by questionnaire


2.1 Univariate statistics: quantifying, measuring, comparing

This section deals with univariate descriptive statistics which merely quantifies the proportion of respondents who selected a particular response option for a given question. The analysis covers all variables and response options in the questionnaire. Response options with semantically related meanings have been grouped together in some variables to make them easier to interpret and understand. We made this explicit where applicable.

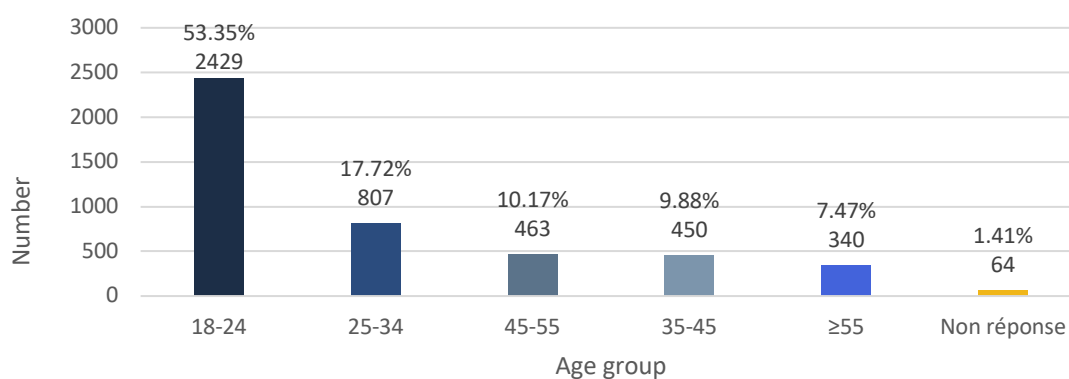
2.1.1 Socio-demographic profiles of respondents

◆ Table U.1. A1 – Gender



 The majority of the respondents were women, accounting for 54.76% (n=2506), compared with 40.91% for men (n=1872). Those identifying as non-binary accounted for 2.97% (n=136) of respondents. 1.35% of the sample (n=62) chose not to specify their gender. One might wonder whether women are more sensitive to issues of social injustice and racism. However, the Acadiscri survey on discriminations in HERIs also found a greater participation of women in their survey. This trend was considered ‘very typical’ (Hamel, 2025), thus it is not necessarily linked to the survey’s theme.

◆ Table U.2. A2 – Age group





The breakdown by age group shows a clear predominance of 18–24-year-olds, who accounted for 53.35% of respondents. Next came those aged between 25–34 (17.72%), 45–55 (10.17%), 35–45 (9.88%) and over 55 (7.47%). Finally, 1.41% of participants chose not to reveal their age.

◆ **Table U.3. A3 – Status**

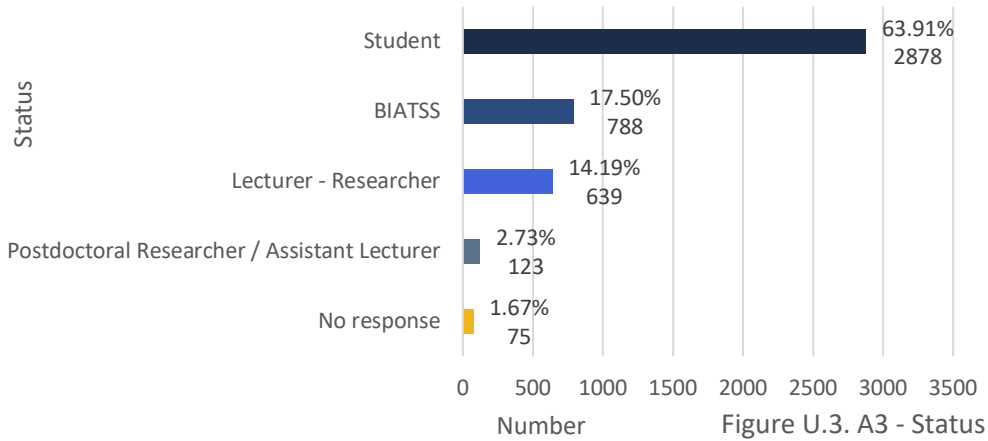


Figure U.3. A3 - Status



The breakdown by status revealed a high proportion of students who accounted for 63.91% of respondents. BIATSS staff made up 17.5%, whilst lecturers and researchers accounted for 14.19%. Postdoctoral researchers and adjunct lecturers (ATER) accounted for only 2.73% of the sample, a relatively low proportion which can be explained by the precarious nature of their contracts and their more temporary presence within HERIs. Finally, 1.67% of the participants did not specify their status. The predominance of students among the respondents reflects the primary function of HERIs, thus is not surprising that they far outnumbered all the other categories of personnel in our sample.

◆ **Table U.4. A4 – Years spent in higher education and research**

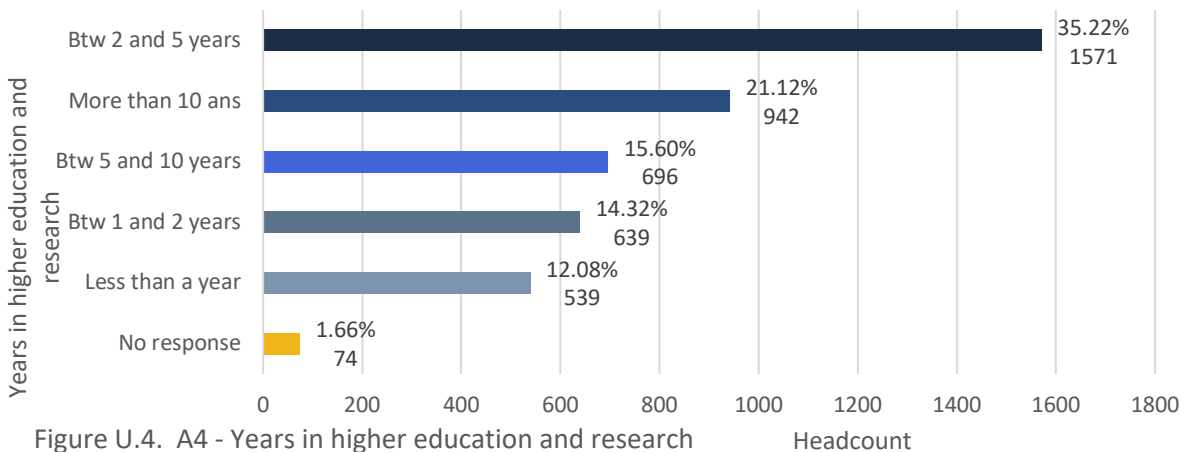


Figure U.4. A4 - Years in higher education and research



With regard to length of service within the HERI, 35.22% of respondents have been there for two to five years; 21.12% for more than ten years; 15.6% for five to ten years; 14.32% for one to two years; and 12.08% for less than a year. Finally, 1.66% did not answer this question. Overall, the majority of participants (over 70%) have been in their institution for more than two years.

◆ **Table U.5. A5 – Discipline/field**

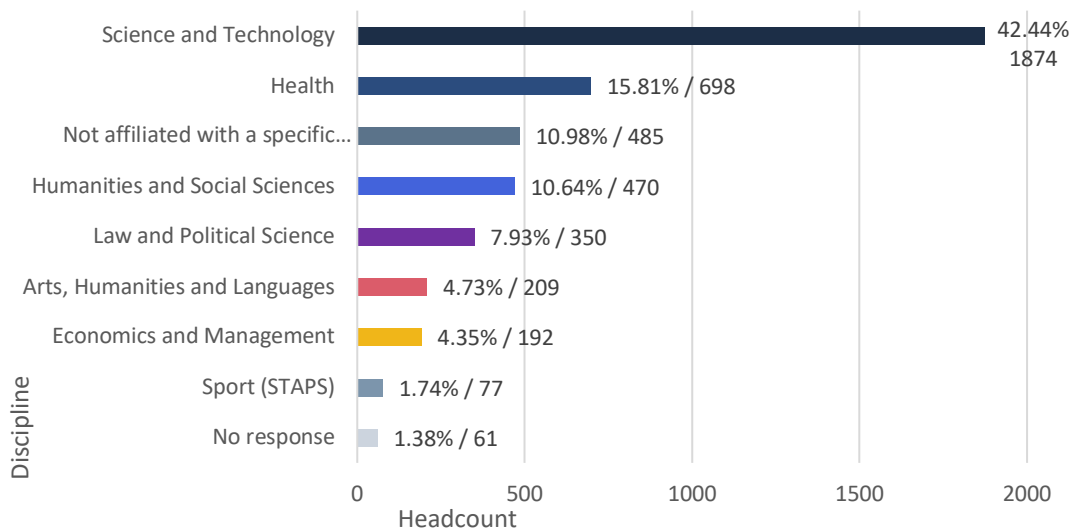


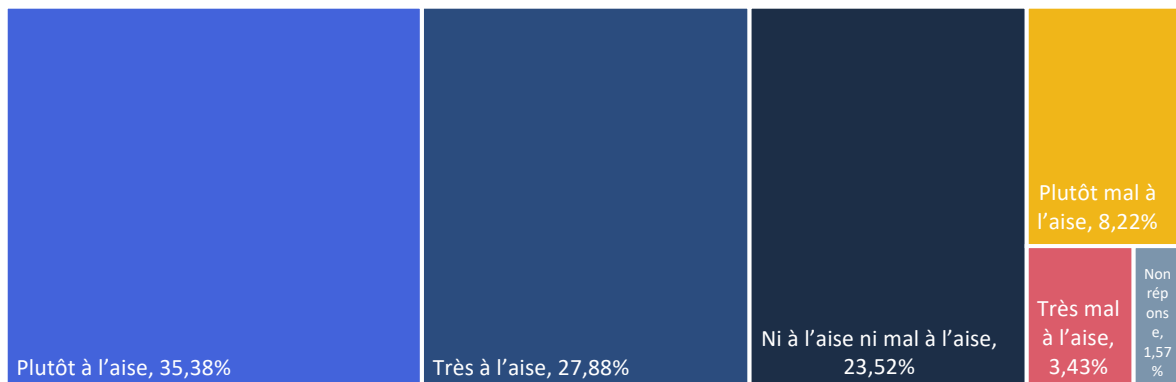
Figure U.5. A5 Discipline

The breakdown by academic discipline revealed a clear predominance of respondents from science and technology (42.44% of the sample). This high proportion can be explained by the very composition of the institutions that took part in the survey, which included in particular, the ENS de Lyon, Claude Bernard Lyon 1 University and ISARA, all of which are predominantly focused on scientific disciplines. Health is the second most represented discipline with 15.81% of respondents, followed by those not affiliated with a discipline (10.98%), partly due to the significant presence of administrative staff (BIATSS: 17.5% of the sample). The humanities and social sciences accounted for 10.64% of respondents. Law and political science represented 7.93%, while Arts, literature and languages accounted for 4.73%. Economics and management accounted for 4.35% of the responses, whilst sports science accounted for only 1.74%. Finally, 1.38% of the respondents did not provide information for this variable.

2.1.2 Reporting and addressing racism

◆ **Table U.6. B1 – Ease in discussing racism**

Figure U.6. B1 – Ease in discussing racism





When combining the responses ‘Somewhat comfortable’ (*plutôt à l’aise*) and ‘Very comfortable’ (*très à l’aise*), it appears that 63.26% of respondents felt that they were comfortable discussing racism. 23.52% were neutral (‘Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable’) (*ni à l’aise, ni mal à l’aise*). 8.22% of respondents (n=355) stated they were “Somewhat uncomfortable” (*plutôt mal à l’aise*), whilst 3.43% of respondents stated they were “Very uncomfortable” (*très mal à l’aise*) (n=148). 1.57% of respondents did not answer, amounting to 68 respondents. This trend was also found in the seven institutions are considered individually.



These figures run counter to the widespread view in French society that racism remains a ‘taboo’ or sensitive subject. Fundamentally, there is still a sense of unease and tension whenever the subject of racism is raised in professional or private discussions and in racially mixed settings. It is nevertheless indisputable that since the racist murder of George Floyd in the United States in 2020, and the global *Black Lives Matter* movement, the topic of racism has established itself as a subject of moral, political, social and cultural debate in the public sphere. Indeed, publications on the subject have seen exponential growth. Between 2020 and 2023, “sales of books on racism rose by over 6,800%. They remained very high at +2,800% in 2022. Searches for race and racism also saw an increase of over 300%” (Ibekwe, 2023).

◆ **Tableau U.7. B2 - Knowing who to turn to in cases of racism**

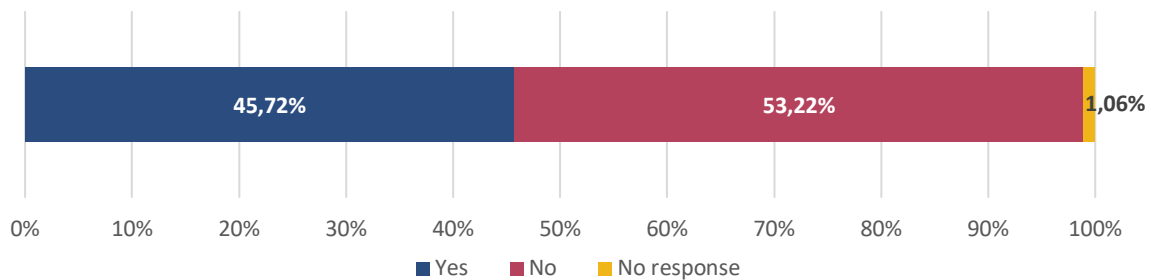


Tableau U.7. B2- Knowing who to turn to in cases of racism



More than half of the respondents (53.22%, n=2201 people) stated that they did not know who to turn to in order to report a racist incident within their institution. Conversely, 45.72% of respondents (n=1891) stated that they knew who to contact. Finally, 1.06% of the respondents (n=44) did not answer this question. This result highlights a lack of awareness of reporting mechanisms for racist acts or behaviours. This finding underscores the need to improve the visibility and accessibility of reporting mechanisms for the entire university community across different institutions.

◆ **Tableau U.8. B3 - Complaint filed for racism**

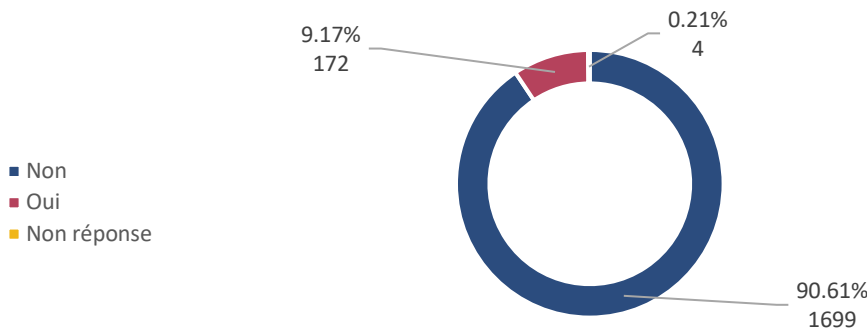


Figure U.8. B3 - Report filed for racism



The question “Have you ever reported comments or behaviour that could be considered racist within your institution?” followed a conditional logic. It only appeared if the respondent ticked “Yes” to question B2: “In the event of discrimination or racist behaviour within your institution, do you know who to turn to or confide in?” (above). Consequently, this question was only seen or completed by 1 875 people. Only 9.17% (n=172) of respondents answered “Yes”. The vast majority, 90.61%, answered “No” (n=1 699) and 0.21% did not answer (n=4).



Although people claimed they were less reluctant to talk about racism than in the past, the rate of reporting of racist incidents remains too low. This may suggest that victims or witnesses do not believe that reporting such incidents to the authorities within their institutions would lead to the problem being resolved. The low reporting rate recorded in this survey is also consistent with the findings of previous studies. For instance, the authors of the Acadiscri survey on discrimination in higher education and research had observed that:

“Most research on these issues highlights the difficulty victims face, at least in the French context, in interpreting their experiences and life trajectories in terms of discriminatory treatment, particularly in situations involving ethno-racial criteria. This difficulty can be attributed to the uncertain, diffuse, and sometimes even imperceptible nature of discrimination. It also stems from the national political framing of these issues in France”. (Bozec et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, racism is widespread, as demonstrated by several reports from the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH). During France’s Universal Periodic Review in 2023, the CNCDH echoed the concerns raised by more than 120 states regarding France’s human rights violations. Several shortcomings were highlighted, including police violence and racism. The CNCDH warned of several persistent gaps in the fight against racism in France, notably the lack of criminal convictions and the reluctance of the justice system to recognise and deal with racist offences. It called for concrete action to “strengthen the fight against discrimination in the workplace; **address the issue of systemic discrimination**², particularly within the police force; combat the normalisation of racist and xenophobic remarks and online hate; and tackle under-reporting and certain police practices that prevent the judicial processing of offences.” (CNCDH, 2023), p.17.

◆ **Tableau U.9. B4 - Recipient of the report**

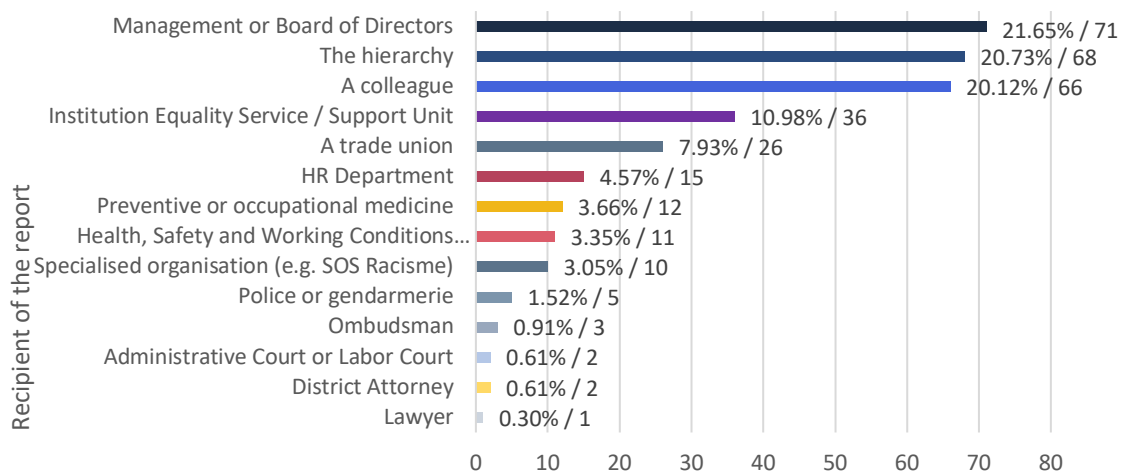


Figure U.9. B4 - Recipient of the report

Number



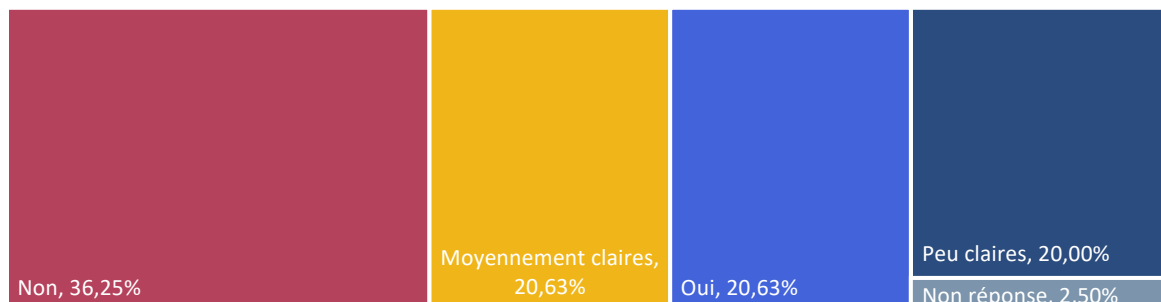
Figure U.9.B4 shows the breakdown of the service or person to whom people reported a racist incident. Thus, the figures presented in this figure do not represent the total number of respondents, but the total number of response options cited. The percentages shown are therefore


² Our emphasis.


calculated based on the number of responses (n = 328), not on the number of respondents. Furthermore, this was a multiple-choice and conditional question, meaning it only appeared for respondents who answered ‘Yes’ to question B3 (‘Have you ever reported comments or behaviour that could be considered racist within your institution?’), i.e. 172 people. Among the recipients of reports cited: “Management or the Chair” appeared as the main recipient with 21.65% (n=71) of reports, followed by “Hierarchy (line manager)” with 20.73% (n=68) and, in third place, “A colleague” with 20.12% (n=66). In the fourth place the “Institution’s Equality Department / support unit” with 10.98% of reports (n=36). ‘A trade union’ came fifth with 7.93% of responses (n=26). The “HR department” came sixth with 4.57% of responses. 3.66% of the respondents turned to “Preventive health unit” (n=12) and 3.35% to the “Health, Safety and Working Conditions Committee” (CHSCT) (n=11). Recourse to a “specialised association” came in ninth place with 3.05% of the responses (n=10), followed in tenth place by the “Police or Gendarmerie” with 1.52% (n=5). The “Ombudsman” accounted for 0.91% of responses (n=3). As for the “Administrative Court or Tribunal” and the “Public Prosecutor”, these each accounted for 0.61% of responses (n= 2 responses). Recourse to a “Lawyer” was mentioned only once, accounting for 0.30% of responses. The “Equality Service / support unit” accounted for 10.98% of reports, which highlights its low visibility in terms of addressing racial discrimination. The overall trend shows a tendency towards reporting to the institution’s internal bodies rather than on exterior and more distant legal mechanisms, which often entail exorbitant emotional and financial costs for victims.

◆ **Table U.10. B5 – Clarity of the information on report handling**

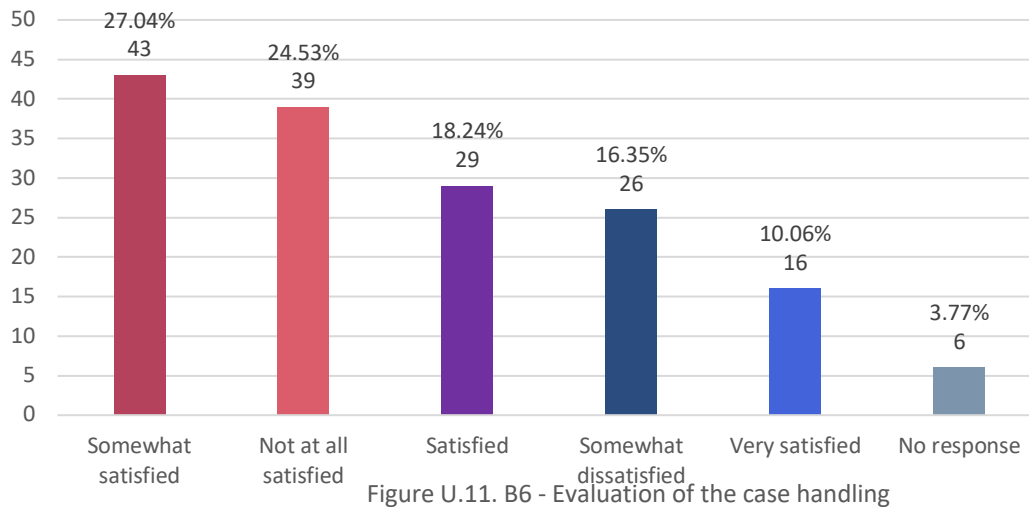
Figure U.10. B5 – Clarity of the information on report handling



 The question “After reporting racist behaviour or comments to your institution, did you receive clear information about how the procedure would be handled?” followed a conditional logic. It only appeared if the respondent has ticked “Yes” to question B3. Thus, only the 172 people who stated that they had reported racist behaviour or comments were shown this question. 36.25% (i.e. 58 people) of respondents considered the information provided on the handling of the matter to be ‘unclear’ (*Non*). Those who rated it as “Moderately clear” (*moyennement claires*) or “Clear” (“*Oui*”) were in similar proportions, at 20.63% respectively. 20% of respondents considered it “Somewhat unclear” (*peu claires*) and 2.5% did not answer (n=4 people). These results show a critical assessment of the clarity of the information provided when complaints were filed for racism, as nearly two-thirds of respondents (76.88%) considered the information received unclear.

 Improve information on support services and engage with victims to gather suggestions for measures that better meet their needs.

◆ **Table U.11. B6 – Assessment of complaints handling**



Similarly, this question followed a conditional logic; it appeared if the respondent ticked ‘Yes’ to question B3. The 172 people who reported incidents of racism were therefore shown this question, and 6 people did not answer it. The assessment of the support provided revealed a predominance of dissatisfaction among respondents. Indeed, 27.04% (n=43) reported moderate satisfaction and 24.53% (n=39 respondents) were not at all satisfied. Only 18.24% (n=29) said they were satisfied. 16.35% (n=26) reported being somewhat satisfied and 10.06% (n=16) very satisfied. These results suggest a generally low level of satisfaction. They reflect a lack of trust in the official reporting mechanisms for dealing with racism and racial discrimination. Nevertheless, given the small number of respondents to this question compared to the total number of respondents, it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion. The fact remains that the majority of racist incidents go unreported. Indeed, all the studies on racism show that the complaint and redress channels in place in the French society are largely ineffective and that victims have no confidence that they will be heard, understood or protected against the insidious reprisals they might face by reporting their perpetrators. As the authors of the Acadiscri survey once again found on this issue:

“Few of those surveyed took any action. Among those who reported having been discriminated against and having informed the university administration, 68% stated that the complaint led to no action, only 16.9% resulted in a preliminary internal investigation leading to disciplinary action; 15.7% in mediation; 4% in managerial action and 2.6% in disciplinary action.” (Weiss & Blassel, 2023).

◆ **Table U.12. B7 – Proposal for raising awareness on racism**

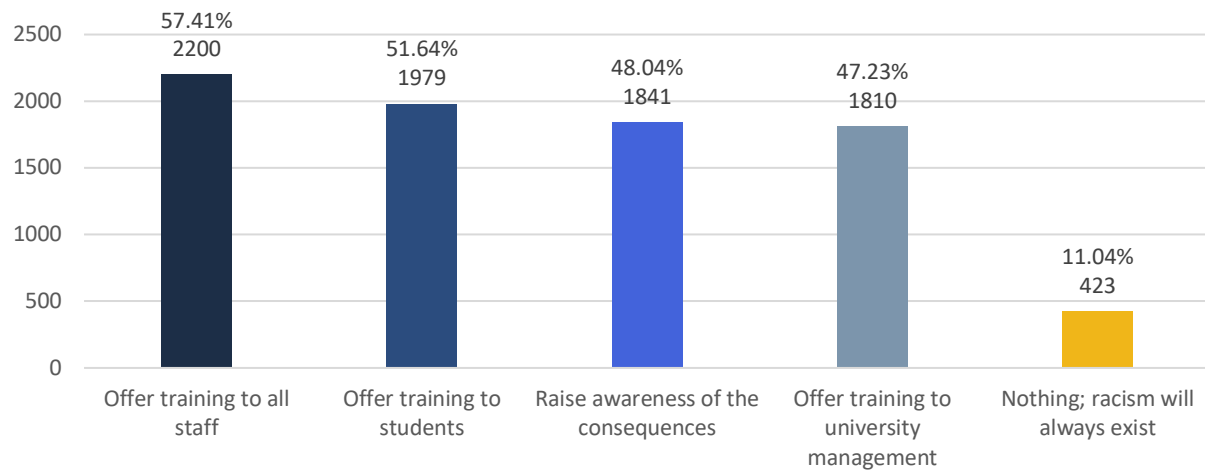




Figure U.12. B7 - Proposal for raising awareness on racism

 The question “In your opinion, how could we raise awareness and reduce racist acts in HERIs?” allowed for multiple answers. Consequently, the total of this table exceeds 100%. Among the response options, “Offer training to all staff” came first with 57.41%, whilst “Offer training to students” came second with 51.64%. In third place was “Raise awareness on sanctions” with 48.04%. “Offer training to university management” came in the fourth place with 47.23%. The answer “Nothing; racism will always exist” received 11.04%, which reflects the fatalism of victims in the face of pervasive racism.

 These findings highlight the high expectations respondents have of their institutions regarding the training of all staff to combat racial discrimination. These expectations are in line with the recommendations of the ‘*National Plan to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism and Discrimination on the Grounds of Origin 2023–2026*’ (Borne, 2023) many of which have gone unheeded.

◆ **Table U.13. B8 – Awareness of anti-racism initiatives**

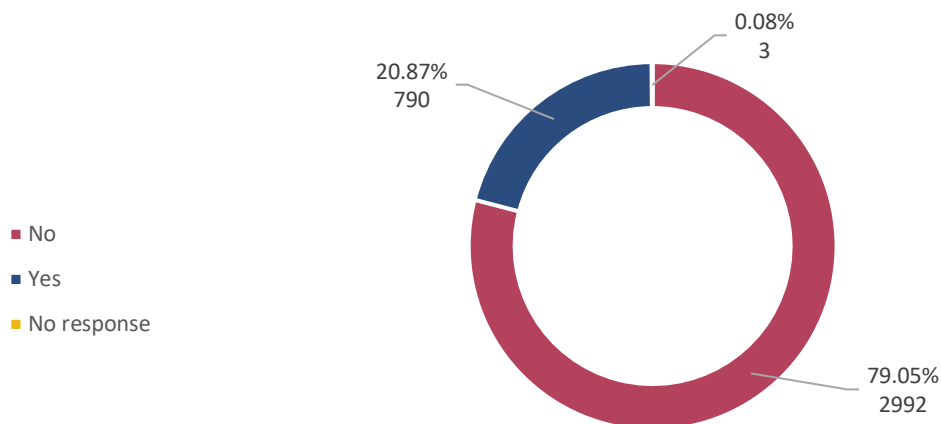


Figure U.13. B8 – Awareness of anti-racism initiatives



In answer to the mandatory question “Are you aware of the anti-racism awareness-raising activities offered by your institution?”, the vast majority – 79.05% (n=2992) – answered “No”. Only 20.87% of respondents (n=790) answered in the affirmative, and 3 people did not answer (i.e. 0.08%).



It is abundantly clear that racism is overlooked and is often absent from anti-discrimination awareness-raising activities carried out in HERIs. The bulk of these efforts focuses on gender equality and combating sexual and gender-based violence.

◆ **Table U.14. B9 – Participation in awareness-raising activities**

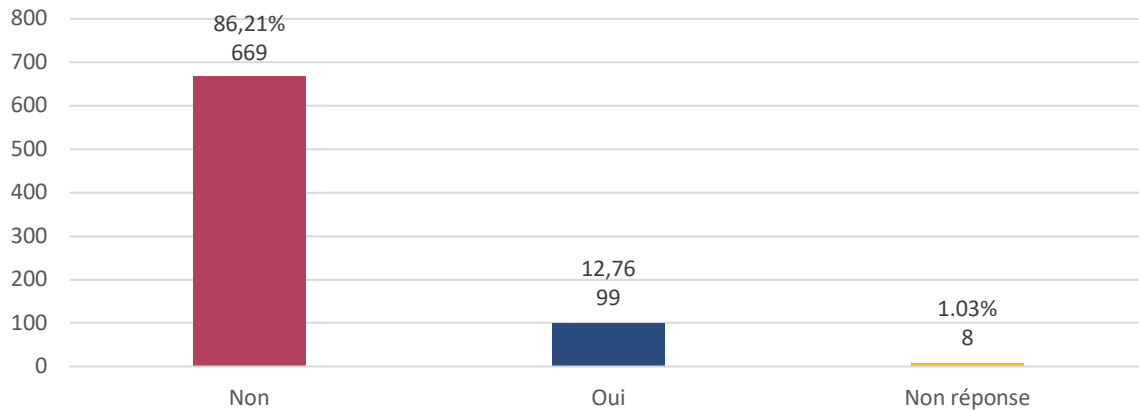


Figure U.14. B9 – Participation in awareness-raising activities



This question was based on a conditional logic: it was only asked of those who had answered ‘Yes’ to question B8, i.e. those who stated that they were aware of awareness-raising activities, amounting to 790 people. Of these respondents, the overwhelming majority, 86.21% (n=669 of the respondents) stated that they had not taken part in such activities, whilst 12.76% (n=99) stated that they had. 1.03% (n=8) of respondents did not answer.

◆ **Table U.15. B10 – Effectiveness of awareness-raising activities**

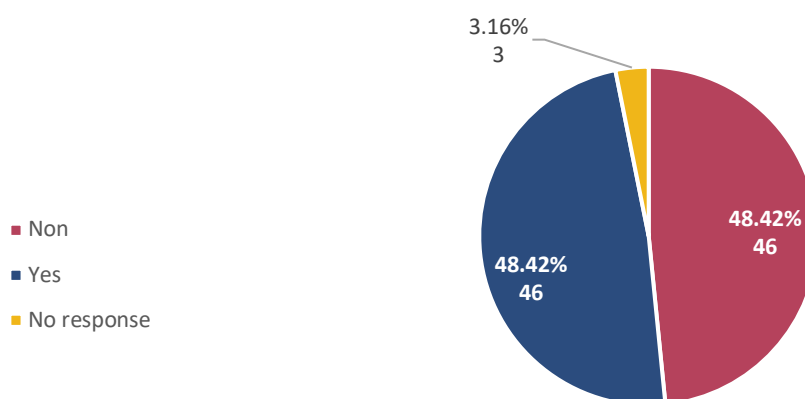


Figure U.15. B10 – The value of awareness-raising activities



Question B10 – “Following your participation, would you say that you have learnt something and that your attitude or understanding of the subject has changed?” – was designed to assess the perceived usefulness of the anti-racism awareness raising activities. It was only presented to those who answered “Yes” to question B9, i.e. 99 respondents. The results show a balanced distribution: 46

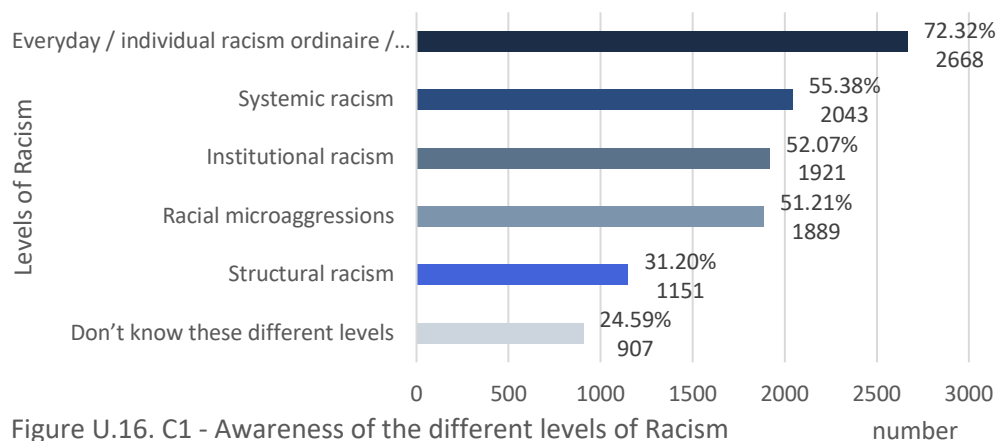
people felt that the initiatives had been beneficial to their understanding or attitudes on discriminations, whilst 46 others did not perceive any significant change. Finally, 3.16% of the respondents (n= 3) did not answer this question.



It will be necessary to conduct a further survey on the effectiveness of anti-racism awareness-raising initiatives and to explore other, potentially more participatory approaches (role-playing, exhibitions, theatre, quizzes, etc.).

2.1.3 Table U.16. C1 – Awareness of levels of racism

◆ **Table U.16. C1 – Awareness of the different levels of racism**



The aim of this question was to determine whether participants had ever heard of the concepts denoting different levels of racism, even if they did not fully understand their meaning. As this was a multiple-choice question, the total number of responses (10 479) far exceeded the total number of respondents (4 707). The vast majority, 72.32%, had heard of or understood the meaning of “everyday/individual racism”. 55.38% had heard of “systemic racism”; 52.07% of “institutional racism” and 51.21% of “racial microaggressions”. By contrast, only 31.2% of respondents had previously heard of or understood the meaning of “structural racism”, a term that consistently ranked amongst the least understood across the seven participating institutions, reflecting a more pronounced lack of awareness of this form of racism. Finally, 24.59% of respondents stated that they could not distinguish between these different forms of racism.



Develop training and awareness-raising materials on the different levels of racism, as the literature and victims’ testimonies show that the most widespread forms of racism are insidious and implicit, meaning that they are embedded in institutional cultures and are therefore systemic and structural.

◆ **Table U.17. C2 - Ability to identify the type of discrimination**

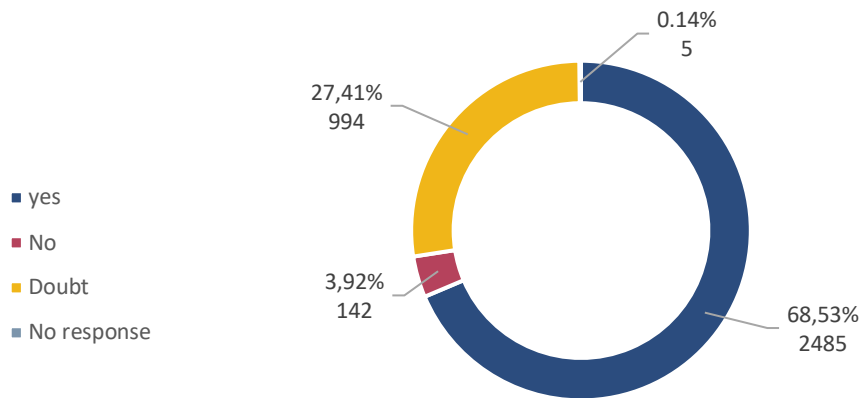




Figure U.17. C2 - Ability to identify the type of discrimination.

 In response to the question, “Do you think you are able to determine whether a behavior or statement constitutes racial prejudice or discrimination, or rather another type of discrimination (gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, etc.)?”, the majority of respondents to this question—68.53% of them—said they were able to do so, while 3.92% said they could not. A significant proportion—27.41%—expressed doubt about their ability to determine the type of discrimination they experienced or witnessed.

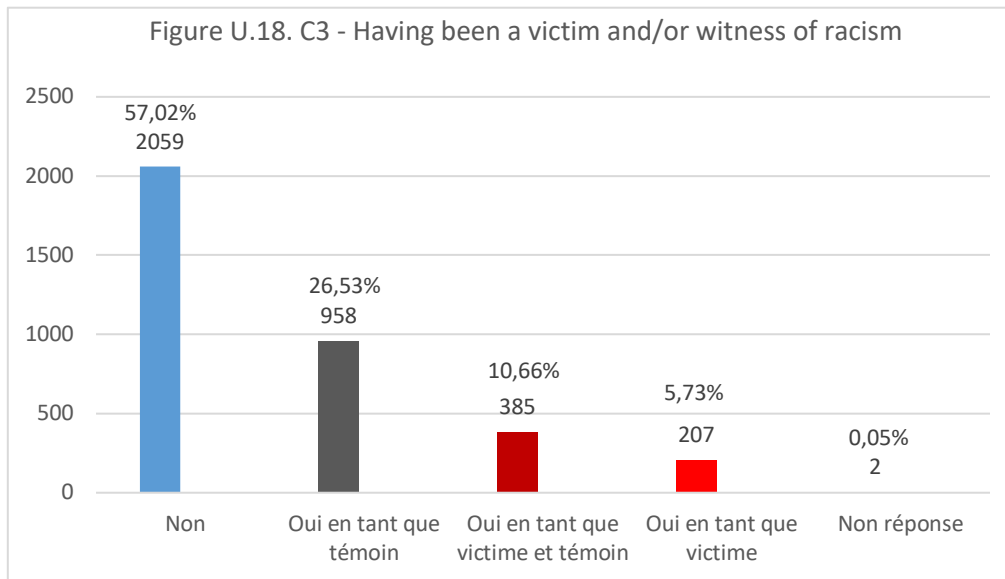
 Although most people believe they can determine whether a behavior or statement constitutes racism, the implicit and unspoken nature of certain manifestations of racism can make it difficult to spot. This difficulty may stem from the excessive psychological, legal, and economic burden for victims and witnesses:


*“The difficulty in speaking about racial discrimination may also stem from the **moral burden** inherent in the term ‘discrimination,’ particularly when it is associated with a racist act. Victims are aware that accusing someone of discriminating against them is not a trivial matter, given the ‘**accusatory force**’ of this expression and the ‘moral condemnation’ it elicits at the collective level. (...) Speaking out about racial discrimination can lead to humiliations that are difficult to endure and may cause one to doubt one’s own mental health.” (Bergamaschi et al., 2026).*


(Hajjat & Zoubir, 2025) made the same observation regarding the inherent difficulty in determining whether an act or statement is racist:

“Because the nature of racism is ambiguous, the interpretation of a given event can vary from one individual to another and from one context to another. Indeed, the racist significance of an event is determined by a series of factors specific to the social world under study. For example, the social sciences are largely based on the idea of essentialist ascribing to a permanent and hereditary characteristic and a reference to racial order, whereas criminal justice is based on a professional definition of the racist situation (“gratuitous”, far-right, etc.) (Hajjat, Keyhani, and Rodrigues 2019). In common parlance, the racist situation refers exclusively to an openly racist ideology, leaving in the shadows everything that pertains to the implicit, to structures, and to everyday practices.” (Hajjat & Zoubir, 2025), 56.

◆ **Table U.18. C3 - Having been a victim and/or witness of racism**



 In response to the question “Have you ever been a victim of or witnessed racist behavior at your institution?”, 57.02% answered “No” (*Non*) while 26.53% (n=958) reported having witnessed such behavior (*Oui en tant que témoin*); 10.66% had been both victims and witnesses (n=385) (*Oui en tant que victime et témoin*), and only 5.73% (n=207) reported “Yes, as a victim.” (*Oui en tant que victime*) Thus, more than one-third of respondents (36.74%) had been both victims and witnesses, or witnesses only.

 **The fact that there are about 1.6 times as many witnesses as there are victims—and that some individuals are both victims and witnesses—highlights the underrepresentation of victims** (primarily people of color) among respondents. Indeed, while witnesses report instances of racist acts or behavior, it stands to reason that there were victims who chose not to come forward. This finding aligns with the results of the “Cadre de Vie et de Sécurité” (CVS) (*Living and Safety Context*) survey, conducted between 2007 and 2021 by the INSEE in partnership with the former National Observatory on Crime and Criminal Justice Responses (ONDRP) and the Ministry of the Interior’s Statistical Service (SSMSI) which highlighted the «*black figure*³ », i.e, the significant proportion of offenses, including racist violence, that go unreported to the authorities (CNCDDH, 2024). This reluctance to report is often due to a lack of trust in institutions, fear of retaliation, or the feeling that reporting is pointless. Thus, as illustrated by the CVS survey, racist violence and discrimination are often underestimated in official reports, hence the importance of listening to those affected to better grasp the scale of this phenomenon (CNCDDH, 2024). Furthermore, reporting discrimination in the university setting carries a very high psychological cost for victims. The Acadiscri survey indeed showed that feelings of powerlessness, the predominance of hierarchy, and institutional inaction lead to fatalism in the face of this type of discrimination. Informal solutions such as decisions to remove victims or retaliation against whistleblowers were common, and institutional responses can have negative consequences for victims, even beyond the university (Bozec *et al.*, 2024).

³ This is the term used in this report. In Western civilisation, the color black is metaphorically associated with negative phenomena, in contrast to other civilisations where phenomena—whether positive or negative—do not have a colour.

2.1.4 Experiences of Racism in Higher Education and Research – Victims and Witnesses

We grouped the different response options for the same questions in sections D, E, and F of the questionnaire. These three sections focused on the respondents’ status either as “victims” (section D), “witness” (section E), or “victim and witness” (section F) of racism. This grouping allows us to analyse the reported experiences in a coherent manner and analytical manner.

◆ **Table U.19. D1-E2-F1 - The perpetrator of racism**

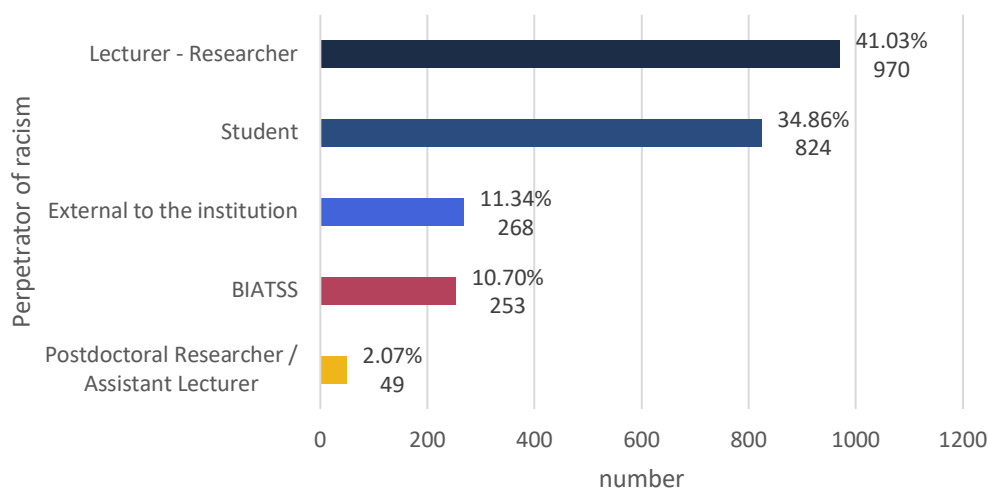


Figure U.19. D1-E2-F1 - The perpetrator of racism



In response to the question “Who was responsible for this racist behavior?”—which you experienced as a victim (Block D), witnessed (Block E), or both experienced and witnessed (Block F)—a total of 2 364 responses was recorded. 41.03% (n=970) of respondents identified a Faculty member as the perpetrator; 34.86% (n=824) identified a student; 11.34% (n=268) identified someone outside the institution; 10.70% (n=253) identified an administrative (BIATSS) staff member, while 2.07% (n=49) pointed to a postdoctoral fellow or an adjunct teacher (ATER).



The fact that 41.03% of respondents identified a faculty member as the perpetrator of racist acts is deeply concerning. Faculty members are expected to ensure the fairness of institutional procedures and to set an example. This suggests that institutional measures are needed to raise awareness and impose sanctions that target faculty members, not just students.

◆ **Table U.20. C3/A3-E1-F2 - Status as a victim of racism**

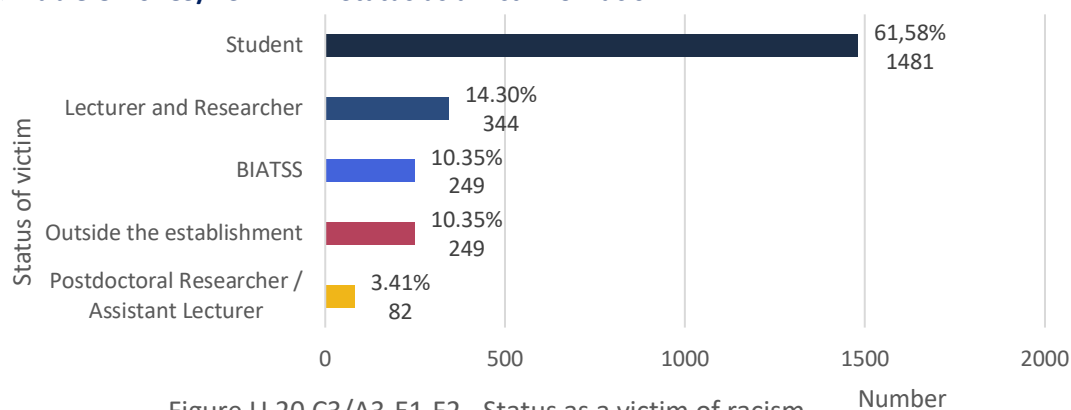


Figure U.20 C3/A3-E1-F2 - Status as a victim of racism

The compilation of responses to this question in the four blocks aims to summarize the answers provided by individuals who identified themselves as victims of racism (variables A3-C3 and A3-F2) or were identified as victims by witnesses (variables E1-F2). A total of 2 406 responses were recorded. Of these responses, 61.58% identified a student as the victim; 14.3% identified a faculty member; 10.35% identified an administrative (BIATSS) staff member; 10.35% identified a person outside the institution; and 3.41% identified a postdoctoral researcher or assistant professor.

The high proportion of students among the victims can be explained by their predominance in the population of HERIs, where they make up the majority of the population. This finding remains a cause for concern because it highlights the specific vulnerability of this population. Hierarchical relation, economic and institutional precariousness, as well as their dependency on faculty members, contribute to greater exposure to racism and a reduced ability to report such incidents. The proportions observed among staff members also raise concerns: the significant proportion of faculty members (14.3%) and BIATSS staff (10.35%) who are victims shows that racism affects all categories of personnel and equally external partners outside the institution (10.35%) with whom the university has ties (contract faculty, temporary instructors, etc.). Finally, while the low proportion of postdoctoral researchers and adjunct teachers (3.41%) affected reflects their smaller share of the total population, this should not obscure their highly precarious and mobile status, which is often associated with underreporting of the situations they experience.

◆ **Table U.21. D2-E3-F3 - Reasons for the discrimination**

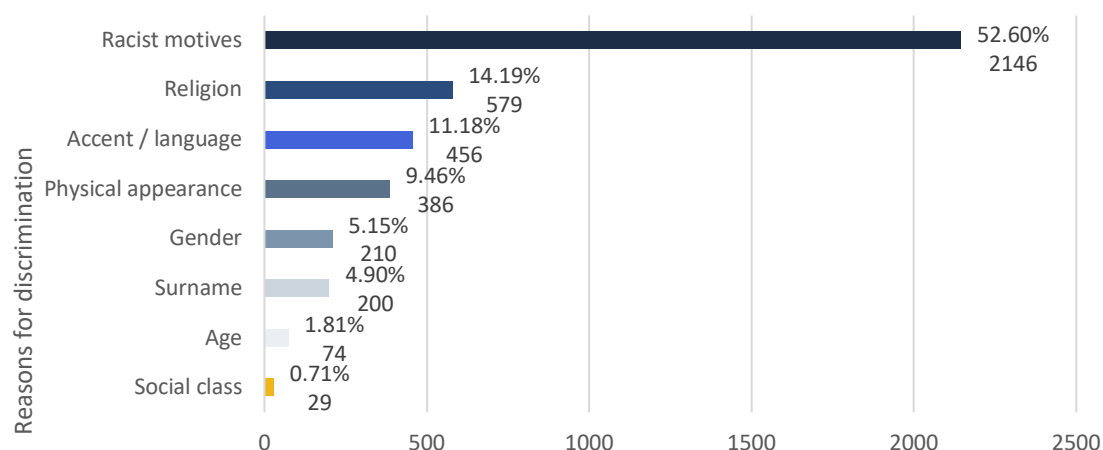


Figure U.21. D2-E3-F3 - Reasons for the discrimination

By grouping the responses to these three questions, we can summarize the perceived grounds for discrimination based on the three response categories for C3 (*“victims”; “witnesses”; and “victims and witnesses”*). We have also grouped the following response categories under *“Racist Grounds”*: *“skin color, nationality, culture, or actual or perceived origins.”* Among the 4 080 responses to this question, 52.6% cited racism as the reason for discrimination experienced or observed; 14.19% cited religion; 11.18% cited a reason related to accent or proficiency in French; 9.46% cited a reason related to their physical appearance; 5.15% cited gender; 4.9% cited their surname; 1.81% cited age; and only 0.71% cited social class.

It appears that the primary perceived form of discrimination is racism. This finding reflects the general rise in racism, which goes hand in hand with the rise of the far right in France and in the West. It also aligns with previous studies showing that approximately 45% of people of color reported experiencing racism almost constantly.

Indeed, in its Anti-Racism Action Plan for 2020–2025, the European Commission (EC) acknowledged that, despite clear anti-racism laws, racism appears to be on the rise, with anti-Black racism topping the list:

“According to the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency(FRA), 45% of people of North African descent, 41% of Roma, and 39% of people of Sub-Saharan African descent have experienced such discrimination. 11% of Jews felt discriminated against because they were Jewish. (...) “Recent events highlighting racial tensions have raised concerns that legal protections against racial, religious, or ethnic discrimination are not being effectively enforced. This is also linked to concerns regarding relations between law enforcement agencies and minorities.” – European Commission, September 18, 2020.

The national consultation entitled *“The Great Cause of Diversity & Inclusion”* launched by Make.org and France Labour agency, reached a similar conclusion:

“54% of employees say they have experienced at least one form of discrimination, and 74% say they have witnessed discrimination in the workplace, often related to physical appearance, racism, age, gender, or ethnic origin.”⁴

These findings may appear to differ from the results of some surveys that focused on all forms of discrimination in which racism ranked third or fourth among the grounds for discrimination. Given that there are 25 grounds for discrimination prohibited by the French law, depending on the survey sample, racism will automatically be overshadowed by other types of discrimination that could potentially affect half of the national population (sexism, ableism, classism, etc.). Currently, the fight against gender-based discrimination accounts for the bulk of institutional efforts and awareness campaigns, to the detriment of other forms of discrimination affecting vulnerable and racialised populations, and to the detriment of an intersectional approach that would focus on the combined effects of multiple types of discrimination. For instance, a woman of color is highly likely to face fivefold discriminations related to (1) her gender, (2) her origin or “assumed race,” (3) her religion; (4) her accent if she is a foreigner; (5) her social class if she hails from a poor neighbourhood.

◆ **Table U.22. D3-E4-F4 - Manifestations of discrimination**

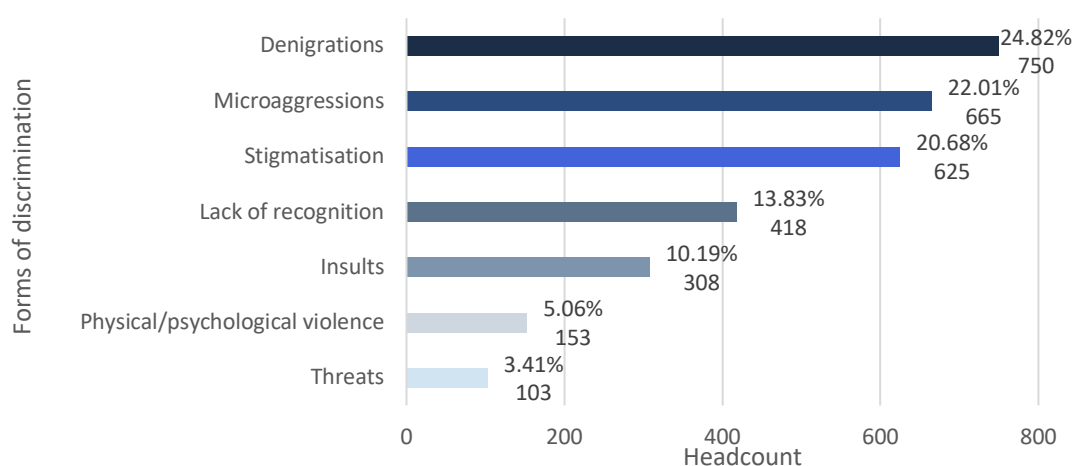


Figure U.22. D3-E4-F4 - Forms of discrimination

⁴ <https://about.make.org/diversite-inclusion#:~:text=La%20Grande%20Cause%20%22Diversit%C3%A9%20%26%20Inclusion,r%C3%A9el%20impact%20pour%20favoriser%20une>.



The graph summarises the responses from victims (D3), witnesses (E4), and both witnesses and victims (F4) to the question, “In what form(s) did this experience of discriminatory behavior occur?” Of the 3,022 responses, “Denigration” ranked first at 24.82%, followed by “Microaggressions” at 22.01%. “Stigmatization” ranked third at 20.68%. In fourth place was “Lack of recognition” at 13.83%. “Insults” ranked fifth with 10.19%. “Physical/psychological violence” came in sixth with 5.06%. “Threats” come in seventh and last place with 3.41%. These results highlight the prevalence of more insidious forms of discrimination that are difficult to articulate but negatively impact victims’ working conditions, self-esteem, and mental health. In contrast, cases of physical violence appear to be less frequent.

This finding is also supported by the survey on racism in higher education and research conducted by (Hajjat & Zoubir, 2025).



Policies and awareness-raising efforts aimed at combating racial discrimination should focus on insidious forms of discrimination (derogatory remarks, ethno-racial microaggressions, stigmatization), which are often viewed by their perpetrators as humour or harmless jokes. Initiatives promoting “active bystander” awareness (*Support and Report, Active Allyship*) should also be considered.

◆ **Table U.23. D4-E5-F5 – Place where the discrimination took place**

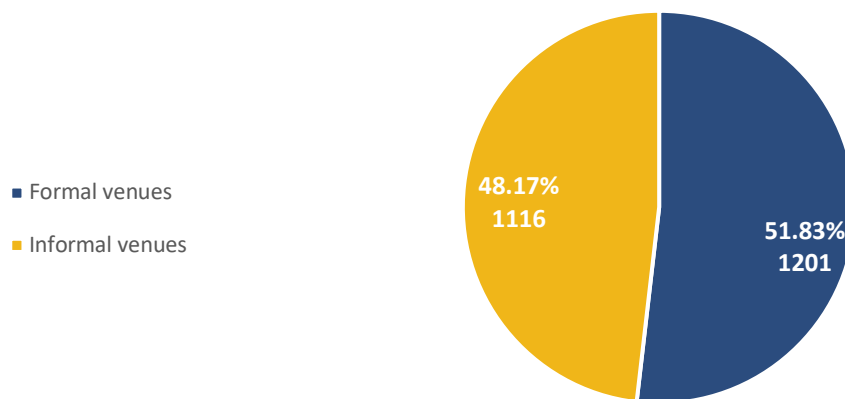


Figure U.23. D4-E5-F5 - Venue where the discrimination occurred



This was a multiple-choice question with ten possible answers (D4-E5-F5). For the sake of synthesis, we grouped the answers into two categories: formal and informal venues. “**Formal venues**” include the following places: “the victim’s office,” “the office of the person who perpetrated the racist act or made the racist remark,” “classroom,” “university library,” “meeting room.” “**Informal venues**” included “open spaces on campus (gardens, courtyards, etc.); common areas (lobby, hallways, etc.); restrooms, university gym, and university cafeteria.” **In 51.83% of the cases (n=1 201), discriminatory behavior occurred in formal venues, while in 48.17% (n=1 116) of cases, it occurred in informal settings.** Again, this result aligns with trends observed elsewhere. The Acadiscri survey on discrimination in HERIs found that, compared to other types of discrimination, racist behavior or remarks tended to occur in secret or intimate settings, within a “closed circle” where the perpetrators felt safe:

“While sexism occurs in public settings (communal spaces, large group classrooms), racism occurs in more intimate settings (small classrooms, meeting rooms.” (Weiss & Blassel, 2023).

Cross-tabulating variable B.42 (“C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism”) with the variables “D4-E5-F5 – Venues of discrimination” in the bivariate analysis section will help refine these results.

◆ **Tableau U.24. D5-E6-F6 - Reactions to discrimination**

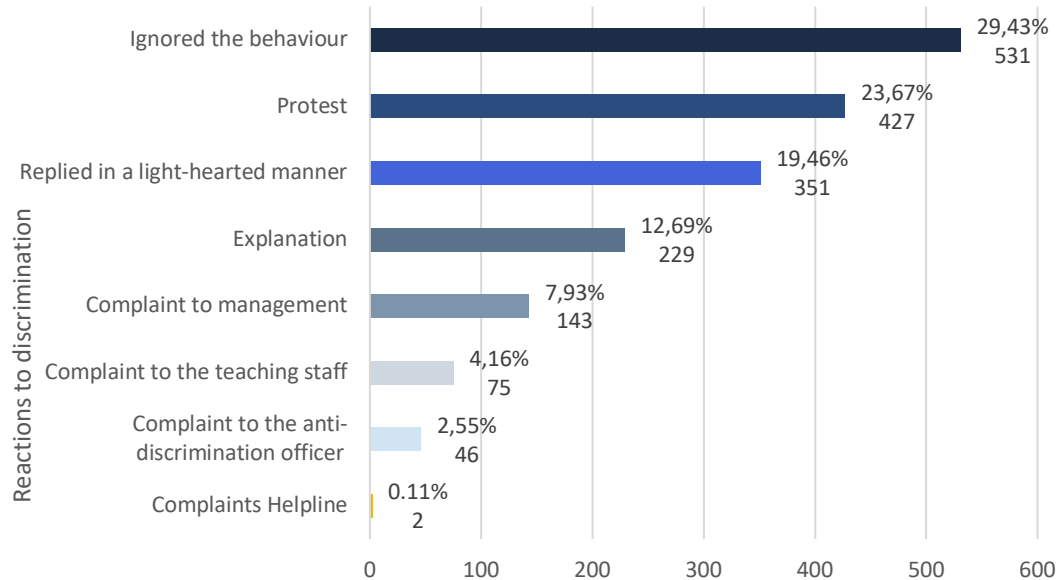


Figure U.24. D5-E6-F6 - Reactions to discrimination

The compilation of responses to questions D5-E6-F6 summarises the reactions of victims and witnesses to discrimination. Out of the 1804 responses recorded, 29.43% reported having “Ignored the behavior”; 23.67% said they reacted by “protesting”; 19.46% “responded with humour”; 12.69% “responded verbally by explaining the racist nature of these acts or remarks”; 7.93% filed a “complaint with management”; 4.16% filed a “complaint with the faculty”; 2.55% filed a “complaint with the anti-discrimination officer”; and 0.11% contacted the support center.

The fact that “ignoring the behavior” consistently appeared as the most frequently cited reaction to discrimination highlights the embarrassment and helplessness of victims and witnesses of discriminatory behavior or remarks. But, without acknowledging and putting an end to the discriminatory behavior, the emotional wounds and trauma experienced may lead to more damaging long-term effects.

◆ **Table U.25. D6-E7-F7 - Frequency of racist behavior**

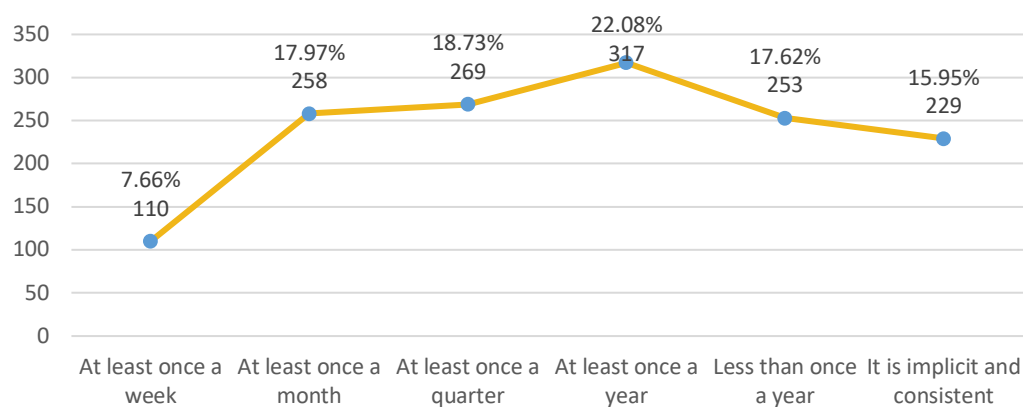


Figure U.25. D6-E7-F7 - Frequency of racist behavior



In response to the question “How often would you say you experience racist behavior?”, among the 1 436 responses collected, the option “At least once a year” ranked first with 22.08% of responses (n=317). “At least once a quarter” came in second with 18.73%, and “At least once a month” accounted for 17.97%. The response “Less than once a year” was cited by 17.62%. “It is implicit and constant” came in fifth place with 15.95%, followed by “At least once a week” with 7.66%. These results show that for a significant proportion of respondents, racism is perceived as pervasive: nearly half (41.58%) associate it with a weekly, monthly, or constant experience.



These responses show that, overall, far from being rare occurrences, racism remains pervasive on college campuses. Indeed, in an article published by the daily newspaper *Le Monde* titled “At university, people of color don’t always feel they belong,” (Nasi, 2023) described the experiences of many students and staff members of color on French campuses. From comments questioning their place in the French society, to reactions of surprise at their mastery of the French language, and the lack of respect they face from white colleagues of lower levels of the hierarchy⁵, people of color face insidious, persistent, and institutional forms of racism. Furthermore, the higher one climbs in the university hierarchy and in certain academic fields, the whiter the environment becomes, such that it becomes rare to encounter another person of color there. The few people of color who manage to reach these upper echelons often find themselves in an environment where they feel either constantly watched or simply ignored.

◆ **Table U.26. D7-E8-F8 - Effects of discrimination on victims**

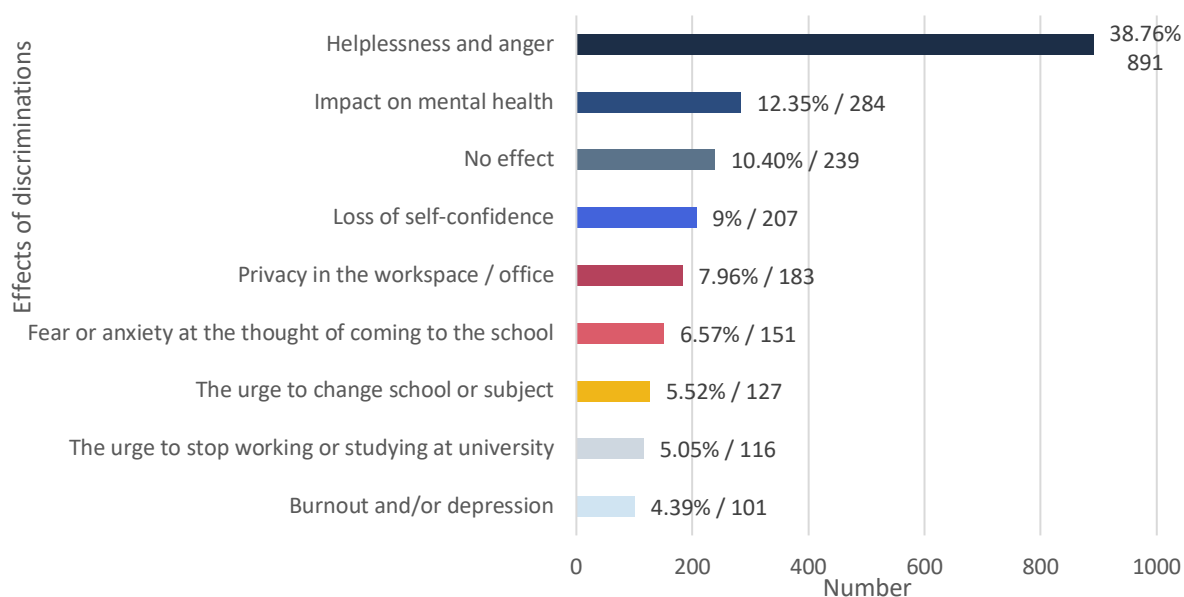


Figure U.26. D7-E8-F8 - Effects of discrimination on victims



The aggregation of the responses to these three questions (D7-E8-F8) summarises the effects that discrimination has on victims and on witnesses. Since multiple responses were possible, the 2299 responses represent the total number of response options cited. The predominant effect is the feeling of “helplessness and anger,” at 38.76%. In second place, “impact on mental health” is cited by 12.35% of respondents. “Nothing, it doesn’t affect you” ranked third with 10.40%. “Loss of

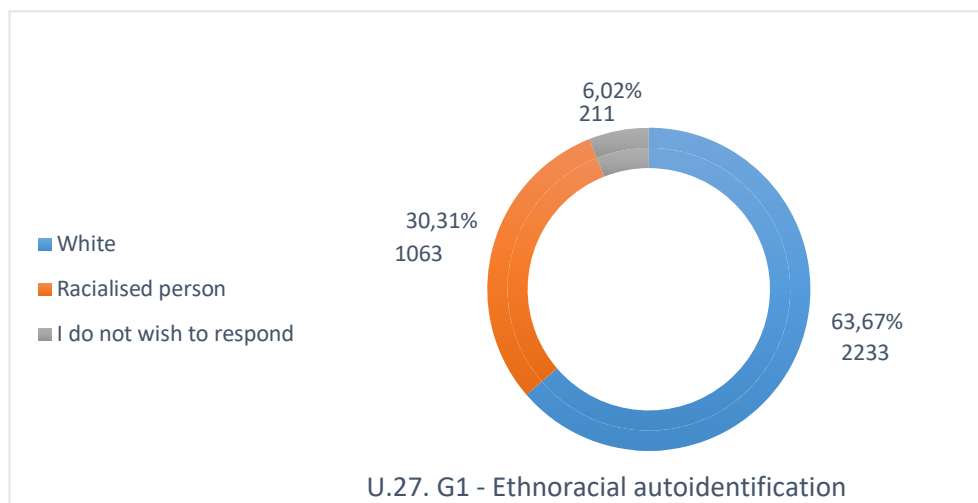
⁵ Here are a few examples of racist remarks and racial microaggressions cited in the article: “You speak French really well for someone from the Caribbean” and “When you’re Black and you express yourself better than other people, you come across as a ‘Bounty’: Black on the outside, white on the inside.”

self-confidence” came in fourth position at 9%, followed by *“isolation in the workspace/office,”* which was cited by 7.96%. *“Fear or anxiety about coming to the institution”* accounted for 6.57% of the responses. *“Desire to change institutions or fields of study”* garnered 5.52% of responses, followed by *“Desire to stop working or studying at the university”* with 5.05%. In the last place, *“burnout and/or depression”* accounted for 4.39% of the responses. This overview of responses underscores the fact that the effects of discriminations are not limited to inappropriate words or behavior. Racism has **concrete effects on the victims’ mental health and their professional commitment. Furthermore, feelings of helplessness and anger (38.76%) predominate among victims or witnesses.** These individuals feel all the more helpless because, unlike the legal framework in English-speaking countries, the French law places the burden of proof on the victims. Given the subtle forms and the insidious nature of racism, proving that one is a victim of racism is often mission impossible.

2.1.5 Ethnoracial origins and migration background

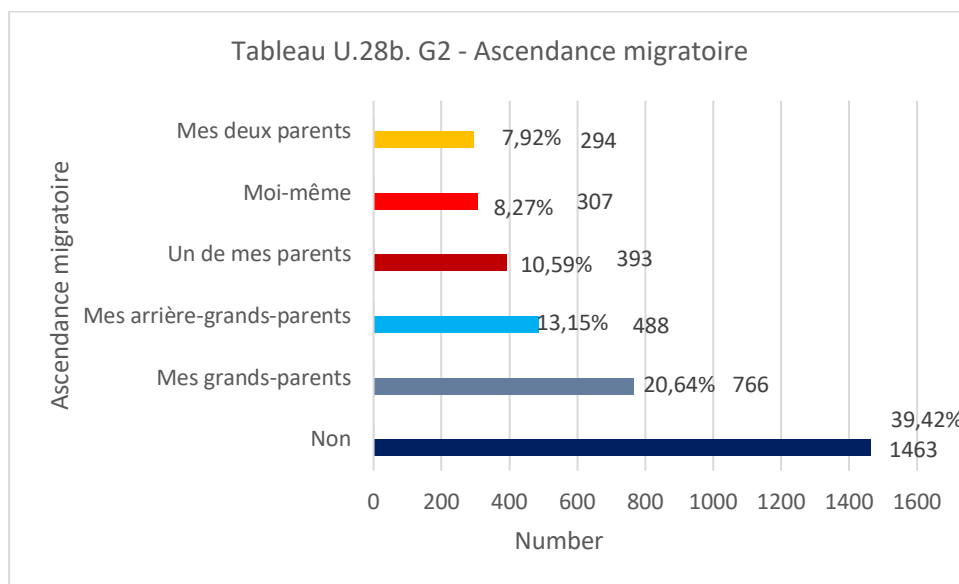
After completing the three conditional sections of the questionnaire regarding their experiences of racism and other forms of discrimination, respondents are directed to the final two questions concerning ethnic and racial origins and migration history. The purpose of the first question (ethnoracial self-identification) is threefold: (i) to see how respondents define themselves in relation to their origins or skin color; (ii) to highlight the fragility of any rigid ethnoracial classification; (iii) to better interpret the responses obtained in the preceding sections, particularly regarding variables C1 (awareness of levels of racism), victim status (D1), or witnessing racism (E1-F1), depending on the respondent’s self-identification.


◆ **Table U.27. G1 – Ethnoracial self-identification**



The responses to this question were grouped together to provide a clearer overview. The category *“racialised person”* is grouped the following response options: *Arab / North African / Berber; Asian; Latino / Hispanic; Mixed-race; Black; Romani / Gypsy.* The majority of respondents, 63.67% (n=2233) of the 3 360 respondents, self-identified as *“white”*; 30.31% (n=1063) self-identified as *“racialised”* while 6.02% (n=211) did not wish to answer.

◆ Table U.28. G2 - Migration History



 The final question sought to determine the respondents' immigrant ancestry. Since this was a multiple-choice question, participants were able to select more than one option. Of the 3,711 respondents, 39.42% reported having no immigrant ancestry. For 20.64% of respondents, it was their grandparents who immigrated to France. For 13.15% of respondents, it was their great-grandparents. For 10.59% of respondents, it was one of their parents, and 8.27% of respondents stated that they themselves had arrived in France as immigrants. Finally, for 7.92%, both of their parents immigrated to France. Thus, a majority of respondents (91.73%) have been French for several generations.

2.2 Bivariate analyses: correlations, dependency tests between two variables

We conducted statistical tests to determine whether there is a relationship between different variables in the questionnaire. Given the primarily categorical nature of the analysed data (single-choice or multiple-choice questions), **Pearson's chi-square test** proved to be the most appropriate. This test determines whether a statistically significant association exists between two variables by comparing the distribution of observed responses to the expected distribution under the assumption of independence. It is the gold standard for contingency analyses.

The bivariate section includes twenty-three cross-tabulations, each testing a hypothesis designed to explore the interactions between different variables in the questionnaire. Only nineteen proved relevant for understanding the influence of certain variables on others in experiences of racism in higher education. Fifteen of the tests proved statistically significant, with a *p-value* below the significance threshold of 0.05. Even when the dependency tests were negative, the cross tabulation of the variables still provided interesting insights.

Furthermore, for the Chi-square tests, the R software we used automatically performed 10 000 Monte Carlo replications to ensure the robustness of the test. The Monte Carlo method is a random simulation technique. In the case of the Chi-square test, it involves repeating the test thousands of times by generating data as if the null hypothesis were true. The actual results are then compared to those obtained through simulation, which allows for a more precise estimate of the probability of obtaining this result by chance, especially in cases with small sample sizes. In other cases, we used Yates's continuity correction, which is a corrected version of the chi-square test for 2x2 tables with small sample sizes. The null hypothesis remains the same (no association between the variables), but the correction makes the test more conservative by preventing an overestimation of statistical significance.

2.2.1 Bivariate analysis of demographic characteristics

◆ **Table B.29. A1 - Gender x A2 - Age Group**

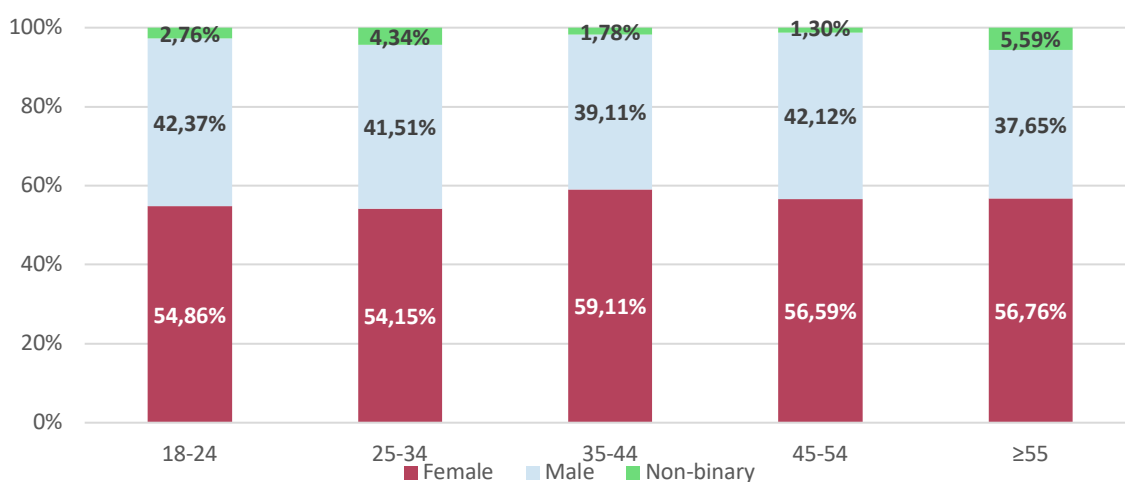


Figure B.29. A1 - Gender x A2 - Age Group



The cross-tabulation of gender and age group aimed to identify the profile of respondents based on these two characteristics. As such, it was not subjected to statistical tests, as its primary purpose is to describe the sociodemographic profile of the respondents. The results confirmed the findings already obtained in the univariate analysis of these two variables: women were

in the majority across all age groups and in all seven institutions. This observation, which spans generations, suggests that women are more likely to engage with issues related to equality and non-discrimination.

◆ **Table B.30. A3 – Status x A4: Years in Higher Education and Research**

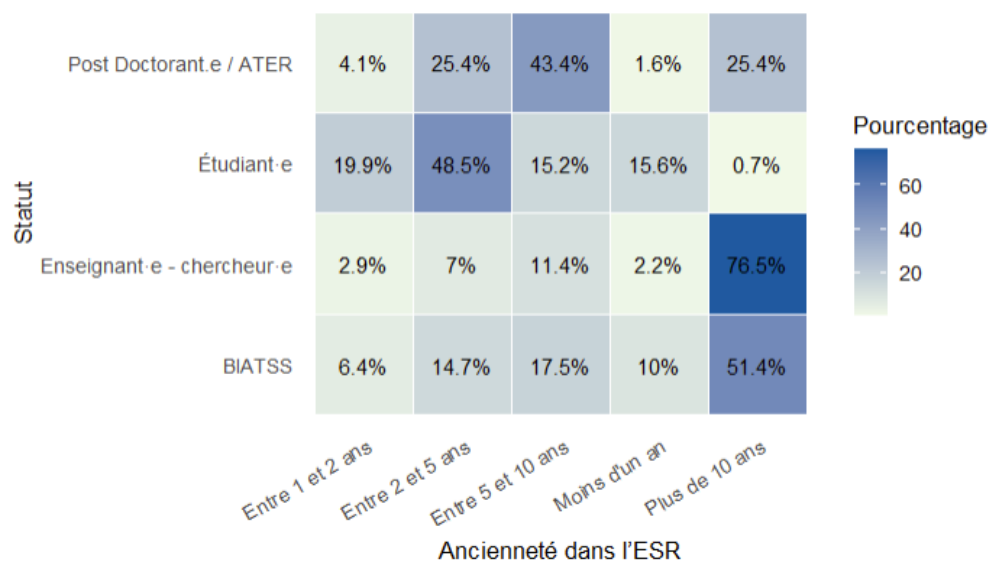



Figure B.30. A3 – Status x A4: Years in higher education and research

 This cross-tabulation sought to determine the distribution of each status according to years of experience in order to best describe the study sample. A Pearson’s chi-square test was carried out and proved significant with a *p-value* of less than 0.05 (*p-value* = $2.2e-16$). This analysis revealed expected trends consistent with the career trajectories specific to each status. Indeed, among lecturers and researchers, 76.5% report more than 10 years’ seniority, which is consistent with the lengthy period required to achieve tenure and establish a long-term academic career. 51.4% of BIATSS staff also have more than 10 years’ seniority, whilst staff with less seniority are the least represented, with 10% having been in post for less than a year and 6.4% having been in the higher education and research sector for between 1 and 2 years. This under-representation could be explained by a reluctance to respond to surveys concerning the working environment when one is newly recruited or in the process of settling in. The test proved significant in each of the six institutions where it could be carried out (it was not carried out at Sciences Po Lille due to a lack of participation from all the categories of personnel within that institution). These results confirm the consistency of the link between permanent status and length of service.

2.2.2 Bivariate analysis – Comfort in discussing racism in higher education and research

◆ **Table B.31. B1 – Ease in discussing racism × A5 Field of study**

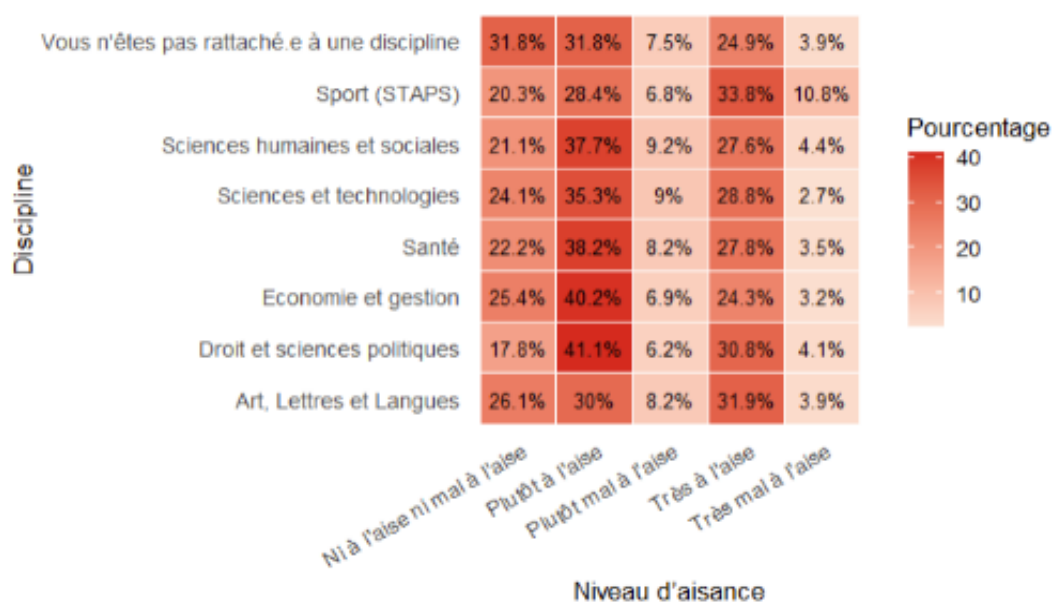


Figure B.31. B1- Ease in discussing racism x A5 Subject area

The cross-tabulation of 'B1 – Ease in discussing racism' with 'A5 – Academic discipline' aimed to determine whether a particular academic discipline predisposed respondents to be more or less comfortable discussing racism. Pearson's chi-square test proved significant (p -value = 0.0008045), meaning that the hypothesis of independence between the two variables can be rejected: the discipline therefore appears to play a role in how comfortable respondents were in discussing the issue of racism. An examination of Figure B.31 above reveals several trends. Among those who consider themselves 'somewhat comfortable' or 'very comfortable', respondents in law and political science topped the chart with a total of 71.9%, followed by respondents from the humanities and social sciences with 65.3%. In third place are people in the health sciences with 66%, whilst respondents from the Arts, humanities and languages came in fourth place with 61.9%. Science and technology, although the largest group in terms of numbers, showed a higher proportion of neutral responses, 'neither comfortable nor uncomfortable' at 24.1%. Responses from people in sports science were mixed: 10.8% felt "very uncomfortable" while 33.8% were "very comfortable". Those not affiliated with a specific discipline (administrative staff) expressed greater neutrality at 31.8%.

It is important to note that this analysis was carried out on the combined responses from all seven institutions and that it is statistically significant for the merged group as a whole and for two institutions considered individually: Claude Bernard University, Lyon 1 (UCBL) and Aix-Marseille University (AMU). This limited significance can be explained by variations in the number of staff across disciplines at the seven institutions — with certain disciplines being more prevalent at some sites but absent or under-represented at others. Consequently, the results of this test at the overall level should be interpreted with some caution.

◆ **Table B.32. B1 – Ease in discussing racism × A3: Status**

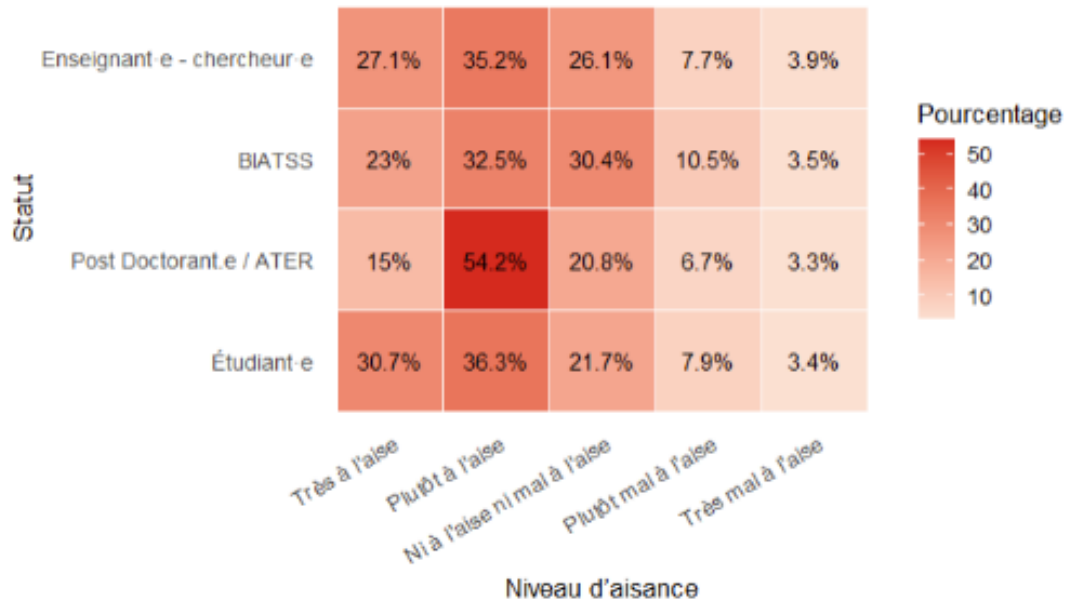


Figure B.32. B1- Ease in discussing racism × A3 Status



The cross-tabulation of 'B1 – Comfort in discussing racism' and 'A3 – Status' sought to determine whether respondents' status influenced the ease they felt in discussing racism or not. Pearson's chi-square test was significant ($p\text{-value} = 1.344e-08$). We can note that postdoctoral researchers/ATERs were the most likely to state "somewhat comfortable" at 54.2% (65 out of 120), but they were also the least likely to say they were "very comfortable" at just 15% (18 people). The percentages of those who felt "very uncomfortable" was fairly similar across all categories.

This cross-tabulation is significant in only two cases: UCBL (n=2146 respondents) and for the combined sample of the seven institutions (n=4707 respondents). In the other institutions, all of which had fewer than 900 respondents, the test was not significant. This suggests that the significance of the test depends on the ability of the sample of respondents to represent the full range of the profiles studied, which enhances the statistical power of the test.

2.3 Bivariate analysis – Awareness of racism in higher education and research

◆ **Table B.33. B2 – Knowing who to turn to in cases of racism x A3 Status**

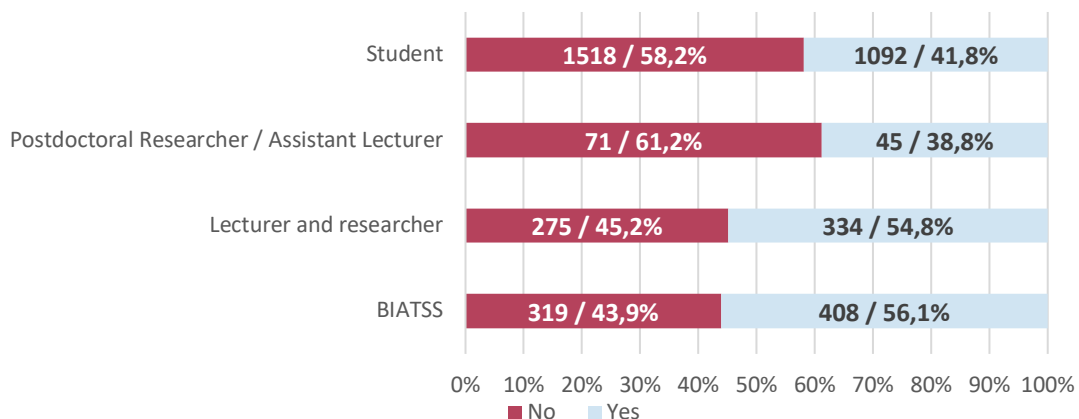


Figure B.33. B2 - Knowing who to turn to in cases of racism x A3 Status



Cross-tabulation of respondents' status and their awareness of reporting channels in cases of racism yielded a statistically significant result ($p\text{-value} = 5.177e-15$), indicating that awareness of support or redress mechanisms varies significantly according to status. Administrative staff (BIATSS) appeared to be the best-informed category: 56.1% of them stated that they knew who to turn to, compared with 43.9% who did not know ($n = 727$). Lecturers and researchers showed a fairly similar distribution, with 54.8% of positive responses and 45.2% of negative responses. In contrast, postdoctoral researchers and ATERs stood out as having the lowest proportion of people who knew who to contact (38.8%, $n = 116$). Similarly, the majority of students (58.2%) who represent the largest group of respondents ($n = 2610$) were unaware of their institution's reporting procedures for racism. These results highlight an uneven dissemination of information across different categories of staff, with permanent staff being better informed than those in precarious positions or students. Furthermore, this correlation proved significant not only for the combined data from the seven institutions, but also for three institutions considered individually: the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) de Lyon, the University of Haute-Alsace (UHA) and Claude Bernard University Lyon 1 (UCBL1), which confirms the validity of linking one's status to knowledge of the people to contact in the event of racism.



These findings highlight a crucial issue regarding communication and accessibility in anti-racism initiatives, particularly for those who are most vulnerable or least integrated into university structures.

◆ **Tableau B.34. B3- Complaint filed for racism x A3 Status**

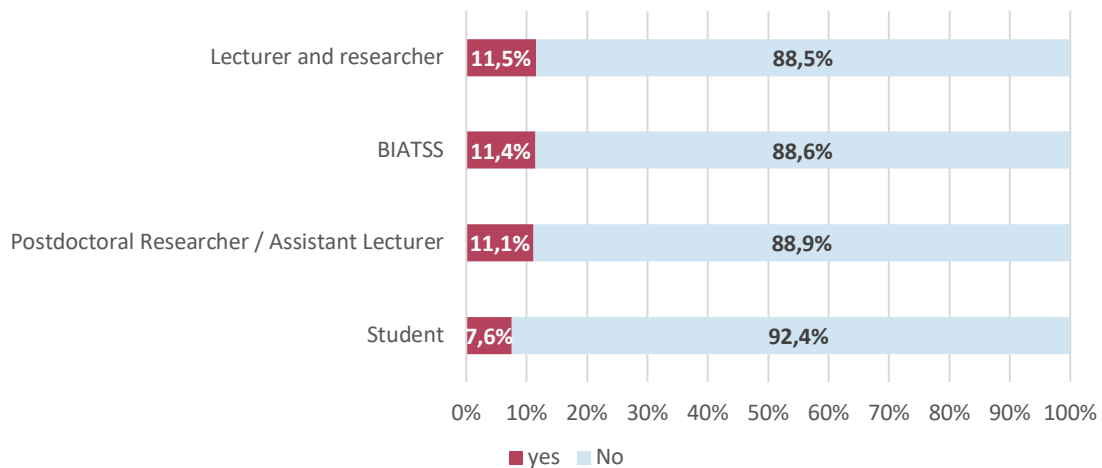


Tableau B.34. B3- Complaint filed for racism x A3 Status



The cross-tabulation of 'B3 – Reports made regarding racism' and 'A3 – Status' shows a statistically significant result ($p\text{-value} = 0.0432$). Overall, the vast majority of respondents did not file a complaint, across all categories. Students, who make up the largest group ($n = 1083$), were the least likely to report incidents, with only 7.6% doing so, compared to 92.4% who did not report. Staff, on the other hand, showed slightly higher and relatively consistent reporting rates: 11.5% for lecturers and researchers ($n = 330$); 11.4% for BIATSS staff ($n = 403$) and 11.1% for postdoctoral researchers / Adjuncts (ATER) ($n = 45$). These differences remain modest but are sufficient to produce a significant overall effect, likely due to differences in institutional context and perceptions of reporting. The fact that the test is significant on the combined data from the seven institutions and only for the ENS de Lyon can be explained by the low overall frequency of reports. In institutions where the number of respondents who reported an incident is lower or unevenly distributed across staff categories, the test lacks the sensitivity required to detect these differences. The significant result

obtained at the overall level is therefore primarily due to the pooling of data, which enhances the robustness of the calculation and better highlights these subtle differences.

◆ **Tableau B.35. B9- Participation in anti-racism awareness activities x A3 Status**

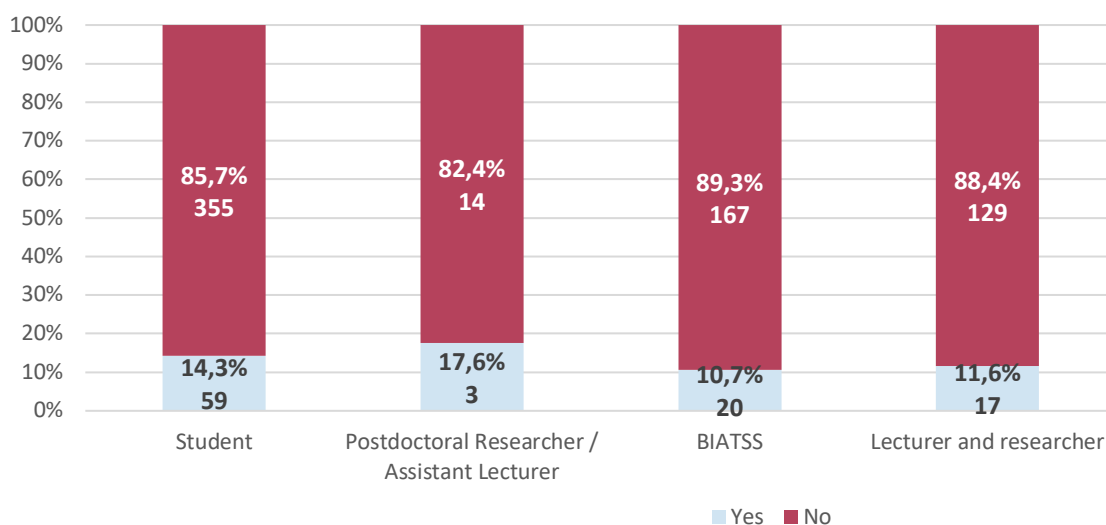



Figure B.35. B9 - Participation in anti-racism awareness activities x A3 Status

 This cross-tabulation of ‘B9 – Participation in anti-racism awareness-raising activities’ and ‘A3 – Status’ aims to determine the propensity of a particular category of staff to participate in the anti-racism awareness-raising activities offered by the institution. The Chi-square test is not statistically significant ($p\text{-value} = 0.5741$), indicating that no correlation can be identified. However, the graph highlighted an important point: participation rates by status were generally low and similar across the board. Postdoctoral researchers/Adjuncts (ATERs) had the highest participation rate at 17.6%, followed by students at 14.3%, 11.6% for lecturers and researchers, and 10.7% for BIATSS staff. This result is consistent across the combined data set as well as in each institution considered separately. It suggests that participation in awareness-raising initiatives does not depend on the respondents’ status. This finding can be explained by factors common to all categories of respondents: the low visibility or limited accessibility of these initiatives, a lack of interest, or constraints on availability.

◆ **Table B36. C1 – Awareness of types of racism x A5 – Discipline of affiliation**

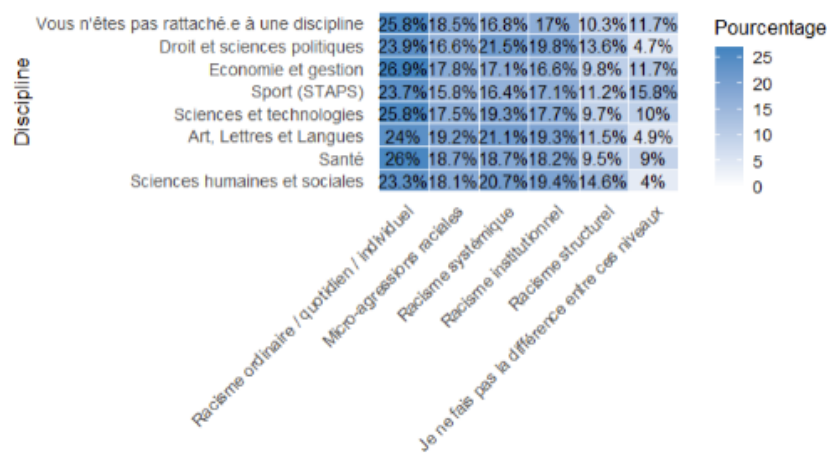


Figure B.36.C1 – Awareness of types of racism x A5 Field of study



The cross-tabulation of ‘C1 – Knowledge of types of racism’ and ‘A5 – Discipline of affiliation’ aimed to determine whether there was a correlation between belonging to a particular discipline and knowledge of the terms used to describe the different levels of racism. Pearson’s chi-square test yielded a significant $p\text{-value} = < 2.2e-16$, suggesting that knowledge of the different types of racism varied according to the discipline to which respondents belonged. Certain patterns can nevertheless be observed: regardless of the discipline, everyday/individual racism remained the best-known type, with proportions ranging from 23.3% in the humanities and social sciences (329 people) to 26.9% in economics and management (110 people). Certain disciplines stood out for having a high proportion of respondents who stated that they ‘cannot tell the difference’ between the types and levels of racism. This is particularly the case in Sports Science, where this response was given by 15.8% of respondents (n=24 people), and by 11.7% (n=122 people) not affiliated with a discipline, and 11.7% (48 people) in Economics and Management. This proportion is lower in Arts, humanities and languages (4.9%, n=30 people), in law and political science (4.7%, n=12 people) and in humanities and social sciences (4%, n=56 people). Furthermore, structural racism remained the least recognised form, across all sites and disciplines. This finding was observed in all institutions, but the test proved significant only when the data from the institutions were combined and for AMU.



These observations reflected a lack of specific information or training on these concepts.

◆ Table B.37. C1 – Awareness of types of racism x A3 Status

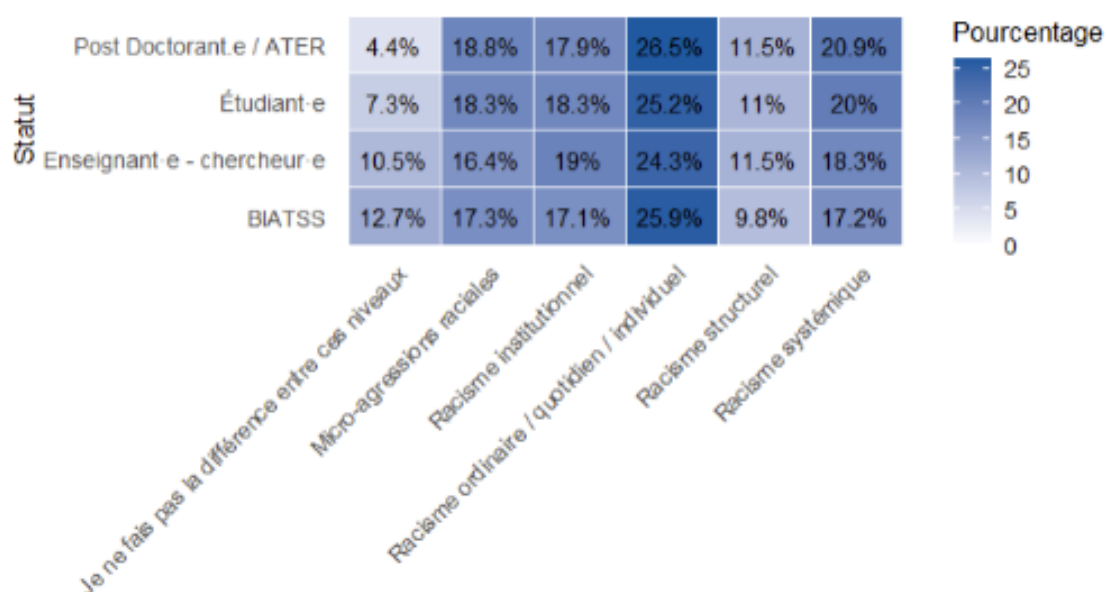


Figure B.37. C1 – Awareness of types of racism x A3 Status



The cross-tabulation of ‘C1 – Awareness of types of racism’ and ‘A3 – Status’ revealed a statistically significant relationship ($p\text{-value} = 9.999e-05$). The data showed a trend already observed in the previous cross-tabulation: everyday/individual racism is the most frequently cited form, across all status groups. Conversely, structural racism remained the least understood. A notable difference is observed between profiles among those who do not distinguish between these levels. Administrative (BIATSS) staff appeared to be the category least likely to distinguish between the different levels of racism, at 12.7% (n=217), closely followed by lecturers and researchers at 10.5% (n=165). Students came in third place with 7.3% (n=505), whilst postdoctoral researchers/ATERs came in fourth place with 4.4% (n=15). This cross-tabulation proved significant for the combined data from the seven institutions, whereas it was significant only for the ENS de Lyon.



These findings **highlight the importance of raising awareness among all staff at the institution regarding these different forms and types of racism.**

◆ **Tableau B.38. C2- Ability to identify discrimination x A3 Status**

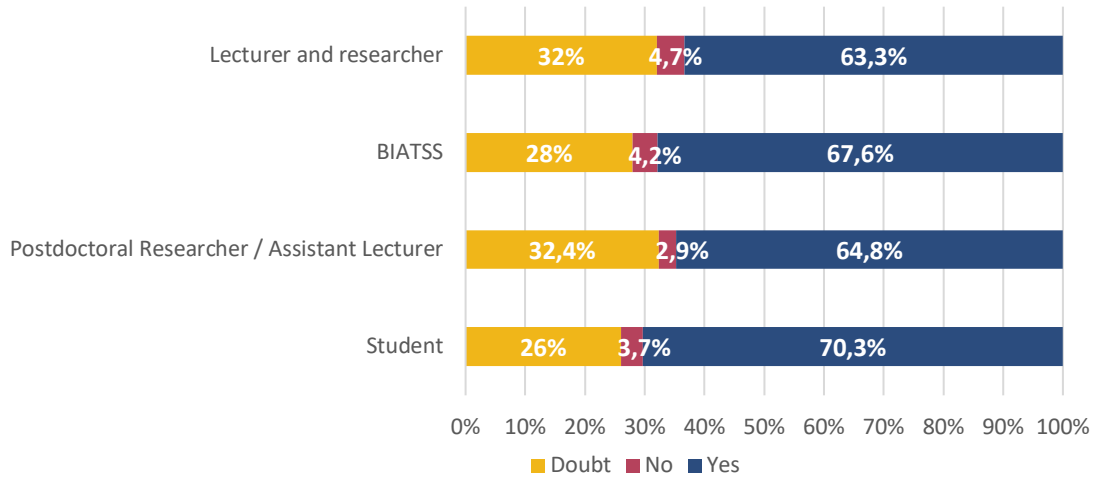


Tableau B.38. C2 - Ability to identify discrimination x A3 Status



By cross-tabulating 'C2 – Ability to identify discrimination' and 'A3 – Status', we sought to determine whether there is a link between the respondent's status and their ability to identify the specific grounds for a situation perceived as discriminatory. The Chi-square test ($p\text{-value} = 0.06719$) did not reveal a statistically significant association between the two variables. This test showed a significant result exclusively for the ENS de Lyon.

◆ **Tableau B.39. C2- Ability to identify discrimination x A5 Department of affiliation**

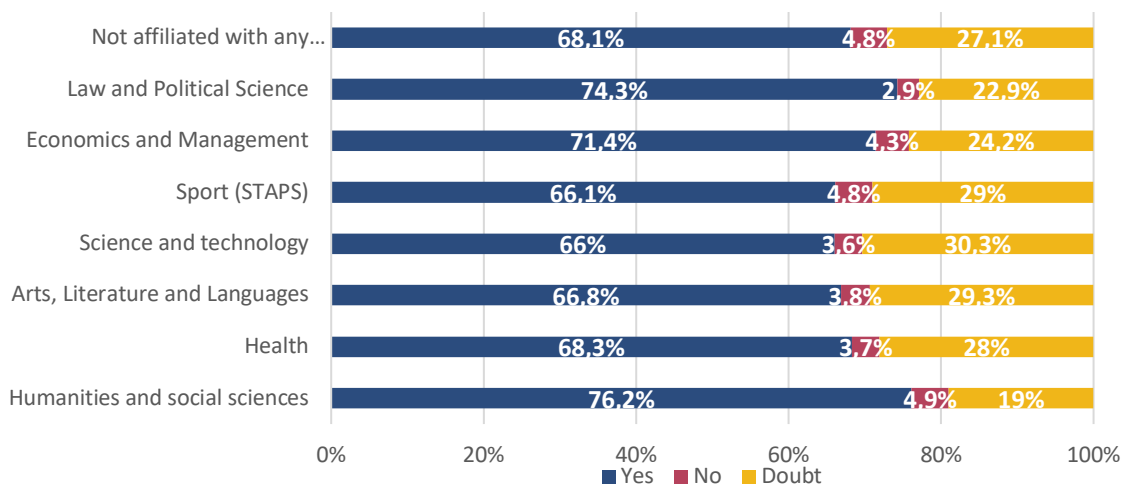


Figure B.39. C2 - Ability to identify discrimination x A5 Department of affiliation



This cross-tabulation of 'C2 – Ability to identify discrimination' and 'A5 – Disciplinary affiliation' aims to determine whether there is a correlation between disciplinary affiliation and the ability to distinguish racism from other factors of discrimination. Pearson's chi-square test

showed a statistically significant result ($p\text{-value} = 0.017$). Although the test was significant, the percentages observed across disciplines regarding the ability to identify discrimination remained broadly in the same order of magnitude, making it difficult to identify a clear trend. This test proved to be significant only in the merger of institutions.

2.2.4 Bivariate analysis – Experiences of racism in higher education and research

◆ Tableau B.40. A1 - Gender X C3 - Having been a victim and/or witness of racism

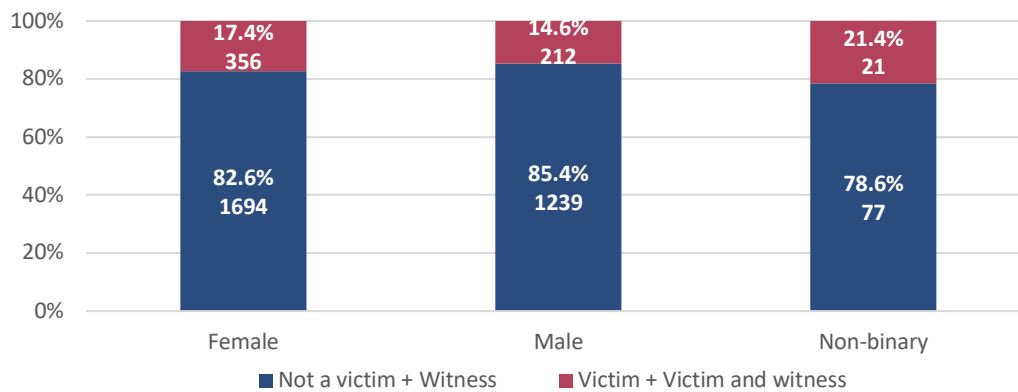




Figure B.40. A1 Gender X C3 Having been a victim and/or witness of racism

 The cross-tabulation of the variables ‘C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism’ and ‘A1 – Gender’ aimed to determine whether there was a link between gender and a higher likelihood of being exposed to racism. Across all institutions, Pearson’s chi-square test was significant ($p\text{-value} = 0.0369$). As can be seen in Figure B.40 above, the percentage of victims is higher among women (17.4%) and non-binary individuals (21.4%) than among men (14.6%). The hypothesis of a relationship between the variables was tested only at the ENS in Lyon, as the differences were minimal at each site. This suggested that considering a larger sample highlights the intersectionality of discrimination, which remains invisible when observing a single institution, i.e. on a small scale.

 These findings can be understood in the light of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), which highlights that forms of discrimination do not simply add up mechanically, but intersect and reinforce one another depending on social positions (gender, race, class, etc.). A person may therefore experience gendered racism, where their gender reinforces the way in which they are exposed to, perceived by, or made vulnerable to racism. Thus, women of colour may be subject to specific stereotypes or microaggressions at the intersection of sexism and racism. Similarly, non-binary people of colour, who are often rendered invisible in academic settings, may experience more subtle forms of marginalisation, combining racial prejudice, transphobia or gender non-conformity. Conversely, for men of colour, this does not mean they experience less racism, but that they may report it differently or less frequently in a questionnaire.

◆ **Tableau B.41. A4 - Years in higher education and research X C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism**

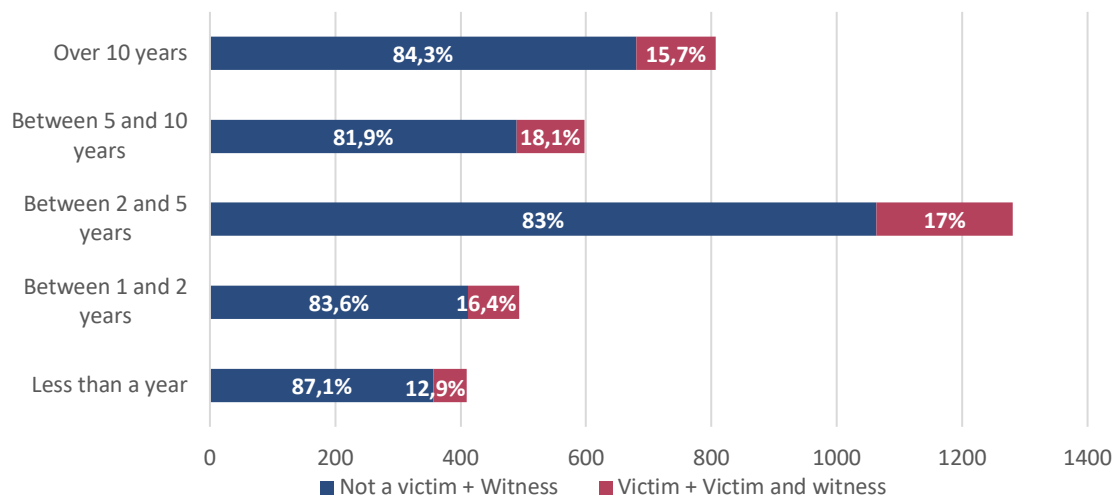


Figure B.41. A4 - Years in higher education and research X C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism

🔍 This cross-tabulation of ‘C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism’ and ‘A4 – Years in higher education’ sought to determine whether the number of years spent in higher education increased the likelihood of being exposed to racism either as a victim or a witness. Pearson’s chi-square test showed non-significant results with a *p-value* of 0.242, indicating that the likelihood of being a victim or witness of racism was not dependent on length of time spent in HERIs. However, this test proved significant in two institutions, namely UHA and AMU, which may be an artefact of the sample of respondents.

◆ **Table B.42. C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism x D4-E5-F5 Places where discrimination occurred**

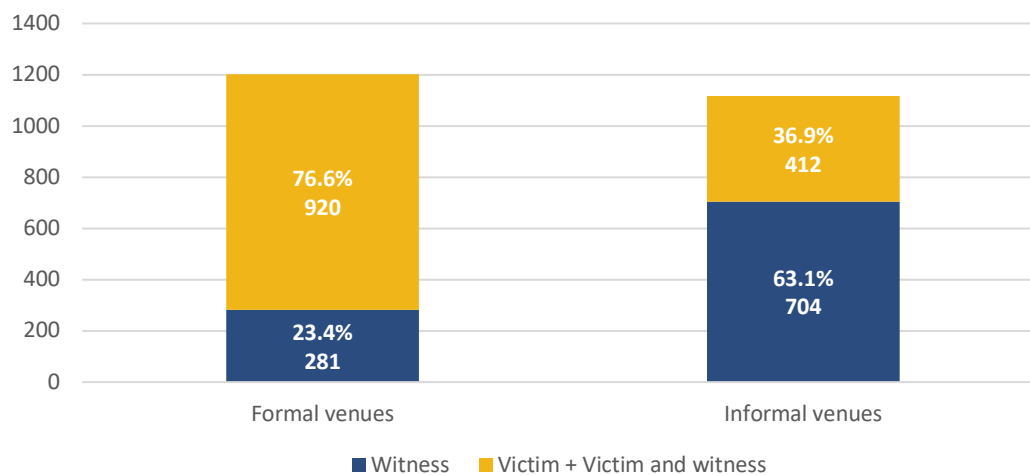



Figure B.42. C3 - Having been a victim and/or witness of racism x D4-E5-F5 Places where discrimination occurred

🔍 This cross-tabulation of ‘C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism’ and ‘D4-E5-F5 – Places where discrimination occurs’ sought to determine whether discriminatory remarks and behaviour were more likely to occur in formal settings or in settings described as informal (see

Figure U.23). Pearson’s chi-square test proved highly significant ($p = < 2.2e-16$). This test was conducted using Yates’ continuity correction. This result indicated that there was a higher probability (76.6%) of being a victim or a victim and a witness of discriminatory behaviour in closed, private or secluded places, out of the public view, than in open spaces where there is a greater risk of independent witnesses being present. **This interaction proved to be significant across the seven university sites participating in the ARCHERIF project and across the entire dataset**; this result is also consistent with those observed in previous surveys, notably Acadiscri. (Weiss & Blassel, 2023).

 **These findings which were already observed in the univariate analysis (section 2.1) are rather worrying, as they show that discriminatory behaviour tends to occur more frequently in formal settings (meetings, juries, selection panels, committees, etc.), which are governed by institutional norms that are supposed to guarantee equal opportunities but are also characterised by power dynamics.**

◆ **Table B.43. D1-E2-F1 – Perpetrator of racism x A3-E1-F2 Status as victim or witness of racism**

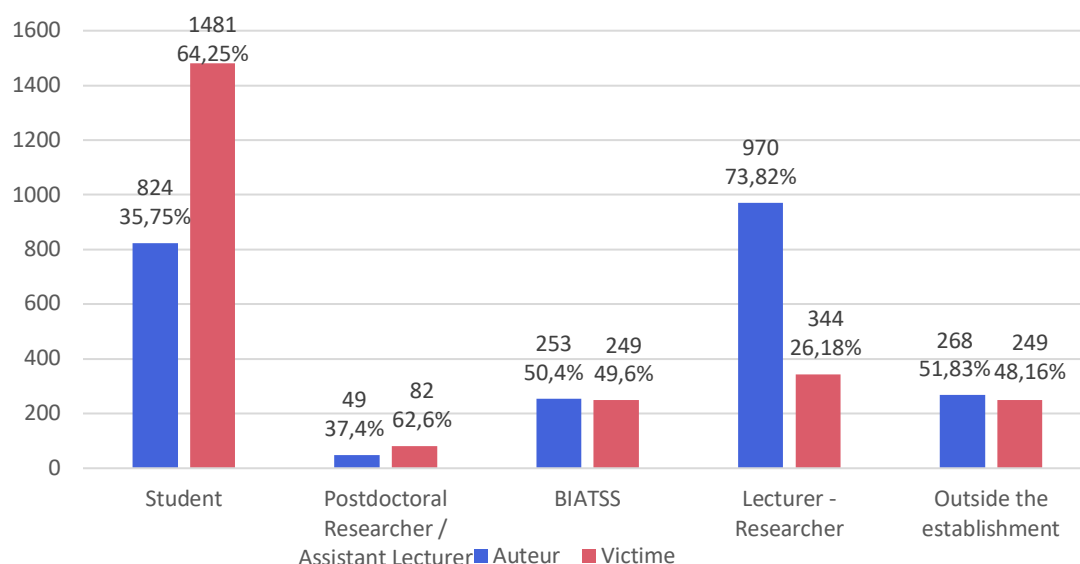




Tableau B.43. D1-E2-F1 Perpetrator of racism x A3-E1-F2 Status as victim or witness of racism

 The cross-tabulation of these two variables aimed to determine the proportion of people within the same group who were victims or perpetrators of racist acts. The Pearson chi-square test applied to the cross-tabulation between the perpetrator of racism and the status of victims/witnesses was highly significant ($p\text{-value} < 9.999e-05$), meaning that the distribution of perpetrators and victims by status was not due to chance. Indeed, faculty members were overwhelmingly identified as perpetrators in 970 (73,82%) reported cases, compared to 344 cases (26,18%) where they were identified as victims. Conversely, students were overrepresented among victims (64,25% or 1481 cases) while they are identified as perpetrators of racism in 824 (35,75%) of the cases. For other categories, the proportions were more balanced, with no clear trend. These results corroborate the univariate analyses presented in U.19, where there was an overrepresentation of faculty members as perpetrators of racism. These results also confirm the fact that hierarchical relationships play a decisive role in reported experiences of racism: faculty members wield a certain amount of power that can encourage racist behavior or remarks toward those of lower rank, particularly students. **This test also proved significant for four institutions: ENS de Lyon, UHA, UCBL, and AMU.** One might assume that the high proportion of students in the total population partly

explains this imbalance: their statistical weight in the sample would automatically accentuate the tendency to find them more often among the victims than among the perpetrators. However, **at one institution (AMU) with significant results, students accounted for only 18.75% of the sample, and faculty members were also frequently identified as perpetrators.**

 Students are overrepresented among victims of racism, while faculty members are more often identified as perpetrators than as victims. This finding, regardless of the sample's size and composition, reinforces the validity of the observation.

◆ **Table B.44. Cross-tabulation of D5-E6-F6 – Reactions to racism × A3 Status**

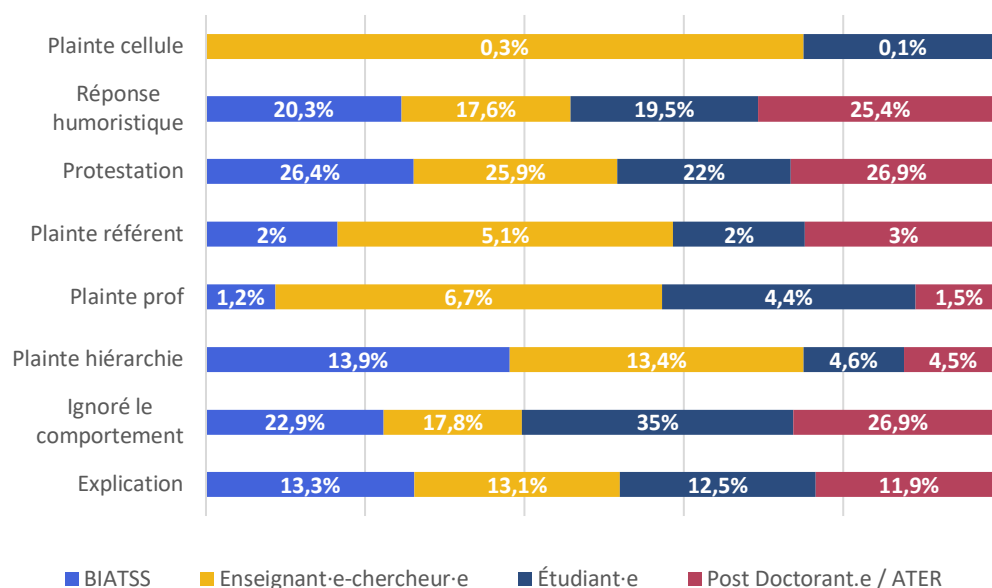



Figure B.44. D5-E6-F6 - Reactions to racism × A3 Status

 The Pearson's chi-square test applied to the cross-tabulation of 'D5-E6-F6 – Reactions to racism' and 'A3 – Status' is significant ($p = 2.818e-13$). This means that reaction patterns differed significantly depending on the individual's status at university. The response "Ignore the behaviour" was cited by 35% ($n=376$) students, which is the highest percentage. By contrast, this figure dropped to 22.9% for the administrative (BIATSS) staff, to 13.4% for lecturers and researchers, and to 26.9% for postdoctoral researchers/ATERs. There were also differences linked to the status of HERI staff. Indeed, 13.9% of BIATSS staff lodged a complaint with management against 10.5% for Faculty and researchers, and only 4.6% for students and 4.5% for postdoctoral researchers/Adjuncts (ATERs). Complaints to the academic staff are made more frequently by Faculty and researchers (6.7%) than by students (4.4%). Furthermore, very few people made use of the support service (only one student and one lecturer-researcher). This low uptake of the support service can be explained by the fact that the suggested responses also included complaints lodged with the anti-discrimination officer. We had proposed these two options, which are similar but could reveal different realities for each respondent depending on their institution. Thus, if we combine the complaints made to the support unit with those lodged with a liaison officer, we arrive at a total of 39 responses (representing just 2.17% of responses to this question across all categories). These results thus underscore the fact that those in more established hierarchical positions, such as Faculty and administrative staff are more likely to favour institutional channels than students or postdoctoral researchers/adjunct teachers (ATERs), who tend to adopt avoidance (ignoring) or defusing (humour) strategies. One's position within the institution therefore determines not only one's exposure to racism and discrimination, but also the modes of response deemed accessible. This correlation was also significant for two institutions—UCBL and AMU—among the seven participants in the survey.

2.2.5 Bivariate analysis – Ethnoracial self-identification, migration ancestry and experiences of racism

◆ **Table B.45. C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism x G1 – Ethnoracial self-identification**

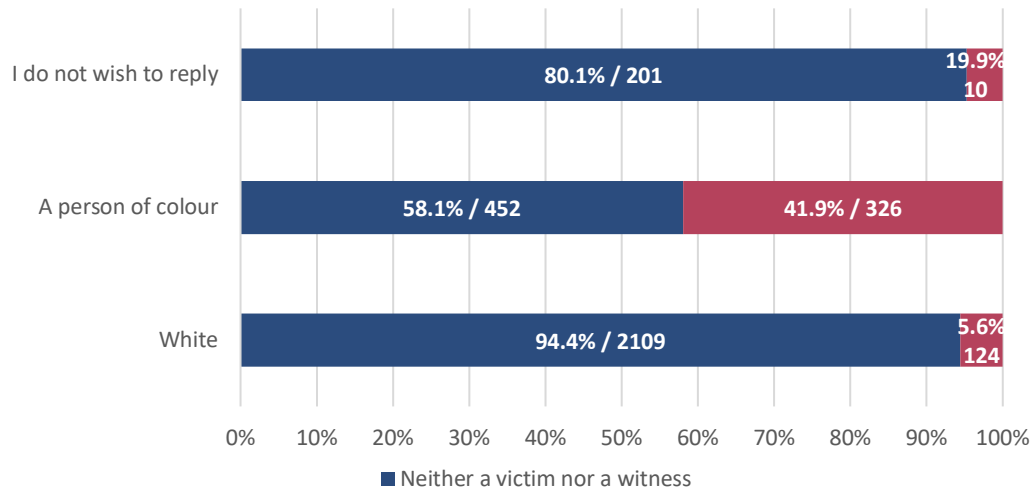


Figure B.45. C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism x G1 – Self-identified ethnic or racial background



This cross-tabulation of the response categories for the variables ‘G1 – Self-identified as white or racialised’ and ‘C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism or not’ tests the relationship between the response categories of these two variables. Pearson’s chi-square test is significant as the *p-value* is less than 0.05 ($p\text{-value} = < 2.2e-16$). This significant result was found in six institutions: Sciences Po Lille, ENS de Lyon, UHA, ISARA, UCBL and AMU; it was non-significant only for UNC.



It is clear that **41.9% of people from racialised backgrounds have been direct ‘victims’ or ‘victims and witnesses’ of racism**, confirming that racism is the primary cause of discrimination affecting these individuals. **There is therefore almost a one-in-two chance that a person of colour will face racism at some point during their time in higher education.** This finding is consistent with those of previous studies (Druez, 2016), (Weiss & Blassel, 2023). Only 5.6% of people who self-identified as white reported being ‘victims’ or ‘victims and witnesses’ of racism. 19.9% of those who did not answer the question on self-identified ethnic background however reported being ‘victims’ or ‘victims and witnesses’ of racism.

◆ **Table B.46. D6-E7-F7 – Frequency of racist behaviour x G1 - Ethnoracial self-identification**

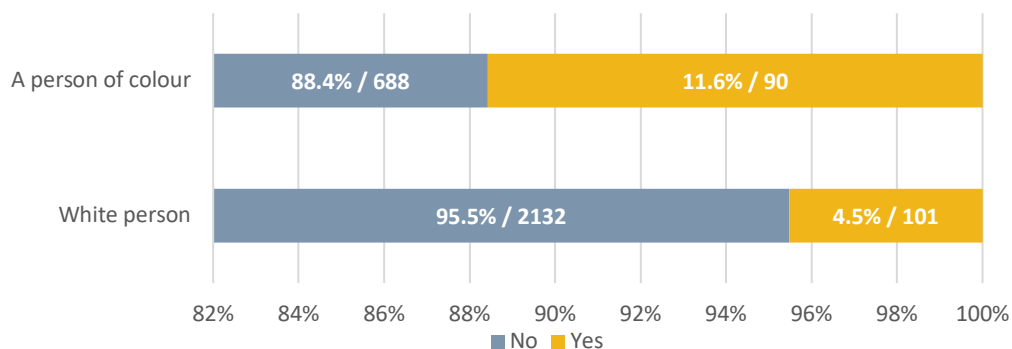


Figure B.46. D6-E7-F7 – Frequency of racist behaviour: “It is implicit and constant” x G1 – Self-identified ethnic or racial group



This cross-tabulation tested the relationship between the response category *'It is constant and implicit'* of the question *'How often would you say you experience racist behaviour?'* of the variables D6-E7-F7, and the ethnoracial self-identification variable (G1). This enabled us to test the hypothesis that racialised people were more likely to face racism more frequently than non-racialised people. The Pearson's chi-square test was statistically significant ($p\text{-value} = 7.014e-12$) in all seven institutions and also in four institutions (ENS de Lyon, ISARA, UCBL and AMU). At 11.6%, people of colour were twice likely to be exposed to forms of 'constant and implicit' racism compared to white people (4.7%). This finding is again consistent with the results of previous studies. The 2024 OECD report entitled *"The State and effects of discrimination in the European Union"* showed that:

"More than one in two people who identify as belonging to a minority group in the EU experienced discrimination in the 12 months leading up to April 2023, which is three times more than people who do not consider themselves to be disabled, an LGBTIQ+ person or a member of a minority group on the grounds of their ethnicity (including Roma), skin colour or religion (European Commission, 2023). LGBTIQ+ people report the highest rates of discrimination (67% on average) in the EU, closely followed by people belonging to an ethnic minority or a minority group based on skin colour (59%). (Hardy & Schraepen, 2024).

This OECD report also cited a 2022 survey carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA):

"The FRA (2023[6]) found that 34% of people of African descent surveyed in 13 European countries in 2022 had experienced racial discrimination in the previous 12 months, compared with 24% in 2016" (Hardy & Schraepen, 2024).

In France, several studies and tests have documented the systemic inequalities in public services, in employment, in access to housing, in healthcare and education, as well as slower or even non-existent career progression that racialised people are subjected to compared to their white colleagues. They also receive harsher legal sentences. The book *Everyday Racism at Work* by (Custos-Lucidi, 2024) highlighted the trauma suffered by victims of racism. (Bergamaschi *et al.*, 2026) made a similar observation:

"The literature has shown that ethno-racial discrimination is part of the life experience and therefore part of the daily reality of a large number of people described as 'visible minorities'".

Indeed, French people of North African or sub-Saharan African descent all experience racism in almost every aspect of their social and professional lives. While racism affects new immigrants from Africa or Asia just as much, this population often finds itself in a precarious situation regarding their residence permits and access to public services, thus limiting their ability to challenge and defend themselves. The socio-economic and educational background of newly arrived immigrants also plays a role in their ability to identify and articulate the experiences of racism they face:

*"The feeling of repeatedly experiencing discriminatory or racist acts to the point of it becoming a 'total experience' (Dubet *et al.*, 2013) is significantly more likely among the children of immigrants than among immigrants themselves. (...) The extent to which discrimination is spoken about depends on the generation to which one belongs and the context of socialisation. 'Visible' minorities born in France therefore tend to stand out due to a greater awareness of discrimination (...) parents, who are themselves immigrants, prefer 'not to rock the boat'." (Bergamaschi *et al.*, 2026).*

The recent national survey conducted by the French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP) on behalf of the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA), based on a sample of 14 025 people, reached a similarly consistent conclusion: **‘46% of French people have been victims of racist attacks or discrimination at some point in their lives, which is nearly one in two citizens’**, and racism **‘is a widespread reality that disproportionately affects ethnic and religious minorities and has lasting consequences on their life trajectories and mental health’⁶**.

This racism affects **“80% of those perceived as ‘Black’ – a gap of 41 percentage points”** compared with other ethnic and racial groups (Licra & IFOP, 2026). The racist insults and caricatures that flooded certain media outlets following the election, in the first round of a Black French citizen as Mayor of Saint-Denis in the spring of 2026⁷ illustrate the pervasive nature of racism in France. In its most extreme form, racism leads to the death of victims during encounters with the police.

The 4.5% recorded for people who identify as ‘white’ in our survey and for whom racism is *‘implicit and constant’* reflects a trivialisation of the term. Without denying that white people may be at the receiving end of hostile reactions due to the real discrimination that people of colour and their ancestors have endured for centuries, to claim that these hostile reactions amount to ‘anti-white racism’ is historically and scientifically nonsensical. Racism adds to the presumption of intrinsic biological inferiority, a relationship of power and domination that manifests itself in real discriminatory and demeaning acts. In its most extreme form, racism leads to the death of victims, for instance during encounters with law enforcement or attacks by violent nationalist groups⁸.

Throughout human history, from slavery and colonisation to the present day, *‘white people’* as an ethno-racial group have not been the object of pseudo-scientific theories portraying them as inferior beings, nor have they been subjected to cultures and political regimes that perpetuate systemic, structural and intergenerational discrimination against them. However, the notion that there is such a thing as *‘anti-white racism’*—which is supposedly the equivalent of racism against people of colour—is the result of manipulation by conservative and far-right circles and by an *‘anti-anti-racist’* movement. See, in this regard, Alain’s book (Policar, 2023) *‘La haine de l’antiracisme’* or Reni’s (Eddo-Lodge, 2018) book *‘Why I am no longer talking to White People about Race’*. Readers who want something shorter may also consult other articles available online¹¹. The counteraccusation of *‘anti-white’* racism is one of the defensive strategies employed by the dominant white group to evade, counter and delegitimise any discussion of racism, thereby maintaining white supremacy:

“Overwhelming kindness, claims of reverse racism, attempts to shift the blame, and constant emotional outbursts” (Toliver & Hadley, 2021). (Bonilla-Silva, 2013¹², p.28) notes that *‘whiteness is so pervasive that white people can appear “reasonable” and even “moral” whilst opposing almost every practical approach to addressing de facto racial inequality’*.

Whilst the recent national survey by (Licra & IFOP, 2026) found that *“39% of people perceived as ‘white’ report having been victims of racist attacks or discrimination during their lifetime”*, the authors

⁶ We have highlighted this in bold.

⁷ https://www.franceinfo.fr/france/ile-de-france/seine-saint-denis/saint-denis/c-est-ignoble-le-mot-ignoble-est-insuffisant-des-milliers-de-personnes-presentes-a-saint-denis-en-soutien-au-nouveau-maire-victime-d-attaques-racistes_7915796.html; <https://www.publicsenat.fr/actualites/politique/propos-racistes-a-lencontre-de-bally-bagayoko-si-une-plainte-etait-deposee-le-prefet-viendra-se-constituer-partie-civile>.

⁸ Marie Turcan The Ministry of the Interior acknowledges three racist homicides in France in 2025. Médiapart. <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/270326/le-ministere-de-l-interieur-reconnait-trois-homicides-racistes-en-france-en-2025>. 27 March 2026, 14h14.

¹¹ Alain Policar, *Libération*. https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2018/10/22/le-racisme-anti-blancs-n-existe-pas_1687081/. Rokhaya Diallo, *Ritimo*, <https://www.ritimo.org/Pourquoi-le-racisme-anti-Blanc-hes-n-existe-pas>. Wikipedia. Racisme antiblanc. https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racisme_antiblanc. Elsa Mourgues, *Le racisme anti-blanc existe-t-il ?*, France Culture, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/le-racisme-anti-blancs-existe-t-il-6345160>. Consultés le 22/07/2025.

¹² Bonilla-Silva, E. (2013), *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistences of Racial Inequality*, 4th ed. Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD.

agree that this “precludes any misleading comparison”. Proportionally, racism targeting other groups stands at “80% for ‘Black’ people, 80% for ‘Arabs’ and 80% for Jews”. More fundamentally, the authors acknowledge that **‘Hostility towards “white people” is therefore a real phenomenon, but one that is structurally different from what minorities experience: it is not accompanied by the same degree of institutional systematicity (schools, the workplace and the police discriminate against “white people” to a limited extent), nor by the same historical depth, nor by the same cumulative effect¹³’.**

The term ‘hostility’ is the most appropriate way to describe the animosity towards ‘white’ people, perceived as belonging to the majority group responsible for the discrimination suffered by racialised minorities over several centuries.

It is also worth noting the significant disparities in the proportionalities of the different ethno-racial groups in this survey: 65.3% of white people compared with only 6.3% of black people; 7.1% of Arabs/North Africans; 3.3% of mixed-race people and 1.2% of Asians. To measure the true extent of racism affecting each ethno-racial group, a sample in which all groups are represented in equal proportions will be necessary.

◆ **Tableau B.47. G2- Migration history x C3 Having been a victim of racism**

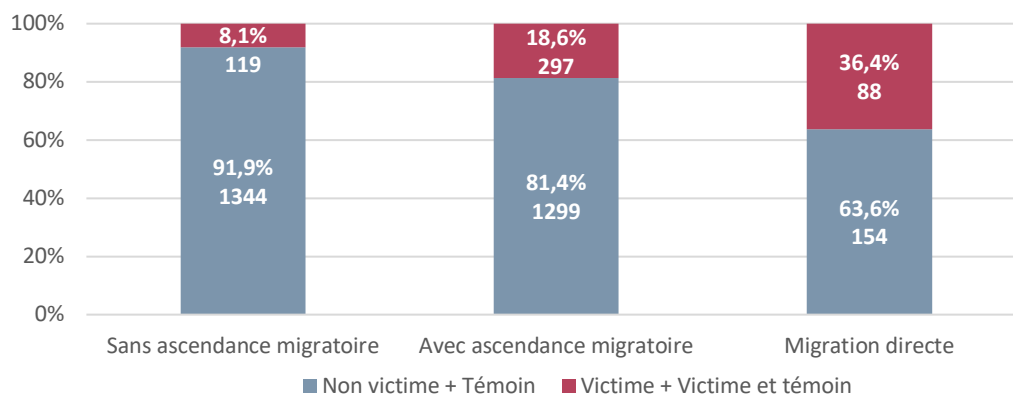




Figure B.47. G2 - Migrant history x C3 Having been a victim of racism

 Pearson’s chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between the variable relating to migrant background and reports of racism ($p = < 2.2e-16$). This association was also found to be significant in six institutions participating in the survey (Sciences Po Lille, ENS Lyon, UHA, ISARA, UCBL and AMU). For this test, the response options to question G2 (*‘One of my parents’, ‘Both my parents’, ‘My grandparents’ and ‘My great-grandparents’*) were grouped under the heading *‘With a migrant background’* and compared with the status of victim (Part D) as well as the status of victim and witness (Part F) of racism (C3). Those who answered *“Myself”* to G2 were classified under the label *“Direct migration”*. Contrary to trends observed in the literature which suggested that people of immigrant origin born in France are more likely to report racist experiences (Bergamaschi *et al.*, 2026), our data showed the opposite pattern. 36.4% of those who migrated themselves – i.e., *‘direct migration’* – were most likely to report having been victims of racism. This pattern was found in five out of six institutions where the cross-tabulation was statistically significant. Indeed, the opposite pattern was found at Sciences Po Lille, where people with a migrant background were more likely to report being victims.

 Strengthening support, guidance and awareness-raising initiatives regarding cultural diversity for international students and staff could help to improve their integration and reduce their exposure to discrimination.

¹³ We are the ones who have put it in bold.

2.3 Multivariate analysis: a comprehensive overview

2.3.1 An introduction to the method

We employed a multivariate statistical approach to refine our understanding and gain an overview of the influence of socio-demographic variables on the likelihood of being a victim, a witness, or both a victim and a witness of racism within the higher education sector. This approach aimed to capture the complexity across several social dimensions (gender, age, status, length of service, discipline, origin and migrant background) and to provide an overview of the mechanisms underlying these varied experiences.

To achieve these objectives, we used multinomial logistic regression, a multivariate ‘explanatory’ method designed to model the relationship between a categorical dependent variable and several explanatory variables. This model requires the selection of a reference category, which serves as a point of comparison for estimating the *odds ratios* (ORs) of the other categories. In a multinomial regression, an odds ratio indicates how much an explanatory variable increases the likelihood of an individual being in a given category rather than in the reference category. Multinomial regression thus allows us to simultaneously control for the effects of multiple factors and assess their specific influence on the probabilities of exposure to racism in our study. This method was applied to the 3,247 respondents who completed the questionnaire in full.

Before interpreting the results of the multinomial logistic regression, it is important to clarify the reference categories used in the model. These serve as points of comparison for all estimates. Firstly, in our model, **the reference category for the dependent variable is that of people who have neither witnessed nor been victims of racism**. The results therefore express, for each profile, the relative probability of having been a witness, a victim, or both a witness and a victim, compared with this category. Secondly, we selected the following socio-demographic characteristics: **A1 – Gender, A2 – Age group, A3 – Status, A4 – Years in higher education, A5 – Discipline, G1 – Self-identified ethnic/racial background and G2 – Migrant background, in order to understand their effects on exposure to racism**. Within these categories, we selected reference response categories based on hypotheses derived from the results of the univariate (§2.2) and bivariate analyses (§2.2) presented in this report:

1. **For variable A1 – Gender**, we selected female as the reference category, given the recognised importance of intersectionality in experiences of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). Furthermore, the cross-tabulation ‘B.40. A1 – Gender × C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism’ yielded a statistically significant result, suggesting that gender influences the likelihood of reporting oneself as a victim and/or witness of racism.
2. **With regard to variable A2 – Age group**, the 18–24 age group was selected as the reference group. This choice is based on the results of the cross-tabulation ‘B.43. D1–E2–F1 – Perpetrator of racism × A3–E1–F2 – Status as victim and/or witness of racism’, according to which students (mainly from this age group) appear more frequently as victims of racism. We therefore sought to test whether older age groups had a different probability of exposure to racism compared to this younger category.
3. **For variable A3 – Status**, the ‘lecturer-researcher’ category was defined as the reference category. Indeed, the cross-tabulation ‘B.43. D1–E2–F1 – Perpetrator of racism × A3–E1–F2 – Status as victim and/or witness of racism’ revealed that lecturer-researchers were the group most frequently identified as perpetrators of racism. This reference therefore allows the other statuses to be compared with a dominant institutional position within the academic hierarchy.

4. **For the variable A4 – Years in higher education**, we wanted to test whether the length of time spent in higher education influenced exposure to racism. Although the cross-tabulation of '*B.41. A4 Years in the ESR × C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism*' did not yield a significant result, we wished to test the possible influence of length of time spent in the HERI on the type of exposure, i.e. having been a victim and/or witness of racism. We therefore decided to use the reference category 'less than one year', which was the shortest period offered to questionnaire respondents.

5. **With regard to variable A5 – Academic discipline**, we took the social sciences and humanities (SSH) as our reference point. This choice is justified by two significant cross-tabulations: cross-tabulation '*B.36. C1 – Knowledge of types of racism × A5 – Discipline*', according to which those from the SHS are the least likely to state that they cannot distinguish between different levels of racism; and the cross-tabulation '*B.39. C2 – Ability to identify discrimination × A5 – Discipline*', showing that those from the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) are the most likely to state that they can identify discrimination. Thus, the underlying question is as follows: does a better understanding of the different levels of racism and an increased ability to identify discrimination influence the likelihood of reporting oneself as a victim and/or witness of racism?

6. **For variable G1 – Ethnoracial self-identification**, the 'white person' category was chosen as the reference group, to compare the likelihood of experiencing racism with that of racialised people or those who chose '*I do not wish to answer*'. The cross-tabulation of '*B.45. C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism × G1 – Self-identified ethnic or racial background*' also revealed a significant result, indicating that nearly one in two people of colour reported being a victim or both a victim and a witness of racism in the ESR.

7. Finally, **for variable G2 – Migrant background**, we selected the category 'no migrant background' as the reference group to assess the likelihood that people who reported having a migrant background are more likely to experience racism. The cross-tabulation '*B.47. G2 – Migrant ancestry × C3 – Having been a victim and/or witness of racism*' did indeed yield a significant result, suggesting that people of direct migrant background are more likely to report being victims or both victims and witnesses of racism.

The results presented should therefore be interpreted in relation to these reference groups, which represent the 'baseline' profile against which statistical differences are assessed. This approach provides a consistent benchmark for comparing the probabilities of having been a witness, a victim, or both a witness and a victim of racism across various socio-demographic characteristics.

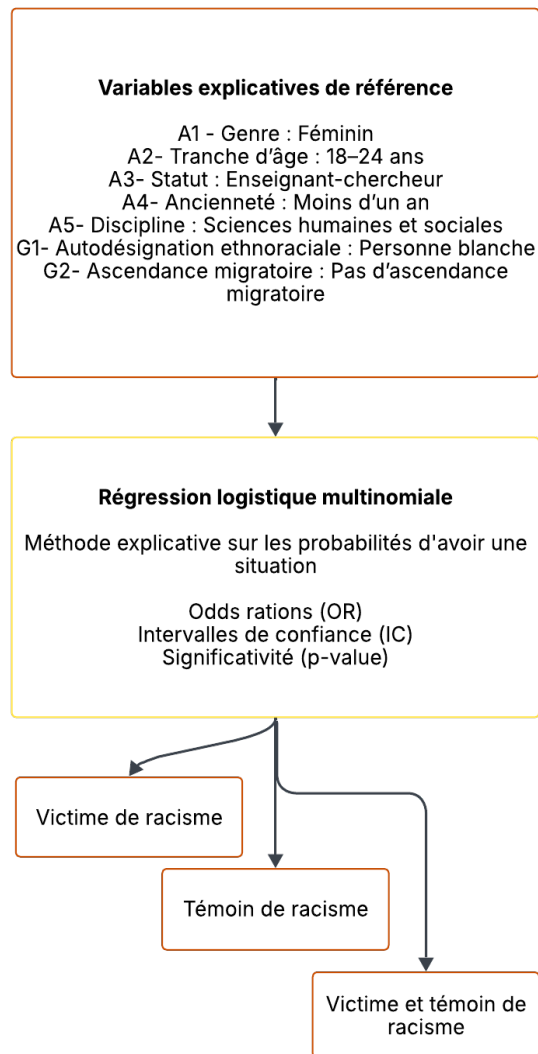


Figure 48. Plot of the multinomial logistic regression

The diagram above shows how multinomial logistic regression works. The results of the logistic regression are presented in three tables showing, for each socio-demographic explanatory variable broken down by response category, the **odds ratios (OR)** along with their 95% confidence intervals (CI) and p-values. These three tables bring together the results obtained for ‘Yes as a witness’, ‘Yes as a victim’ and ‘Yes as a witness and victim’.

The interpretation is based on the *OR* values: an *OR* greater than 1 indicates a higher probability of belonging to the category in question (for example, being more likely to have been a victim of racism according to the response categories of each reference explanatory variable). An *OR* of less than 1 indicates a lower probability. Thus, an *OR* of 2 means that the probability of belonging to the group under study is twice as high as that of the reference group, whilst an *OR* of 0.5 indicates a probability that is half as high. The interpretation is therefore relative to the reference. However, it is possible to identify general trends by comparing the odds ratios between groups. The p-value allows us to assess the statistical significance of the observed effect: a result is considered significant when $p < 0.05$.

2.3.2 Results

Here we present the results—*ORs* and *p-values*—organised in a table according to socio-demographic categories, compared with the reference values given in the paragraph above. For the sake of brevity, we will only present the categories that yielded statistically significant *p-values*.

- **For the response modality ‘Yes, as a witness’**

A1 – Gender: Men are significantly less likely to be witnesses than women ($OR = 0.7638, p = 0.0067$), whilst non-binary people are much more likely ($OR = 1.8903, p = 0.0201$). These results suggest differential exposure to the role of witness according to gender; women are more often witnesses than men, and non-binary people even more so than women.

A3 – Status: According to the statistical results obtained, postdoctoral researchers/Adjuncts (ATERS) report having been witnesses more frequently ($OR = 1.8590, p = 0.0462$), compared to the reference group used, namely lecturers and researchers.

A4 – Length of time in higher education and research: The effect of seniority appears to evolve over time; the longer respondents report having been in HERIs, the higher the *OR* values become. Given that the reference group used is the value ‘Less than one year’, we observed that the *ORs* associated with years in HERIs increased progressively: 2–5 years ($OR = 1.5055, p = 0.0144$), 5–10 years ($OR = 1.5767, p = 0.0227$) and over 10 years ($OR = 2.0424, p = 0.0036$). Thus, people who have spent over ten years in their institution were twice likely to have been witnesses as those who have been in the ESR for less than a year.


- **For the response modality ‘Yes, as a victim’**

A1 - Gender: Non-binary people were more likely to be victims ($OR = 3.8065, p = 0.0078$), whereas the effect for men was not significant ($OR = 0.9488, p = 0.8143$).

A2 – Age group : The likelihood of reporting oneself as a victim increased progressively across the age groups 25–34 ($OR = 2.7113, p = 0.0048$), 35–45 years ($OR = 3.5411, p = 0.0180$) and 45–54 years ($OR = 4.1678, p = 0.0191$), but not for those over 55 years old compared to the reference group, i.e. those aged between 18–24.

A3 - Status: According to the results, administrative (BIATSS) staff were less likely to report being victims ($OR = 0.4552, p = 0.0470$) than the reference group used, namely lecturers and researchers.


A5 - Field of study: The results suggested that individuals from the economics and management fields ($OR = 3.9985, p = 0.0069$) and sports science ($OR = 6.8477, p = 0.0033$) were more likely to report being a victim than those from the humanities and social sciences (as this is the reference group used). The tests carried out with the other disciplines were not significant.

 **G1 – Ethnoracial self-identification:** Compared with all the explanatory variables analysed, the most significant factor is membership of a racialised group. Indeed, racialised individuals are more than 12 times likely to have been victims than white individuals ($OR = 12.43, p < 0.001$). Individuals who selected the option ‘I do not wish to answer’ also show a significant effect ($OR = 3.3731, p = 0.0026$) and are therefore three times more likely to report being a victim than white people, who serve as our reference group.

• For the response modality ‘Yes, as a victim and witness’

A4 – Years in higher education and research: The number of years spent in HERIs increased the likelihood of having been a victim of or witness to racism compared with those who spent less than a year in HERIs. Thus, we observed an increase in ORs in line with the increase in years spent in HERIs, with the exception of the 5–10-year period; for 1–2 years ($OR = 2.0265, p = 0.0258$), 2–5 years ($OR = 2.1527, p = 0.0055$), 5–10 years ($OR = 1.9758, p = 0.0439$), and over 10 years ($OR = 3.2397, p = 0.0036$).

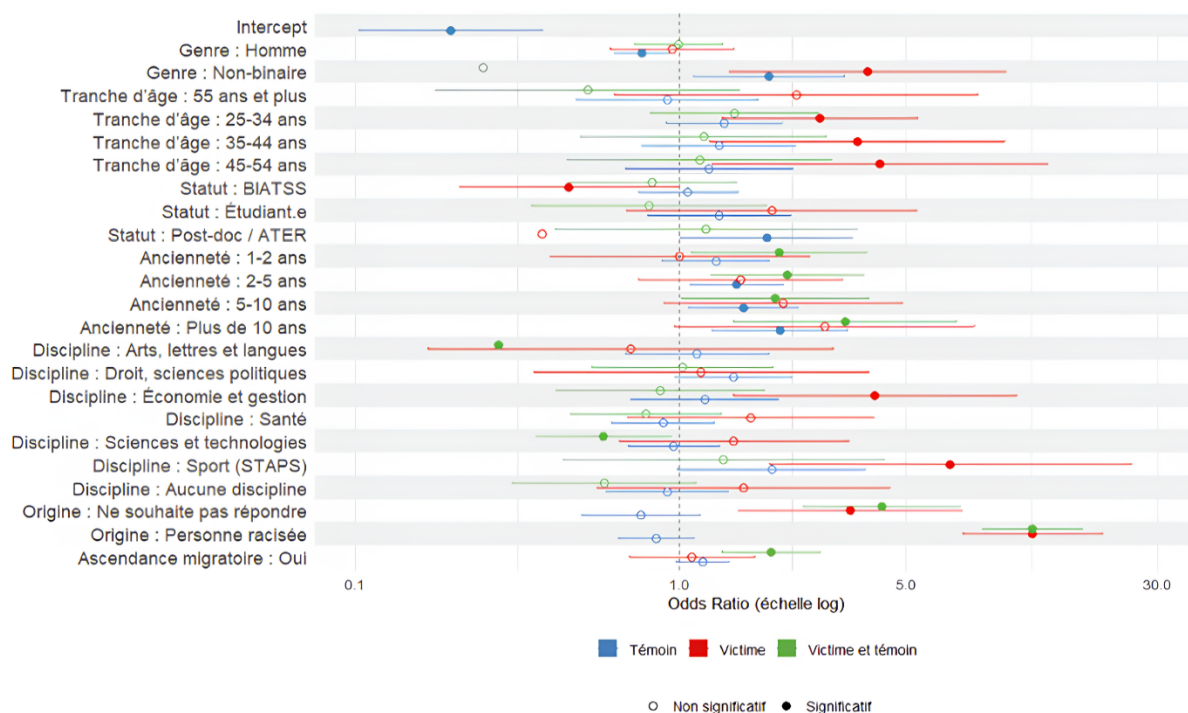
A5 - Discipline: The fields of Arts, Humanities and Languages ($OR = 0.2774, p = 0.0262$) and Science and Technology ($OR = 0.5834, p = 0.0286$) showed a lower probability of being both a victim and a witness compared to those in the reference group, namely the Humanities and Social Sciences.

 **G1 –Ethnoracial self-identification: People of colour ($OR = 12.2678, p < 0.0001$) and those who chose not to answer this question ($OR = 4.2086, p < 0.0001$) were more likely to have been both victims and witnesses of racism than white people.**

G2 – Migration history:

People with a migrant history ($OR = 1.9179, p = 0.0002$) were more likely to have experienced both situations (as a victim and as a witness) than people without a migrant background.

The forest plot shown below (Figure M.49) summarised the findings from the multinomial logistic regression.



Plot M.49. Multinomial logistic regression – Forest plot

◆ Protocol for interpreting the forest plot

- The coloured dots represent the odds ratios (*OR*) estimated by the model, i.e. the ratios that reflect the change in the probability of belonging to one of the categories of the dependent variable (having been a witness, a victim, or both a victim and a witness of racism) relative to the reference category (having been neither a victim nor a witness).
- The three colours indicate these three distinct situations: **blue**: having been a witness; **red**: having been a victim; **green**: having been both a victim and a witness. The *ORs* are plotted on a logarithmic scale, which allows for a visual comparison of weak and strong effects on the same symmetrical basis: a value greater than 1 indicates an increased probability of belonging to the group in question, whilst a value less than 1 indicates a reduced probability, relative to the reference.
- The horizontal bars associated with each data point represent the 95% confidence intervals, which indicate the degree of uncertainty surrounding the estimate. If these bars intersect the vertical line at 1, this means that the observed effect is not statistically significant: the modality in question does not differ significantly from the reference at the chosen confidence threshold. Conversely, when the 95% CI lies entirely above or below 1, the effect is significant and the association is statistically robust.
- Finally, the circles indicate statistical significance:
 - Solid circle: significant effect ($p < 0.05$)
 - Empty circle: non-significant result ($p \geq 0.05$)

This graph therefore provides a comprehensive overview of the effects of each variable on the three profiles of exposure to racism, highlighting the direction, strength and significance of the associations, whilst maintaining an overview of the interactions between the variables (which are the socio-demographic variables set out in the methodology section and broken down according to the possible response categories). This makes the overall interpretation of the model more intuitive than reading a table of raw coefficients. Thus, each row of the graph corresponds to a category of an explanatory variable. For example, for variable A1-Gender, we can see from the graph that the second line represents the 'Male' response category and the third line the 'Non-binary' response category; we do not see 'Female' because it is the reference used for comparisons. We can see that for the 'Male' row, the blue circle (control) is filled in, meaning it is significant, and is positioned to the left of 1 on the logarithmic scale, suggesting a lower probability. Meanwhile, the red circles (*victim*) and green circles (*victim and witness*) are empty, again for the 'Male' category. We can therefore conclude that men were significantly less likely to be witnesses of racism than women ($OR = 0.7638, p = 0.0067$). This pattern holds true for all seven explanatory variables we used, across a total of 23 rows representing the different response options provided in the questionnaire.

◆ Summary

The results obtained from the multinomial regression analysis highlight several key structural dynamics. **Belonging to a racialised group is by far the most powerful determinant of the likelihood of having been a victim or witness of racism.** This massive and robust effect underscores the structural nature of racial inequalities in the academic environment. Indeed, this is the socio-demographic characteristic that showed the strongest effect, substantially increasing the probability of being a victim (**x12.3232**) or a victim and witness (**x12.2678**) according to the *ORs*, compared to those identifying as white. Having a migration background was also associated with greater exposure to racism as both a victim and a witness compared to those without migration background. Regarding gender, women appeared to witness racism more often than men, whilst non-binary people were

more likely to be both witnesses and victims than women, indicating a specific vulnerability at the intersection of gender relations and racial discrimination. Length of time within HERIs also played a role in the accumulation of experiences, suggesting an effect of accumulation and repetition of situations over time, whether for witnesses or for victims who are also witnesses of racism.

With regard to academic fields, we were able to identify trends in relation to the chosen benchmark of the humanities and social sciences. According to the statistical results obtained, respondents from the disciplines of sports science and economics and management were more likely to report being victims, whilst those from the disciplines of arts, humanities and languages, and science and technology showed lower levels of exposure as both victims and witnesses. These results must however be interpreted with caution as they are influenced by the composition of the sample and the chosen reference framework. Indeed, certain disciplines are under-represented in the survey, which may artificially exaggerate or understate the observed differences. In terms of status, postdoctoral researchers and assistant lecturers stood out as witnesses, whilst the administrative staff appeared to be less exposed as victims compared to the reference group of lecturers and researchers. **These results show that the intensity of exposure to racism depended on multiple factors, the most significant of which are perceived membership of a 'race', of an 'ethnic group', and one's skin colour.** Next was the gender, the length of time spent in the institution, the position occupied in the hierarchy and, to a lesser extent, the field to which one belongs.

III. Qualitative survey by interviews

3. Methodology of the qualitative survey

The qualitative phase of the study was based on individual interviews, a method particularly suited to situations where the topics under investigation are sensitive or require an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences. Interview styles can be classified into four main categories: structured (directive), semi-structured, unstructured, and focus groups.

For this research, we opted for a structured interview approach to ensure consistent coverage of all topics, limit digressions and ensure greater comparability between participants' responses. Section 3.1 presents the interview guides designed according to the profile of the respondents. Section 3.2 describes the participant recruitment process. Section 3.3 outlines the chosen method of analysis, namely thematic analysis. Finally, Section 3.4 summarises the main findings from the interviews.

3.1 Interview guides

The survey methodology was designed to reflect the diversity of profiles and experiences within higher education and research (HER). With this in mind, five structured interview guides were developed, tailored to different categories of individuals within the HER sector:

- A. Students
- B. Academic staff
- C. Administrative staff (BIATSS)
- D. Equality, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Officers
- E. People in leadership positions.

Comprising between 24 and 28 questions, each interview guide was designed to explore in depth the specific experiences, perceptions and practices of each category of participants, whilst retaining a core set of questions that allows for cross-sectional comparison of the results. The exact number of questions in each guide varied depending on the category surveyed. For example, the interview questionnaire for 'Equality, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Officers' comprised 28 questions, several of which related specifically to their role as anti-discrimination officers (e.g. annual figures for reports of racism, handling of victims' complaints, institutional measures and policies against discrimination, etc.). The interview guides were structured in five parts:

1. **The first section** comprised eight questions designed to collect sociodemographic data on the respondents (name, gender, age group, ethnic origin/skin colour), length of time spent in the institution, position held (for staff) and length of service in HERIs (including work experience at other institutions).
2. **The second section** comprised four questions concerning their ease in discussing racism, their level of familiarity with concepts related to racism, and their knowledge of the 25 criteria for discrimination prohibited under the French law. This section served as a point of comparison with the responses already provided in the quantitative questionnaire phase.
3. **The third section** comprised four questions concerning their personal experiences of racism. Here, respondents were given the opportunity to provide an account of incidents they witnessed or experienced. This was not possible in the quantitative survey phase.
4. **The fourth section** comprised three questions concerning respondents' awareness and use of their institution's anti-discrimination services. These questions aimed to understand why respondents do or do not choose to report instances of racism they experienced or witnessed, and thus to identify the barriers that lead to non-reporting.

5. **The fifth section** comprised six questions. The first part focused on suggestions for training programmes that the institution could introduce to combat racism more effectively, as well as the target audiences. The second section examined the feasibility and relevance of creating a specific antiracism charter for French HERIs, following the example of other countries such as the United Kingdom and Canada, and of other charters already signed by French HERIs promoting gender equality, diversity or anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination.

We chose to send the interview guide to participants in advance of the interview because some questions required information that participants might not necessarily have on hand, and also because our aim was not to catch our participants off guard, but to collect the necessary data for our study. We therefore felt it was important for participants to have sufficient time to prepare themselves mentally and psychologically to discuss these sensitive issues which may have caused trauma or, in some cases, dated back several years. Finally, this allowed certain participants to have the chance to withdraw from this phase of the survey if they wished, an option very few chose to take.

3.2 Method of recruiting participants

Two approaches can be used to recruit participants for qualitative studies: **probabilistic/random sampling, and non-probabilistic/purposive sampling** (Cohen *et al.*, 2017).

Probability sampling is used when the researcher is able to define the entire population concerned by the study. A stochastic process is then used to randomly select participants deemed representative of the entire population. This helps to reduce the level of bias in participant selection by paying particular attention to the inclusion of participants from different segments of the population who equally represent the various variables that make up the population. These random sampling methods are normally used in surveys involving a large population spread across a vast territory, i.e, national and international surveys.

Non-probability sampling is generally used when the researcher is unable to identify the entire population of interest and must resort to more practical approaches to select a sample. Non-probability sampling comprises several sub-types: convenience sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling, dimensional sampling and snowball sampling. The selection of participants for this phase of the survey was based on non-probability sampling, given the impossibility for us to know the exact size of the population concerned by this topic. The aim of non-probability sampling methods is therefore not to obtain a sample that is representative of the entire population concerned. The risk of bias is therefore higher because the process relies on the willingness of each participant to participate. It is therefore likely that relevant profiles and situations will not be reflected in the sample. Thus, non-probability sampling methods can lead to *“a loss of the ability to generalise research findings (a feature often sought in quantitative research). However, these methods can prove valuable for both quantitative and qualitative research; and given the problems posed by probabilistic samples where there is a lack of diversity in the field, the chances of being able to generalise effectively using a probabilistic sample are already reduced.”* (Colon-Aguirre, 2022). Conversely, non-probabilistic sampling methods are appropriate when the aim is to explore the subject in greater depth, whereas quantitative methods based on probabilistic sampling are limited to measuring and comparing different orders of magnitude.

This non-probabilistic approach yielded 198 contact details of individuals willing to take part in the qualitative survey phase. Following several contacts and follow-up reminders, 56 semi-structured individual qualitative interviews were conducted across the seven participating sites, representing a 28% response rate – a good level of participation compared to typical participation rates in sociological surveys. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to three hours, for a cumulative total

of 55 hours and 34 minutes of recordings. The table below provides details of the number of participants and the total duration of the interviews per institution. Interview recordings were transcribed and then manually checked to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the contents as well as the pseudonymisation of sensitive data (names of identifiable individuals, units, etc.). The breakdown of participants by category is given in the table below.

Establishment	Number of contacts left	Interviews conducted	Duration
ISARA ¹⁴	2	1	00:33:00
University of Haute-Alsace	4	0	00:00:00
University of New Caledonia	7	3	02:28:00
Sciences Po Lille	19	7	06:56:00
Claude Bernard University of Lyon 1	76	13	10:22:20
Aix-Marseille University	46	14	18:28:00
ENS Lyon	44	18	16:47:20
Total	198	56	55:34:40

Table 50. Number and duration of interviews at the seven participating sites.

3.3 Methodology for analysing interview content

On a conceptual level, our approach to analysing interview content broadly falls within the family of methods known as **grounded theory**, which is commonly used in the social sciences and humanities. Grounded theory is defined as ‘*the discovery of theory based on data systematically collected in the context of social research*’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Due to its inherently inductive nature, grounded theory does not assume that the theories thus discovered are universal or immutable. They may change and evolve as the data is analysed.

More precisely, we employed thematic analysis (hereafter TA), also known as “**content analysis**” (CA). Although the two are not strictly equivalent in their methods, TA and CA converge *vis-à-vis* their objectives. According to (Clarke & Braun, 2013), “*Thematic analysis is essentially a method for identifying and analyzing patterns in qualitative data.*” (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012) (pp. 249–250) defined TA as “*primarily a method for identifying and synthesizing themes present in the corpus.*” In essence, TA aims to answer the question “*what are the main topics contained in a set of verbatim transcripts and how are they related?*” (Bhopal, 2024) added that “*an advantage of thematic analysis is that it is a method, rather than a methodology, meaning it is not tied to a particular theoretical perspective, which makes it a flexible analytical method.*”

In line with our qualitative approach and given that the interview content consists of a small volume of textual data, we subjected it to manual intellectual analysis, considered the most appropriate method in this case (Wicks, 2017). A fundamental assumption of TA is that it is possible to assign a deeper semantic meaning to surface linguistic utterances and that recurring phrases and expressions allow for the researcher to identify the main themes of the corpus. A **theme** or **unit** of meaning can take the form of a sentence, an expression, or a set of sentences that refer to the same idea. A new theme is identified when a new idea or a different theme is encountered in text segments. Various authors have attempted to formalise the steps to performing a TA, to ensure a systematic and rigorous framework in order to reduce methodological biases. However, all TA specialists emphasised that

¹⁴ Institut supérieur d’agriculture Rhône-Alpes.

multiple readings of the corpus is necessary to grasp all the themes and their underlying structure. Thus, (Clarke & Braun, 2013) broke down the steps for conducting a TA into six phases.

According to (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012), the “**thematization**” process can follow one of two main approaches: **continuous coding** or **sequential coding**. In continuous coding, themes are identified as the researcher reads through the corpus. In the sequential approach, a sample of the corpus is first extracted and used to construct an initial list of themes, which is then applied to the rest of the corpus. This may result in retaining the previous list, which remains unchanged (fixed sequential approach), or in revising the list due to the discovery of new themes encountered throughout the corpus. (Lannoy, 2012) identified three coding approaches: **a priori conceptual coding** (top-down); **open/latent or inductive coding** (bottom-up); and **generic coding** (a blend of a priori and bottom-up inductive coding). Lannoy’s three approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be judiciously combined. The coding obtained through an inductive approach can be used to validate the coding obtained through the a priori conceptual approach, prompting the researcher to revise the latter. Regardless of the coding approach adopted, it is essential to keep in mind that the resulting list of themes is not an end in of itself, nor does it constitute an authority. Its sole purpose is to summarise the content of the corpus and highlight any connections between the themes. Consequently, the corpus remains the ultimate source for validating the final list of themes and the thematic analysis performed thereon.

The TA approach we implemented combined (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012)’s **continuous coding** with **priori** (Lannoy, 2012)’s **a priori conceptual coding** approach. In fact, the development of the interview guides had already predetermined the high-level themes that we identified in the interview contents. Next, through iterative readings of the corpus, we identified, then incrementally expanded and refined the themes until saturation was reached. “*Saturation is used in qualitative research as a criterion for stopping data collection and/or analysis.*” (Saunders et al., 2018).

A second important premise of TA is that themes do not exist independently of one another but are interconnected by relationships that are best represented in the form of a tree (Lannoy, 2012). Gradually, as we read and identified themes, we grouped them thematically around main topics that grouped together similar themes. This led us to distinguish between **major themes**, which formed the main branches of the tree, and **minor or subordinate themes**, which formed the sub-branches and leaves of the tree. In the section below, we present the TA of the major and secondary themes identified in the interviews on the seven sites, along with their underlying structure in the form of a **thematic tree**.

3.4 Thematic analysis of the interview contents

Figure 50 below provides the thematic tree of the major themes identified in the fifty-six (56) interviews. This map was created using the generative AI (GAI) agent embedded in the Xmind software. This provided us with an initial tree structure which we then manually verified and adjusted in several respects, both in terms of its content and the hierarchical structure of the branches. As this is a high-level overview of all the interviews across the seven sites, it does not exactly replicate the structure of manual and intellectual TA we performed, rather it offers a complementary overview illustrated by verbatims that support our detailed TA in the sections hereafter.



Figure 50. Thematic tree of the contents of the 56 interviews conducted at the seven participating sites.

The thematic analysis of the 56 individual interviews conducted across the seven institutions revealed major recurring themes despite the diversity of the participants' profiles, statuses, backgrounds and geographical locations. Firstly, the participants' socio-demographic profiles are presented in §3.4.1. The taboo surrounding race and the delegitimisation of research on racism are discussed in section §3.4.2. The prioritisation of forms of discrimination at university and the invisibility of racism are addressed in §3.4.3. The pervasiveness of racism across all levels and spaces in HERIs is illustrated in §3.4.4. The vulnerability of racialised students, who are particularly exposed to racial discrimination is the subject of section §3.4.5. The maintenance of racialised minorities in their assigned 'place' within HERIs is analysed in §3.4.6. Section §3.4.7 discusses the strategies employed by victims to handle the trauma caused by racism. The lack of specific antiracism training which is a demand strongly supported by almost all participants is discussed in section §3.4.8. Finally, section §3.4.9 discusses the avenues and levers for action proposed by the participants to improve the antiracism policies in French HERIs. In the remainder of the analysis, fictitious first names have been assigned to the participants to ensure anonymity.

3.4.1. Sociodemographic profiles of participants

The interviews conducted at the seven sites revealed a diverse range of profiles, providing an insight into the variety of experiences of discrimination faced by students, administrative staff and academic staff. The age groups are fairly representative of the HERI population: alongside young students aged 25 to 34 are tenured staff with long careers, such as lecturers and researchers and administrative staff aged between 40 and 55 or above. Some of these individuals have been in the HERI sector for thirty years' service, across different departments and decision-making bodies. The participants therefore represent the diversity of structures and levels of professional practice within HERIs. The table below breaks down participants by status at each survey site.

Participants status	ISARA	UNC	UHA	Sciences Po Lille	AMU	ENS Lyon	de	UCBL	Total	%
Students	1	0	0	6	5	9	7	28	50%	
Lecturers-researchers	0	3	0	1	2	2	4	11	20%	
BIATSS	0	0	0	0	7	7	2	17	30%	
Total	1	3	0	7	14	18	13	56	100%	

Tableau Q.51. Catégorie des participants aux entretiens – tous les sites.

The involvement of administrative and academic staff introduces an organisational perspective that contrasts with the students' accounts, shedding light on power dynamics, the working environment and the handling of discrimination within HERIs in general. The diversity of backgrounds, roles and origins represented by the participants is a testament to the robustness and credibility of the accounts of experiences of discrimination, whether personally experienced or reported.



The predominance of women among the participants, observed in the quantitative section and across all survey sites, is confirmed in the qualitative section.

With regard to ethnoracial self-identification, participants reported a wide range of self-identities. Several participants combined multiple origins, self-defining as Arab, Berber, mixed-race or Franco-German, whilst others claimed a more context-specific identity linked to their family's migration trajectory or professional experience. Camille, who identified as non-binary, questions the gender norms of school and administrative settings. Maeva, from a Tunisian family, highlights how social categorisations vary depending on the context: perceived as 'Arab' in some circles, she is seen as 'white' in others. Jade oscillates between perceived 'mixed-race' and 'Black'. Jim, who is of mixed Breton, Chinese and Tahitian heritage, illustrates this fluidity of categorisations. He is perceived in turn as Asian, North African or Mediterranean white depending on social and national contexts. These variations illustrate how identities are simultaneously situated, perceived and reconfigured in public spaces.

A common thread however ran through the stories of all the racialised participants: they face direct exposure to various forms of discrimination linked to their appearance (skin colour) and their actual or perceived ethno-racial background. People of mixed heritage, navigating multiple identities, find themselves in an ambivalent position, caught between two worlds. On the one hand, their lighter skin tones allow them to 'pass' in spaces where whiteness is the norm. They are therefore less directly targeted by overtly racist remarks or acts. Véronique, who passes as 'white' but is Muslim, highlights the discrimination she experiences due to the sound of her name. Diane, a PhD student of mixed heritage, is perceived sometimes as Arab, sometimes not. This creates a sense of invisibility and hyper-visibility for her in academic spaces dominated by whiteness, which she explains as follows:

'So, on the one hand, everyone's surprised just by my being there, and then surprised that I'm actually saying the same things as them. And at the same time, well, sometimes I just feel invisible. Most of the time, I get the impression that sometimes they're talking amongst themselves, as if I wasn't there... sometimes I think to myself, 'I feel as though I don't actually exist.'

People of mixed heritage are acutely aware of the more overt and sometimes cruel forms of discrimination faced by the darker-skinned members of their social or family circles. By contrast, the accounts of participants self-identifying as white illustrate the coexistence of majority experiences in which racism remains invisible or is misunderstood in all its complexity and nuances. However, even within the category of non-racialised participants, some claim more specific identities such as 'Afro-European, Mediterranean, 'Spanish-Arab', 'Italian-Arab', etc. The heterogeneity of

responses to the thorny question of self-identification confirms that any attempt to put people ethno-into ethno-racial boxes is not only reductive, but also ethically problematic. This complexity was already apparent in the quantitative section of the survey where the same question had elicited similar responses (see Table U.27. G1 – *Ethnoracial self-identification* above).

3.4.2 *The taboo surrounding race and the delegitimisation of research on racism*

All interviewees spoke of the unease and taboo surrounding the words ‘race’ and ‘racism’ in the French national context. At university, this taboo manifests itself in the form of intellectual avoidance, evasion and euphemisms, which serve to downplay its impact on society. The unequal access to the intellectual tools needed to tackle racism means that few people are equipped to address the problem head-on, as avoidance and rebranding are the norm. In fact, those who employ these two words are regularly accused of being the cause of the very phenomenon they are studying, observing or denouncing: *‘In France, talking about racism is often perceived as being racist. Pointing out someone’s ethnic or racial background is seen as racist. [...] French higher education and research is more conservative than some English-speaking environments and suffers from an automatic backlash against ‘Anglo-Saxon’ anti-racism efforts.’* (Jim). For him, this symbolic denial is accompanied by a *“total silence on racist violence”*, which contrasts with the visibility given to feminist and LGBTQ+ struggles.

Asma adds: *“As soon as you even mention the term ‘race’, (...) the response was: ‘No, it’s a concept imported from the United States, it makes no sense in our French history’. (...) I stopped talking about it with the lecturers.”*

Pierre adds: *“There’s a taboo; I’ve heard very little about this subject in conversation... even at an institutional level, it’s rarely discussed... there’s a code of silence (...).”* As for Amel, she *“finds it complicated because it’s a subject where [...] it’s a bit of a taboo”*. Ada, a Faculty member and researcher, points out that *“Mentioning racism makes the white population—who hold power at every level—uncomfortable; they feel targeted and either go on the defensive or bury their heads in the sand.”*

The same analysis was made by a participant in a senior leadership role: *“Administrations are very afraid to tackle it, because the status quo doesn’t cause much of a stir. But if we do something, it risks causing a stir.”* (Camille).

The lack of conceptual understanding of the concepts surrounding racism contributes to this invisibilisation. Some participants are comfortable using terms such as *‘systemic racism’*, *‘white privilege’* or *‘microaggressions’*, reflecting an intellectual socialisation shaped both by formal education and by activist or online spaces. Other participants acknowledge a superficial familiarity with the notions of systemic or structural racism, without fully grasping their scope: *“I think I’ve heard them all before (...) but I wouldn’t necessarily be able to give an exact definition. (...) I can see the nuances between systemic, structural and institutional racism to some extent, but not entirely”* (Kader).

First, a brief overview of the different levels and forms of racism:

Institutional racism was originally defined by political activists Stokely Carmichael and Charles Vernon Hamilton in their 1967 book entitled *“Black Power: The Politics of Liberation”*. These authors noted that while individual racism is often identifiable because of its overt nature, institutional racism is less perceptible because of its *“less overt, far more subtle”* nature. According to (Phyllis Jones, 2000), institutional racism is:

“normative, sometimes legalized, and manifests as inherited disadvantage. It is structural, having been codified in the customs, practices, and laws of institutions. (...) With regard to material conditions, examples include: differential access to quality education, sound housing,

gainful employment, appropriate medical facilities, and a clean environment. With regard to access to power, examples include differential access to information (including about one's own history), resources (including wealth and organisational infrastructure), and public participation and voice (including voting rights, representation in government, and control of the media)."

The negative consequences of institutional racism are systemic and intergenerational for its victims.

Systemic racism refers to the way in which entire systems - for example, political, legal, economic, health, educational, cultural and criminal justice systems - build into their culture and institutional procedures unfair advantages for dominant groups while systematically discriminating against other groups on the basis of skin colour, race or ethnic origin:

"A central component of systemic racism is the "white racial frame," an "organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate" that are part of the "color-coded framing of society," which includes a "positive orientation to whites and whiteness and a negative orientation to racial 'others' who are exploited and oppressed" (Feagin, 2001, p. 11; 2006, p. 25)." (Elias & Feagin, 2020).

Structural racism is the cumulative effect of everyday and institutional racism. It is pervasive, insidious and highly damaging because it operates intersectionally, reinforcing explicit and implicit prejudice manifested in unconscious racial attitudes, beliefs and prejudices, and produces lasting structural inequalities and power imbalances leading to unequal access to services and opportunities for ethnic minorities and migrants in all institutions. In its action plan against racism, the European Commission recognised that: *"Structural racism is the most dangerous form of racism, due to the silent mechanism in which it operates. It is almost invisible but at the same time affects a person's access to equal opportunities"* (Brzozowski, 2021).

Structural racism means that *« the dominant social group systematically occupies all positions of power, whilst minority groups struggle to gain access to the same services or opportunities»*. The difficulty in tackling structural racism in many countries, apart from its invisibility, lies in the fact that social status is determined by those in positions of power. People of colour are more exposed to these various forms and levels of racism, as well as to racial microaggressions.

For students, PhD students and researchers working on this subject, the intellectual taboo surrounding "race" and "racism" in France constitutes a form of epistemic violence that drives them to self-censorship and to adopt various strategies to circumvent censorship. Yves recounts having *'rewritten [his] entire thesis proposal by erasing racial issues'* to avoid institutional censorship and denounces a depoliticised hijacking of critical approaches: *"Some say: 'I've worked on class and gender, so that's intersectionality', without citing a single Black or postcolonial author. It's an erasure, even a form of plunder."* This form of epistemic violence shows that racism also affects the production of knowledge, restricting academic freedom and the recognition of references drawn from postcolonial studies.

The accounts reported in the study by (Hajjat & Zoubir, 2025) from students of colour in other French universities reveal that epistemic censorship on the part of Faculty and research supervisors is widespread: *'It is interesting to note that several Master's or PhD students working on socially and politically charged topics report experiencing backlash from their lecturers. (...) from the moment she embarked on an anti-racist intellectual path that displeased her supervisor, Juliette, a 23-year-old French student who self-identifies as Arab and is studying for a Master's in Political Science, faced repeated refusals to have her work marked and assessed; as a result, Juliette failed her year (interview by ZZ, 2019).'* p. 63.



These remarks reveal a form of epistemic denial: by sidestepping racial issues in the fields of inquiry and education, these disciplines undermine the scientific legitimacy of racial issues

and render invisible the lived realities of racialised minorities who form an integral part of the social fabric of the French Republic.

Talking about racism thus appears to be a transgression that disrupts the apparent stability of administrative processes and the illusion of internal cohesion within the French society. The delegitimisation of the word ‘race’ and the realities it underpins has been analysed by several researchers, including the sociologist Sarah Mazouz in her short book *Race* where she delivers a sharp critique of the obfuscation and denial of the effects racial realities in France:

“Through a kind of mystification for which nation-building is notorious, the Republic did indeed, in the second half of the 20th century, regard racial issues as something that concerned “the others” – and in particular the United States. The slave trade did not concern it. Colonial rule belonged to an era with no connection to the present. As for the Vichy regime, it was null and void. Thus, a strangely biased memory was constructed and reaffirmed, consigning to oblivion the past use of racial categorisations in French laws and condemning the contemporary manifestations of racialisation to silence and oblivion. In this context, we are also witnessing a fetishisation of the term ‘race’. The mere act of using or mentioning it is said to have the power to breathe new life into racist ideologies. Banning it from the Constitution would, as if by magic, solve all the problems.” (...) Those who denounce the logic of racialisation are labelled racists. Those who highlight the experience of minorities by relating it to that of racial discrimination are accused of holding hegemonic views. At the same time, racialising discourse continues to flourish under the indifferent gaze of the majority. ‘As Collette Guillemin has already pointed out in an article entitled “I know, but still” (...), **race does not exist, and yet it is everywhere¹⁵ . (...) because the consequences of this ideology are very real.**” (Mazouz, 2020).

Robin DiAngelo’s book *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* also provides insights into the tendency to deny and avoid discussing ‘race’ and racism by the white majority.

3.4.3 A hierarchy of discriminations in the university where racism is invisibilised

The interviews revealed a stark contrast between the official stance adopted by HERIs and the reality of a persistent silence surrounding racism. Whilst formal anti-discrimination measures do exist in all HERIs¹⁶, participants’ accounts showed that the issue of racism is often sidestepped in favour of topics deemed more neutral or consensual such as diversity or inclusion. In the French context, when diversity and inclusion are discussed, they relate almost exclusively to disability and gender diversity (LGBTQ+).

Whilst Floriane acknowledged that she was aware of her university’s equality and diversity service, she was unaware that it could handle cases of racism: *“So I hadn’t realised that diversity actually takes into account, well, all kinds of minorities [...] Yes, but actually, I realise as I say it that it’s a classic white privilege not to know that it exists and simply not to need to know that I don’t need it, you know.”*


Floriane *“knew that racial discrimination was prohibited by law, but that was really all. I’ve never actually read the legislation.”* This lack of knowledge reflects a lack of information and training within the institution, limiting the ability to identify and name instances of discrimination.

Participants unanimously agreed that racism is being sidelined in favour of other priorities in the fight against discriminations: *“There are posters all over the corridors about gender-based and sexual*

¹⁵ Our emphasis.

¹⁶ National Plan to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism and Discrimination on the Grounds of Origin (2018–2020), published by the Interministerial Delegation for the Fight against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Anti-LGBT Hate, recommended the creation of ‘racism and anti-Semitism’ liaison officers or project managers in every higher education and research institution.


violence, about all sorts of things, but not about racism. [...] We have someone whose job is to tackle discrimination, and these forms of discrimination are being ignored. Except since ARCHERIF.” (Alan).

 **The finding across all HERIs where the survey was conducted is that racism is neither openly denied nor explicitly addressed. It is often relegated to the background – or even further down the list of priorities – compared to the prominence given to the fight against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).**

This recurring observation highlights a hierarchy of discrimination whereby certain forms of discrimination receive official recognition and concentrate all the resources whilst others remain invisible.

Ada, a lecturer and researcher, recounted her experience of situations she perceived as racist being reclassified by the anti-discrimination unit at her institution: *“When it comes to structural, systemic and institutional racism, the unit is ineffective. They tell you that your experience is neither racism nor harassment, but rather a matter of interpersonal difficulties.”* This observation is common across all the sites surveyed: *“I don’t think it serves much purpose, because in the end it’s always treated as a communication problem”* (Rania).

This tendency to downplay the issue is also reflected in a reluctance to even employ the word ‘racism’: *“I was told: ‘We can’t talk about racism; it’s too strong a word’”* (Aya). For Amel, this institutional stance contributes to a trivialisation of the issue: *“When we talk about racism, we’re told it’s a misunderstanding, that we shouldn’t read too much into things.”* This semantic shift from racism to “misunderstanding” or “disagreement” illustrates how the institution avoids acknowledging the political and systemic implications of racist incidents, preferring to frame them in terms of interpersonal relations.

 **The systematic reclassification of reported cases of racism as interpersonal ‘communication’ issues transforms power relations into personal disagreements, thereby stripping them of their structural, political and cultural significance.**

When it comes to prevention policy, many institutions are content to rely on centralised, top-down communication campaigns, announcing, at regular intervals, awareness-raising days that are detached from everyday professional realities and the institutional cultures established in various departments and services of the university. Ultimately, no one feels involved or obliged to take part in these rare awareness days, which are offered each year to populations of tens of thousands of individuals, situated on campuses that are often several kilometers apart.

Some participants criticised the token nature of their anti-discrimination services: these units exist to ‘reassure’ the institution rather than to protect victims.

Those who are most aware of this type of discrimination and have a deeper understanding of it often gained this through their own experiences, or through activism or research, whilst others perceive it as an abstract and distant phenomenon that does not concern them. Camille says she became familiar with these concepts through social media: *“I follow Instagram accounts that popularise social sciences, feminism, ecology...”*

These discrepancies reflect a selective circulation of anti-racist knowledge, confined to certain critical spaces and rarely integrated into traditional academic education. This finding aligns with the results from the quantitative part of the survey: whilst the term ‘everyday, ordinary or interpersonal racism’ was generally understood, the other levels of racism were largely unknown (systemic, institutional and structural racism, internalised racism, colourism).

When the issue of racial discrimination is finally addressed in HERIs, it is framed within a national discourse that always singles out antisemitism by placing it on the same level as racism, of which it is a sub-type. In the eyes of many participants, whilst antisemitism enjoys recurring visibility, no comparable action has been taken regarding the discrimination targeting Blacks, Arabs, Muslims or

Asians. The focus on antisemitism may reinforce the idea that there is a hierarchy of targets for antiracism battle. It may also shed light on the persisting tensions at national level generated by the history of the fight against racism, which has continually divided and polarised debates by pitting minorities against one another, fragmenting the meagre resources allocated to this struggle and contributing to what is commonly referred to as *the war of memories*.

Finally, many participants noted that initiatives to raise awareness of racism tended to originate more from student associations or external groups than from the university itself, reinforcing the impression of institutional disengagement. Thus, racism is constantly displaced, reframed or incorporated into universalist discourses that erase its specificity. When it is mentioned in official discourse, it is quickly lost amidst a list of other types of discrimination. Once this listing exercise is complete, those involved in anti-discrimination policies immediately return to their '*comfort zones*', deemed more consensual and receptive to the white majority group (Sexual and Sexist Violence or SSV) and the fight against LGBT+ phobia. Jim sums it up: "*We have an opinion on everything, except racism.*" Between proclaimed universality and concrete invisibilisation, the lack of specific action on racism maintains the *status quo*.

Finally, **the predominantly white composition of the people in charge Equality, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Units in HERIs** in France partly explains institutions' difficulty or the reluctance of these institutions to confront the matter, and the reluctance of the victims – the majority of whom are people of colour – to feel confident enough to come forward. Attending an inter-professional meeting of equality and inclusion officers from several HERIs, Louison observes: "*There was a very, very, very, very, very large majority of white people working on these issues in universities, and I found that incredibly revealing, really. I thought to myself, sure, we can largely blame a lack of resources, because that's a reality, and we lack the resources to tackle anti-racism issues, but the fact is, if it's only white people appointed to these roles, well, for me, that's still an issue too. There's an issue with recruitment.*"

3.4.4 *The pervasive nature of racism across all levels and spaces of the university*

Far from being an ivory tower, the university is the theatre of the same debates and power struggles that characterise the society in which it exists.

The forms of racism experienced or observed at university lie on a *continuum* ranging from microaggressions to institutional and systemic racism and, to a lesser extent, cases of racist physical violence, which are rather rare.

Several participants mention forms of microaggressions that have become commonplace in student or professional interactions, often disguised as humour or light-hearted banter. Staff members from migrant backgrounds or those identified by their accent or surname reported implicit doubts about their competence or comments regarding their appearance. Conversely, non-racialised participants state that they have not witnessed discriminatory behaviour, perceiving such situations as marginal or isolated. This contrast in perspectives illustrates how, within the university, the everyday racism experienced by some goes unnoticed, whilst others face a more direct and palpable reality.

Jade mentions the case of a white classmate who made comments comparing the '*adoption of a black child*' to that of '*a little monkey*'. Maeva recounts more direct incidents: racist insults ('*Islamoterrorist*') scrawled on the door of the student union room. These accounts reflect a form of everyday racialisation, where religion, appearance or first name become markers of identity. In research laboratories, Charles and Léa mention repeated comments about Chinese researchers, described as "*publication mills*" producing "*poor-quality science*".

Non-racialised participants acknowledge the internalisation of certain stereotypes: Camille wondered “*why [he] hadn’t teamed up with a particular Arab person*”, before realising that he had “*perhaps internalised the idea that she worked less efficiently*”.

The accounts of Asma, a PhD student, are particularly revealing: from repeated questions about her surname, to persistent comments about her headscarf, and implicit suspicions of radicalism. Added to these humiliations is the feeling that she must ‘keep a low profile’ so as not to jeopardise her academic career. Maeva recounts an instance where, in response to content deemed Islamophobic, a collective complaint was drafted and signed by twenty-five students of colour — that is, “*practically all the students enrolled in the same diploma in the school*”. The initiative was intended as a strong statement, a demand for public acknowledgement of the seriousness of the matter. Yet the administrative response caused deep disillusionment: “*I was summoned to be told that yes, it was everyday racism, but they hadn’t called us ‘bounoules’¹⁷, so it was fine.*” This statement, which has become emblematic in the accounts collected, illustrates both the minimal acknowledgement of the problem and the trivialisation that results from it. Faced with this kind of reaction, many students choose not to make official complaints.

Very often, the victims find themselves in more vulnerable positions: African or North African students, support staff or teachers of colour who are alone in a predominantly white environment. In the first case, hierarchical dependency limits the possibilities for reporting; in the second, being the ‘only black or Arab person in the room’ syndrome makes any protest risky.



The victims are almost always students or staff members from racialised ethnic minorities, who are in the minority in their educational or workplace settings.

Rudy, a student, recounted an incident that occurred during a lecture whilst Black students were giving a presentation. From the upper rows of the lecture theatre, he observed a group of students exchanging racist messages in an online chat, one of which read: “***When monkeys make presentations to us***”, or “***What I say to the niggers at ISFA***”. These openly racist remarks reflect a form of symbolic violence that is normalised and legitimised by laughter, reinforcing the divide between those perceived as ‘legitimate’ and those assigned to a status of inferior otherness. The absence of institutional sanctions following a report reveals a mechanism of institutional silence and impunity. Such cases of explicit racist abuse are not uncommon on French campuses. (Hajjat & Zoubir, 2025) reported similar experiences where Black students were subjected to racist mockery and taunts that drew upon animal imagery inherited from the era of slavery: “*Racist insults can be seen as verbal reminders of racial hierarchy. They explicitly deny the humanity of racialised people through their animalisation. They intrinsically associate them with filth and/or darkness to better signify the purity and/or whiteness of the majority group. By accusing them in an essentialist manner of being stupid, criminal, deceitful, lazy, foreign, or by likening them to slaves, these insults associate the majority group with the supposed virtues of intelligence, innocence, honesty, hard work, nativeness and freedom.*” p. 61


Numerous studies have shown that in spaces dominated by whiteness, a person of colour is first and foremost perceived through the lens of their skin colour and an assigned ethno-racial background that is associated with intellectual inferiority, regardless of their qualifications (titles, degrees, years of experience) or international renown. Their position in a white dominated environment is constantly and insidiously called into question by members of the majority group, even when they are of a much lower rank or inexperienced.

Aya, a lecturer and researcher, confides: “*I always ask myself: are my skills being questioned simply because of the colour of my skin [...] we’ll have to prove ourselves even more [...] but we’ll still be judged on that.*” This demand for over-performance, characteristic of racialised minorities in institutions

¹⁷ A very derogatory term used to refer to Arabs in France, almost equivalent to the “N” word for Blacks.

dominated by ‘whiteness’, reflects the tension and state of constant hypervigilance in which these people live, aware that their expertise and worth are liable to be called into question at any moment. Aya also feels this professional delegitimisation in her work at the university hospital, where patients themselves question her abilities; she explains to us that “yes, I do have patients who don’t want to be treated by a Black dentist”. The institutional silence observed here reveals a differential approach to conflict management, where the hierarchy tends to prioritise organisational stability at the expense of acknowledging discrimination.

Ada, also a lecturer and researcher, recounts an incident that occurred during a staff meeting where a person in a position of authority used a stigmatising expression towards an African student. When she confronted him, her white colleagues remained silent, a sign of the normalisation of racism and of the complicity of members of the dominant group.

 **Attaining a senior position within the institution does not protect a person of colour from racism. This reversal of hierarchy highlights the fragility of the status of a researcher-lecturer of colour in the face of the symbolic power associated with whiteness.**

When white bystanders witness such discriminatory behaviour and comments, their tendency is to ignore the behaviour or downplay its racist implications. Alan, who witnessed a racist remark made by a superior explained that he was left “frozen to the spot, unable to intervene”. This silence acts as an implicit endorsement and fuels a sense of impunity. Other reactions play out informally: discussions among colleagues or peers where the incidents are acknowledged as ‘inappropriate’ but deemed too minor to report. Charles sums it up: ‘Everyone agreed it was borderline, but we weren’t going to make a fuss about it.’ This bottom-up regulation allows for partial acknowledgement without challenging the institutional order.

 **The first reaction is one of shock. Witnesses and victims describe feeling paralysed by the event, often because of the perpetrator’s position of authority.**

The avoidance and denial surrounding racism lead to a lack of conceptual or practical tools to put an end to such discrimination.

For staff from racialised backgrounds, career stagnation is one of the consequences of racism. Selma mentions a colleague who remained in the same grade for twelve years before being promoted, analysing this prolonged stagnation as an internalisation of a subordinate position. This observation illustrates how marginalised individuals end up, sometimes against their will, conforming to the implicit expectations of the hierarchy established by whiteness: “Some end up fulfilling the role expected of them, that of the token Arab or the submissive Black woman.” Ada observes bitterly: “My white colleagues were promoted as soon as they applied for the first time (...) but my applications are rejected despite having an equivalent or even more deserving track record.”

Several participants attribute the increase in overt and unapologetic forms of racism to the national political climate: “Since the 2024 general elections, we’ve seen a rise in unapologetic racism (...) with some people making comments out loud,” noted Pierre.

Experiences of racism occur in a variety of contexts—educational, administrative and social—but follow the same pattern: they unfold in situations characterised by hierarchical imbalance and a lack of symbolic protection. **People of colour, who are often isolated, face a double bind: they must endure without being able to speak out, and adapt to norms that are sometimes unspoken in order to preserve their place.**

3.4.5 Students from ethnic minority backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to racial discrimination

The problem of racism is not limited to its everyday or interpersonal dimension. When perpetrated by those in positions of authority (Faculty, department heads, line managers, heads of research units and of central services), it takes on a systemic and institutional nature.

Previous studies showed that African and Asian students are particularly vulnerable to unequal treatment by their lecturers and members of the administration, and that this has a negative impact on their futures: failure to obtain good grades in their degrees and difficulties in securing internships and in entering the job market.

Cécile's account reveals the institutional and systemic nature of the racism directed towards African students in her department by the head of the department: *'I had already noticed certain attitudes and behaviours on the part of a director and some lecturers of a specific nationality towards Senegalese students, and a different attitude towards students of all other nationalities. (...) a friend who had already been working in the department for four years confirmed what I already knew: the head of department is racist, very racist, and so is one of the lecturers, and she had already been accused of racism at her previous university.'*

As the Acadiscri survey (Bozec *et al.*, 2024) and the quantitative phase of our survey showed, racial discrimination occurs more frequently in the context of official procedures that take place in formal venues, in secret, closed-door settings (admissions or jury committees, recruitment panels, promotions panels, etc.), thus, through procedures presented as guarantors of the French republican motto "*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*". Cécile's testimony is an indictment of how the supposed equality in law quickly unravels in everyday professional practice and institutional cultures:

'One thing that I think is very serious, and which happened during the staff meetings, was when this head of department told the other staff members that the Senegalese students were in the department solely to meet the admissions quota and keep the courses open, even though she knew full well that they couldn't succeed. They couldn't get their degree. I saw that this person did everything she could to prevent these Senegalese students from succeeding. She set them impossible tasks that nobody could do; even me that have already completed a PhD, I could not have done them within the timeframes she set. The students began writing their dissertations. They were always obliged to write on a topic related to her own research. The Senegalese students, who were very keen to work on tourism in Senegal and conduct fieldwork, and to talk about their culture, were made to rewrite their entire dissertation two or three times, and of course, at some point, the students just gave up and dropped out. In three years, I saw only one Senegalese student who succeeded – just one!' [Editor's note: the participant became emotional and began to cry here].

Cécile's story is far from uncommon. Even when students from racialised backgrounds manage to complete their studies despite these obstacles, their struggles are not over. Their academic work tends to be scrutinised and judged more harshly than that of their white peers. Francine, a Black student, recounts her own experience:

"On top of the fact that I was attacked during my defense, which lasted an hour and thirty-five minutes, even though it was supposed to last forty minutes – twenty minutes for the presentation and twenty minutes for questions. And this happened in the presence of my internship supervisors, who are now my thesis supervisors. And they didn't understand what was going on. I understood because it wasn't the first time this had happened to me. So, I stayed calm throughout; I didn't get upset. And it was at the end of this defence that I got 11.50 – of course, let's not get carried away – whilst my classmates got 17 and 18 for doing nothing."


Despite the obstacles put on her path, Francine – who had just started a PhD in a scientific discipline at the time of this interview – explained that her experience of racism began as early as her group work with her fellow Master’s students: *‘In my Bachelor’s degree, for example, we were in a group with two Senegalese students, one from Martinique, one from Guadeloupe and one French student of Algerian origin. And we’d always end up together; we’d laugh about it, and one of us would say we were the most cosmopolitan group. We all laughed, but deep down we all knew why we always ended up together whenever we had to form groups.’*

The Acadiscri survey of several university sites in France cited similar experiences:

“The questionnaire responses and interviews illustrate the more or less implicit mechanisms of racialisation experienced by minority students: derogatory remarks or looks (experienced by 33.2% of students); exclusion when tutorial groups are formed, linked to the grouping of racialised students together (6.6% of students and case 1); the construction of a problematic presence and the denial of French identity (cases 3 and 4); paternalistic condescension (case 2); the promotion of the figure of the ‘good exception’ (‘you’re still my favourite Arab’, interview with Walid by ZZ, 2018); the underestimation of students of colour by teachers (idem); differentiated expectations from a teacher who expects more or less from a student depending on their ethnicity (6.5% of students); the greater difficulty in finding an internship, particularly for female students wearing the hijab (interviews with Sarah by CM, 2017, and with Émilie by ZZ, 2018) ; or even sexual objectification (“you’re beautiful for a Black woman”, interview with Julie by ZZ, 2017).” - (Hajjat & Zoubir, 2025), p.61

The integration model of which France is so proud would suggest that teachers should ensure that new arrivals are integrated with local students in order to help them adapt to a new academic culture, thereby enhancing their chances of success. In reality, their isolation often leads to failure in their first year, thereby reinforcing racist stereotypes and prejudices of less intelligent people, whilst multiplying the administrative obstacles they face: *“The thing is, for international students, if you fail a year, you face problems with your residence permit. If you don’t obtain your degree, you end up without a residence permit.”* (Francine).

In the training and industrial attachment settings, discrimination sometimes takes on an institutional character. Louison, who works in a department responsible for equality and diversity, admits that Islamophobia is a real problem within her university: *“There is a real issue regarding the wearing of the hijab, with differences between what is permitted in lectures and in work placements. We know that discrimination is perpetuated by work placement supervisors in this regard, towards students who wear the hijab.”*

 **Cases of systemic discrimination by Faculty against African and Asian students are widespread in universities. Racism does not primarily manifest itself in the form of overt aggression, but through a combination of microaggressions, internalised stereotypes and mechanisms of trivialisation.**

Habiba, a faculty member, describes a conversation with a white colleague who, looking at the new intake of students, said: ***“We’ve gone from 20% to 90% Black students,” adding that the pass rate would therefore surely drop.***

In a similar vein, Pierre reported that a colleague who heads the international student admissions office asked, *“Why does our university only accept students from the African continent?”* Behind this question lay an implicit hierarchy of origins, in which Africa is perceived as an academic space of lesser value. Pierre mentioned staff members who refused to process the enrolment of an international

student, describing her as “*undocumented immigrant*”. As Black people are systematically associated in the white imagination with individuals of lesser intelligence, the racist and denigrating nature of such remarks cannot be downplayed.



The influence of the colonial and slave-owning mindset, which views Black people as intellectually inferior, remains evident in universities.

The commitment to international openness often touted in universities’ official statements is at odds with the prejudices—inherited from the era of slavery and colonialism—that permeate the attitudes of many white members of administrative staff and academic staff.

Just as the anti-immigration rhetoric currently saturating the European political and media landscape constitutes a paradox, the racism faced by racialised French and international students is counterproductive for the French HERIs sector. Universities are in competition with one another for dwindling financial resources. They all need to attract international students, a significant proportion of whom are racialised, in order to meet course admission quotas, particularly as tuition fees for non-EU students are now sixteen times higher than that of EU students¹⁸. Faculty and administrative staff need courses within their departments to be well attended so as to keep them open and to continue receiving funding from the relevant ministry. This, in turn, ensures the survival of their departments, their jobs and their salaries. Some degree programmes would be hard put to survive without the influx of international students. The careers of Faculty and researchers will be stunted (including bonuses and promotions) without their doctoral supervision work, a significant proportion of which involves racialised international PhD students. Yet the myth and narrative of a ‘civilising’ mission towards racialised (international) students remains very much alive among French faculty and researchers.

3.4.6 Racialised minorities largely kept in their ‘place’ within the university

The issue of the under-representation of people of colour in management positions is seen as one of the symptoms of the pervasive nature of racism in HERIs. For several participants, the composition of governing bodies reflects a form of institutional insularity that limits the recognition of minorities. Whilst HERIs claim to be social, inclusive and international spaces, senior leadership roles are predominantly held by white people. Cécile again sums it up with a touch of irony:

“I think the French need to open their eyes and realise that this version of France, the Marie-Antoinette era, is over. They need to see what’s happening today. The population is diverse. Everyone is different. It’s impossible to ignore ethnic differences. But in France, I know they’re very attached to the past – to a past that’s long gone.”

Cases of racialised academic staff in governance positions in universities and *Grandes Écoles* (elite special schools) in France are relatively rare, given their representation within the academic world and in the national population. By contrast, in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, it is no longer surprising to see people from racialised minority groups taking up such roles. As Samuel put it, **“When the university president is Black or when the professor is Black, that already changes a great deal.”**

(Beaman, 2012)’s publications entitled *“But Madam, we are French too”* and *“Are French people white?: Towards an understanding of whiteness in Republican France”* (Beaman, 2019) reveal all too well that, in the popular imagination, being French is associated with the condition of whiteness.

(Hamel, 2025) also noted that *“Research on whiteness (or critical white studies) has indeed shown that the invisibility of whiteness as an ethno-racial category and the perception of white as the absence of*

¹⁸ <https://www.campusfrance.org/fr/cout-etudes-superieures-france-frais-inscription>. Accessed on 2/02/2026.

colour are characteristic of social representations of the majority group (Sandeau and Kac-Vergne 2022)."

This absence or under-representation of racialised minorities is even more glaring in the academic disciplines that directly concern them. The case of Diane, of mixed heritage and alone in her research laboratory that is focused on colonial and African history, is another illustration of this continued epistemic colonisation:

"There aren't many people of colour in my lab. Yet my lab focuses on the Mediterranean. I'm the only person of colour, and I'm the only one working on colonial history and African history. There's not even really any need to talk about racism, because all the conferences, symposia and so on are just white people among themselves, so there you go. A research lab based in the region of XX that focuses on the Mediterranean – it's true that it came as a shock to me. And when I arrived myself, everyone looked at me as if to say, 'Well, how did you end up here, how did you get the contract, what are you doing here?' For me, that's where the problem lies. There isn't much diversity at the university" (Diane).

As a result, students and researchers from racialised backgrounds are often relegated to the role of learners when it comes to their own histories, cultures and bodies, with the positions of expertise almost exclusively held by white people. Several participants felt isolated with regard to the scarcity of similar profiles in their academic environment. Agathe summed up this feeling by saying: *"Being the only Black person in the class wasn't very pleasant."* These comments reflect a disconnect between formal membership and lived recognition: being present in the academic space does not guarantee full inclusion within it.

Maeva observed with bitterness: *"They say diversity is important, but in my year group of 270 students, there were only five of us who were Arab."* She added: *"Whenever we wanted to talk about racism, it was very difficult... I came up against a form of censorship from the administration."*

This disdain also came from other students. When she tried to organise talks on these topics, she received reactions that belittled her work, with comments such as *'oh, but you're just doing a bit of that indigenous stuff'*. On the issue of the violence of decolonisations, which is not taught, she says: *"I also think the teachers don't realise, and that's why I'm almost more angry with the teachers than with the students. Because, firstly, the teachers, as figures of authority, reinforce and legitimise what the students say. And also because they're teachers, they should know better."*

Loneliness, the need for constant vigilance, the need to watch one's words or moderate one's reactions—all of which weigh heavily on their relationship with learning and the institution—fuel a form of psychological fatigue among this population. Students and staff of color learn to anticipate misunderstandings and choose their words carefully, for fear of being perceived as "too sensitive" or "demanding." This emotional hypervigilance, described in the literature as *"race fatigue"* (Harrell, 2000), leads to lasting moral exhaustion: it does not result from violent acts, but from the silent repetition of microaggressions, isolation, and the lack of recognition of institutional legitimacy.

Other participants noted a French paradox: the "academic" value of a racialised faculty member or doctoral student increases in direct proportion to his/her having first spent some time abroad in an English-speaking university in a Western country. Jim testifies: *"My boss and I are the only racialised tenured faculty members in the department. We grew up abroad. In fact, I think the university finds it easier to recruit people of color when they didn't grow up in France. Being a Black French woman in France isn't interesting. On the other hand, if you've done something in the United States, then, yes, that becomes interesting."*

This distinction between the valued “foreigner of color” and the devalued “national person of color” reflects a subtle hierarchy between a valued English-speaking and western otherness, and a national otherness perceived as threatening or demeaning.



The contrast between institutional messaging about universities’ openness and inclusivity clashes with the reality on the ground: diversity is celebrated in official statements but rarely reflected in educational and academic structures

Valérie broadened the perspective. She noted the underrepresentation of minorities among faculty members— *“out of 250 staff members, barely three are from ethnic minorities”*—and the linguistic microaggressions experienced by students from the Pacific Islands. These observations reveal the structural nature of racism, embedded in imbalances of representation and recruitment practices. For her, *“students are the main victims,”* but it is the very organisation of the university that perpetuates these symbolic inequalities.

Elena noted: *“In my department, we’re all white. Talking about racism among ourselves is a bit like the white savior syndrome. [...] We have no minority representatives, so we have no problem talking about it.”*

Ada observed: *“When I receive emails from the central administration, I see a lot of names that sound Arabic, but we don’t see these people... they’re the foot soldiers, not the ones in leadership positions.”*

Asma also points out the near-total absence of people of color in her department: *“Where are the people of color? They’re in the cafeteria and they’re doing cleaning work. (...) They were constantly checking my ID to let me in, even though I’d been there for five years.”* Selma, who works in an administrative department, observed that **the careers of people of color are systematically stunted:** *“They’re placed in categories where the waiting is long... these are people who will never reach the higher category. (...) Some end up fulfilling the role expected of them—that of the token Arab or the submissive Black woman.”*


This implicit assignment of minorities to subordinate roles reproduces a symbolic and unacknowledged racial hierarchy.

This observation is shared by Amel, who mentioned the lack of diversity as one moves up the ranks: *“I’m alone [...] I was the only one for years [...] it’s true that as you move up a bit in the ranks, well, there are fewer and fewer of us.”* Habiba and Floriane also confirmed this homogeneity at the top of the hierarchy: *“in the teaching staff, I counted about 19% [...] I’m the only one”* (Habiba); *“Well, it’s very simple: we have one Black woman, and that’s it. There are about thirty of us.”* (Floriane). As for Louison: *“It’s a real issue that there are also people of color in governance and decision-making bodies. We can’t just track the number of people of color because those aren’t necessarily leadership positions. We also need to ensure that leadership roles are filled—and not just by white people.”*

The Acadiscri survey also found that the experiences of people of color at university are marked by various forms of racism—some more explicit than others—on an almost daily basis:

“Institutional racism intersects with everyday racism in the interactions of racialised employees with their work environment. We observe a dual process whereby these employees are concentrated in various contractual statuses and in entry-level positions within permanent roles. (...) At the level of workplace interactions, these policies manifest in deteriorated working relationships where everyday racism takes the form of microaggressions, the frequency and variety of which lead to a deterioration in working conditions. They manifest through the imposition of numerous small humiliations and acts of exclusion, as well as through the imposition of degrading work schedules.” (Hamel, 2025) p. 70.

People of colour in France were twice as likely to be hired on temporary contracts than their white counterparts (Hamel, 2025) p. 89

 **The testimonies describe a racialised division of roles, in which people of colour and from minority backgrounds predominantly occupy operational or precarious roles, and rarely hold leadership or decision-making positions. This unequal distribution of roles fosters a form of intrinsic invisibility and illegitimacy: minorities are present, but only in their expected roles, at the bottom of the ladder, with no real power of representation.**

The racial hierarchy of positions and responsibilities in HERIs is simply a reflection of the racial hierarchy of roles across all sectors of activity in France. While racism affects all racialised minorities, **anti-Black racism** takes on a biological character inherited from the slavery and colonial era, where the Black phenotype and skin color are associated with degrading animalistic traits (savagery, stupidity, docility, low intelligence) (Licra & IFOP, 2026), (CNCDH, 2019). This matrix of biological racism is then channelled through racist microaggressions and across the various levels of racism (individual, institutional, systemic, and structural). In the popular imagination, Black people cannot attain leadership positions without arousing suspicion and hostility from the white majority group, which perceives itself as being “downgraded.” The result is the holding back of Black French citizens and immigrants in subordinate roles, excluding them from political, scientific, economic, and cultural power centers.

3.4.7 Strategies for coping with the trauma caused by racism

As numerous studies (CNCDH, 2023), (Bozec et al., 2024) and the results of our quantitative survey showed (see section 2.1.2 above), racism is one of the least frequently reported forms of discrimination: only 1 in 10 incidents is reported. This is due to a lack of confidence among victims and witnesses in the mechanisms put in place by the state (courts) and by institutions to combat this type of discrimination, and the failure to enforce the sanctions provided for by law, which leads to impunity for perpetrators. Far from being a space for free speech, the university is a world where speaking out against racism comes at a very high cost, both socially and professionally. Anne, an equality and anti-discrimination officer at her institution, acknowledges the persistent difficulty in encouraging reports: *“The first challenge is how to encourage those affected—whether victims or witnesses—to come forward and report incidents.”*

Many participants said they have given up on any official action for fear of reprisals: *“If we say anything, afterwards people look at us askance [...] so we protect ourselves by keeping quiet.”* Amel. Clémence confided: *“I think people are afraid [...] they tell themselves it will backfire on them.”*

This fear of reprisals contributes to the fragmentation of experiences: each person faces a structural and systemic situation alone. Consequently, victims and witnesses adopt various strategies that range from silence and downplaying the issue, to resorting to official channels perceived as ineffective, and to individual resistance. Karim described situations where, faced with a racist joke, *“either people laughed or kept quiet... at best awkward, at worst humiliating”*. The same participant added: *“If I say it bothers me, people will tell me I’m playing the victim, that it was just a joke... that the problem lies with me.”* Ilham admitted she did not report it, convinced that *“it would be pointless”*, whilst Jim said he felt *“utterly powerless to act”* before the equality task force was set up. Francine summed up her personal strategy in the face of the many acts of discrimination she has endured:

“No, I’ve never reported anything because I’m a researcher. I don’t want to get canceled. I didn’t want to get canceled in the industry because I know what I want to do. At some point, you just tell yourself, ‘Go on, it’ll blow over, just one more year, then you’ll be gone, and they won’t see you again.’ From where I stand, I can see that’s not true. I bump into them at conferences, seminars and forums. I realise I won’t be able to work in this field as long as I stay in Marseille because they’re there.”

Isolation and a sense of exclusion can lead to avoiding coming to the university. Diane, a PhD student and the only person of mixed heritage in her research laboratory, described the physical unease she feels at the thought of coming to university:

“I don’t really feel comfortable physically at university in the sense that I don’t usually stay there for very long. I don’t eat there. I mean, I don’t feel at ease in my own skin when I’m at university, so I really only go there when I absolutely have to. I go to pick up a book for a seminar or to attend a lecture, but apart from that, I’m not really there.”

Elena evoked her loss of self-confidence, leading to *“less collaboration, less speaking up”*. Jim talked of recurring anxiety attacks he felt following episodes of humiliation, whilst Asma described a gradual isolation: *“I ended up avoiding certain teachers, because I knew I would be put to the test again.”* Kader, for his part, mentioned his difficulties concentrating during his exams after seeing racist graffiti in the lift reading *“Re-migration”* on pro-Palestine stickers.

In some cases, the administration’s inaction and the deadlock drive victims to exile or to resignation. Asma said she *“left France because I could no longer bear”* the experiences of marginalisation. Yves described a local atmosphere in Lyon saturated with far-right rhetoric that drove him to leave his institution.

The national Ifop/Licra survey of 14,025 people confirmed that ***“The psychological and existential consequences of racism are profound and long-lasting (...)*** 7% [of victims] have had suicidal thoughts. (...) *The temptation to leave the country reflects the intensity of the distress felt: 22% of victims have already considered leaving France.»* (Licra & IFOP, 2026)


For a proportion of racialised Faculty, researchers and PhD students, leaving the country becomes the only option for regaining not only some academic legitimacy, but also career progression that is commensurate with their skills and ambitions. Those departures are mainly towards English-speaking countries (Canada, the United States and the UK).

The lack of diversity among authority figures and peers reinforces the feelings of isolation and makes it difficult to find institutional support: *“Even just being part of an ethnic minority, we know we’re more vulnerable. [...] These reactions reinforce feelings of inferiority and learned helplessness.”* (Elena). *“Their views are sometimes given less consideration, and they feel less legitimate,”* says Agathe. The sense of vulnerability caused by the victims’ isolation leads them to withdraw or practise self-censorship, in an environment where the voices of minorities remain precarious. Saying nothing becomes a way of preserving one’s position and of avoiding jeopardising professional relationships.

In the rare instances where a victim or witness of racism chooses to speak out or report an incident, the psychological, professional and personal cost is often exorbitant. Ada recounted how publicly challenging the head of her department over stereotypical remarks made during a jury discussion about an African student led to her being isolated with negative consequences for her career: the silence of her white colleagues present was compounded by stigmatisation and marginalisation that she continues to experience to this day within her department. No protection was offered to her by the university services to whom she reported the negative consequences following her complaint. Individual resistance therefore relies on personal resources—academic status, legal knowledge, union support or activist conviction—which are not accessible to everyone. The act of speaking out becomes a struggle in which only those who are psychologically ‘strongest’ and possessed of academic capital (high standing, knowledge of academic rules, standards and procedures at both local and national levels) can engage. For others, professional survival depends on coping strategies: circumventing obstacles, avoiding confrontation or relying on external support. These coping strategies, whilst effective in the short term, cannot counteract the profound effects of exclusion and the emotional toll racism takes on the victims. This individualisation of trauma prevents institutional change in power dynamics and, in the long term, leads to a sense of moral and professional burnout.

These accounts corroborate those in the *Le Monde* article “*At university, people of colour don’t always feel they belong*” (Nasi, 2023), which we cited in the quantitative survey section, detailing the microaggressions to which racialised people are subjected on a daily basis.

Our interviews showed that racism acts as a cumulative stressor (Carter, 2007): it is not only expressed in interactions, but becomes ingrained in the body and mind, it manifesting as anxiety, fatigue, demotivation or symbolic disaffiliation. In short, the psychological effects of racism are not merely a matter of individual suffering, but of a collective sense of internalised otherness. Loneliness, emotional exhaustion and constant vigilance reflect a silent reality: that of formal inclusion which does not translate into a lived experience of equality.

 **Overall, these accounts highlight a twofold effect: on the one hand, persistent psychological and professional distress, fuelled by stigmatisation, invisibility and career stagnation; on the other hand, the lack of an institutional response capable of alleviating the psychological burden of the suffering and injustices endured.**

These accounts merely confirm the experiences of racism faced by racialised minorities in the workplace. In her book *Everyday Racism at Work*, the clinical psychologist Marie-France (Custos-Lucidi, 2024) showed that **racism in the workplace is not limited to isolated incidents but is systemic in nature**. It is embedded in organisational structures that assign individuals to subordinate positions based on their background, skin colour, as well as their social class and gender. This racial assignment acts as an invisible yet powerful mechanism, often difficult for the victims themselves to articulate, due to the prevailing climate of denial and the fear of being dismissed — accusations of exaggeration, paranoia and victimisation being the most common. Her patients’ accounts revealed a wide variety of situations: verbal humiliations, physical violence, wage discrimination, career blockages, exploitation, psychological and sexual harassment. These experiences cause **intense psychological suffering, which can lead to suicidal thoughts**. The silence of colleagues, the inaction or complicity of the management further reinforce the victims’ isolation. The author criticised the ineffectiveness of current institutional non-discrimination policies (membership of diversity charters and labels) in the face of a deeply rooted problem. Racism thus appears as a tool for management and domination within organisations.

3.4.8 Lack of training programmes specifically aimed at combating racism

Almost all participants stated that they had never received training on racism, whether through internal modules, external workshops or professional development programmes. This lack of dedicated training on racism and the lack of ethnic diversity at the university’s decision-making levels appear as symptoms of the same problem: an institution for which racism is reduced to its interpersonal form and which remains blind to its structural dimension. Regarding this lack of dedicated training, Isaure was emphatic: “*None whatsoever.*” Ousmane confirmed: “*Never... never heard that there are training courses or anything like that.*” This observation of a lack of training is consistent across all categories of staff and students interviewed, whether administrative staff, lecturers or PhD students.

Participants highlighted the selective focus of existing training programmes, which concentrate more on certain forms of discrimination at the expense of others: “*In five years, I’ve never attended a single session that explained what everyday racism actually is. On antisemitism, on sexism, yes. But the issue of Islam, of Islamophobia, of racism, isn’t addressed at all.*” (Maeva). Floriane observed: “*We have lots of initiatives for LGBTQIA+ minorities... but the issue of race, no.*” Yves added: “*I never had a single course on racial issues. (...) When we talked about racial issues, it was just to say nonsensical things. (...) I took a whole course on the sociology of the working classes, and we didn’t talk about racial issues. Even though it was right there in front of us.*”

Selma described a Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination unit in her university *“that merely recycles the same themes without any added value”*. She highlighted this void in explicit terms: *“I haven’t seen a single one—not a single one—dealing with this issue, whether it’s a self-directed online course or a face-to-face training session; it simply doesn’t exist, and I don’t think that’s right (...) as long as there’s no information, there’s no awareness, and that’s just paving the way for racism.”*

This lack of training is seen as a factor in perpetuating inequalities, as it prevents any collective awareness from developing. Worse still, it creates an implicit hierarchy among different forms of discrimination. Armelle stresses the need to identify racism as a distinct issue, rather than subsuming it under a generic category of discrimination.

Some individual initiatives go some way towards filling this gap. Aya, a teacher, explained that she took the initiative to create a compulsory course on racism and xenophobia for her second- and third-year students: *“I created a module... it’s compulsory... they’ve all done it.”*

Lucie, a secondary school teacher and university lecturer, explained that she found it easier to explore the topic of racial discrimination with her sixth-form students from a working-class neighbourhood in the city, who taught her a great deal. However, at the university, where she had hoped to find the conceptual tools and content to tackle this subject with her students, no training existed. These examples of personal commitment remain isolated, however, and rely on the initiative of socially conscious individuals rather than on a comprehensive institutional policy. Indeed, in both cases, these participants had to make considerable efforts to set up these training modules.

Whilst all participants agreed on the need for training specifically addressing racism, opinions differed on whether such training should be compulsory. Indeed, some fear it could backfire if attendance is made compulsory: *“When people don’t want to be there, it’s more counterproductive than anything else,”* observed one participant. Others, such as Jim, stressed the need to make these training sessions compulsory to ensure they do not only reach an audience that is already convinced: *“In the long term, it must be compulsory, but with a phased implementation.”*


Clémence emphasised the importance of a systematic approach: *“It has to be imposed on everyone, otherwise nothing will ever change.”* Sonia believes that *“it should be part of general university culture... not just an optional extra.”* Isaure suggested a gradual approach to raising awareness: *“Even a short training course, but one held regularly, would be a start.”* Mélanie believes that *“it would be useful in any case”* and that *“it’s not a waste of time.”*

Emma, for her part, **believes that particular emphasis should be placed on training the teaching staff:** *“I think it would be a really good idea for teachers. They are less aware of these issues and less familiar with the terminology, so it would be more useful.”*

The idea would be to integrate anti-racist content into the curricula through incentive schemes for teachers, or to create compulsory training modules in the form of short videos accessible to all students and staff: *“a compulsory half-day training session or a self-directed but compulsory module (...) so that these issues can be understood; otherwise, we run the risk of perpetuating them unconsciously”* (Claire).

A consensus also emerged on the need to diversify teaching approaches to make them creative, artistic and participatory: ***“It has to be interactive... so that people can put themselves in the others’ shoes.”*** Thus, Soraya believes that *“theatre can be a good way of raising awareness (...) some will remain racist at heart, but they won’t express it and won’t victimise others”*. These ideas reflect a desire to combine the teaching of knowledge with experiential learning in order to go beyond mere moral imperatives.

There is also a demand for training from people who identify as white and wish to better understand their own unconscious biases or stereotypes. Indeed, several accounts highlighted the difficulty—particularly for white people—to grasp the full complexity of the ways in which racism can operate and its real impact on victims: *“Racism is a word that hides a whole range of different realities. Until these things are explained, as a white person, it’s a really abstract concept. (...) You might think you’re not racist, yet you’re acting in a slightly racist way without realising it.”* (Alan).

 **These proposals reflect a need to recognise racism as a professional competence in its own right, on a par with issues of gender or disability.**


This call for visible commitment stems from the conviction that antiracism education should not be left to individual initiatives but should be part of an institutional policy embedded in everyday practices.

It is not merely a matter of morality, but of creating a shared standard where knowledge of racism becomes a professional skill. Other participants **advocated increasing cooperation between their universities and local civic associations to organise campus activities**. Some institutions have already established this type of cooperation: *“It’s a student society that handles all the organisation. They present their project, secure funding and take care of everything.”* (Anne).

These grassroots initiatives appear to be an essential link in the implementation of an inclusive policy, often proving more effective than formal institutional mechanisms.

However, these partnerships can be a source of disagreement or even controversy. Mélanie reported that workshops run by the LICRA (International League Against Racism and Antisemitism) organisations at her institution were *“boycotted by students”*, with the association being accused of downplaying Islamophobia. This boycott highlights the disconnect between institutional choices and the expectations of marginalised the student populations.

Outsourcing and subcontracting the fight against racism to organisations outside the university must not become the standard approach to managing this issue, allowing the governing bodies of HERIs to ‘wash their hands’ of a taboo subject that is difficult to address. Without challenging the cultures and practices embedded in their institutional routines that allow racism to persist, a day or two of forum theatre or visits to memorial sites will not put an end to centuries of prejudice and stereotypes, which are the breeding ground for racism.

 **The expectations expressed focus on three key areas: firstly, addressing a clear lack of anti-racism education, which is seen as a major shortcoming in awareness-raising initiatives; secondly, integrating anti-racism content into subject-specific curricula across university departments; and finally, making such training compulsory and multi-level, so as to reach not only students but also the teaching staff, administrative staff and management.**

3.4.9 Suggestions to improve the fight against racism in higher education and research

Following this very somber picture, participants were asked about potential courses of action and avenues for improvement in combating racism more effectively. Among the areas where there was broad consensus, targeted training programmes were cited as the top priority, followed by **calls for the strict enforcement of sanctions already provided for by law** but rarely applied by institutions, a situation which fosters a sense of impunity and tolerance. Ada pointed out that *“as long as there are no consequences, there will be no change”*. This is essentially Cecile’s view, for whom the blatant racism of her department head constitutes a criminal offence: *“What she’s doing is a crime. What she does to the students is something I’ve frankly never seen before”*.

Cecile advocates combining disciplinary measures with compulsory training for teachers:

“And really talk about the consequences – the most serious ones, the legal consequences – that this is a crime, that they can’t do that, and give concrete examples. Like, ‘If you say this, that and the other, that’s racism’. ‘If you do this, this and this, that’s racism.’ And explain it as if you were talking to a five-year-old, because that way—since everyone is attending this meeting to defend their own interests—I think it would also be useful to make this training compulsory for all teachers as soon as they start at the university. So tell them, ‘Hello, welcome, there’s this training here, it’s compulsory, please complete it before signing your contract, because it’s important.’” In the same way that they asked if we were properly vaccinated against COVID before hiring us, I think everyone needs to take this training, even if it’s an online course, but one that really captures people’s attention. It’s not just multiple-choice questions or optional exercises, but really about writing and thinking critically, so we don’t end up hiring racist teachers.”

 **The systems for reporting and addressing discrimination suffer from a severe lack of funding and resources.**

Some of the staff working in the Equality, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination department HERIs are on fixed-term contracts. This undermines their ability to take initiatives and leaves them vulnerable to decisions made by their institutions’ governing bodies. In cases where institutions also have a Vice-Presidency for Equality and Anti-Discrimination, this post is filled by a Faculty member who must also carry out their usual teaching and research duties. Anne, Equality and Diversity Officer, says:

“The budget is extremely limited. I’m on my own. Obviously, this is a role that deserves more than just one person to handle it.”

Regarding the value of charters as a means of securing a more binding commitment from HERIs on this issue, participants were more divided on the form and practical arrangements for implementing such charters, although the idea was generally seen as relevant. *The French National Plan to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism and Discrimination Based on Origin (2023–2026)* by former Prime Minister Elisabeth (Borne, 2023) recommended that HERIs adhere or apply for a certification demonstrating their commitment to equality and the fight against discrimination, and to implement meaningful and measurable actions. French universities are already signatories of various charters concerning equality and non-discrimination towards different sections of the population — **the LGBT+ Commitment Charter, the Diversity Charter, and the Charter for Gender Equality**. But unlike certain English-speaking countries (United Kingdom and Canada), there is no antiracism charter for HERIs in France. Participants raised the possibility of extending the logic of gender parity—already imposed in HERIs by the presidents of French universities (France Université)—to ethnic diversity, an idea that was considered both stimulating and controversial.

Anne suggested the introduction of a ‘diversity charter’ as a means of raising visibility and providing symbolic legitimacy: ‘A diversity charter, designed as a first step towards a certification process, could send out an interesting signal.’ However, she believes this approach remains dependent on sufficient human resources.

The adoption of anti-racism measures implemented in foreign universities within the French context has sparked both interest and scepticism. The introduction of affirmative *Action*¹⁹ (AA) since 1965 has helped to redress centuries of discriminatory treatment inflicted on Black Americans, but Trump’s return to the White House in January 2025 brought an end to decades of AA policies aimed at correcting some of the systemic and structural inequalities that Black Americans continue to face. In the United Kingdom, the Equality Act 2010 includes a provision known as ‘positive action’²⁰ which enables organisations in the public sector to address inequalities in the representation of ethnic


¹⁹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affirmative_action_in_the_United_States for the history. Accessed on 16/10/2025.

²⁰ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/positive-action-in-the-workplace-guidance-for-employers/positive-action-in-the-workplace> for an explanation of this mechanism and the contexts in which it is applied. Accessed on 16/10/2025.

minorities within an organisation. More specifically, the creation of the *Race Equality Charter*²¹ in the higher education and research sector, this is a sign of the clear commitment by UK higher education and research institutions to allocate significant resources to a proactive policy to combat racism. The **Race Equality Charter (REC)** has been signed by over 100 UK universities. Adherence to the REC involves an audit of the institution's structures and institutional culture, as well as quantifiable and measurable commitments whose achievement level is assessed at each new membership renewal. Signatory institutions receive one of three medals – bronze, silver or gold – intended to reward the effort they have made in achieving the objectives set to combat racism.

Aya, who has lived abroad, confirms the difference in the lived experience for people of colour: *"I spent six months in England... actually, in English-speaking countries, in my experience, people have never behaved in the same way as in France... the relationship isn't the same with the former colonies."*

In Canada, the national awakening sparked by the racist murder of George Floyd in 2020 prompted Canadian universities to develop and adopt '**The Scarborough Charter**' which aims to combat *"anti-Black racism and promote the inclusion of Black people in higher education in Canada."*²² To date, more than 40 Canadian universities have signed it. The Scarborough Charter is just one example among other explicit commitments to combat the discrimination affecting other ethnic groups in Canadian higher education²³.

 **The non reckoning of France with its slavery and colonial legacy is an obstacle to the emergence of explicit anti-racist policies and cultures.**

Opinions are more divided on ways to address the lack of representation of racialised minority groups at certain levels and in certain areas of the university. Farid observed: *"I believe that such a poorly designed or poorly implemented policy could lead to people like me being sidelined (...) For me, we must do everything we can to ensure that the most deserving people can access what they are entitled to."*

Karim added: *"If I applied for a job tomorrow and realised I'd been accepted to meet a quota rather than for the quality of my work, that would bother me (...) I feel it's a crutch; we're treating a symptom rather than the underlying problem."*

Behind this line of reasoning, which emphasises meritocracy, lies a fear that recognition will be conditional on corrective measures perceived as artificial, as well as a tension between the desire to ensure diversity and the fear of being subjected to reverse discrimination. Indeed, these policies have been successfully attacked by far-right parties in the United States, where Affirmative Action was abolished by Trump on the grounds that it was discriminatory towards white people, who constitute the majority group and dominate in all the positions of power.

Aware of the lack of diversity within the institution itself, Jade believes that implementing this model would be impossible in France: *"It just wouldn't be possible,"* given that *"people of colour make up barely 1 or 2 per cent"* of her year group, whilst Anne mentions *"perhaps two per cent"* of teachers from minority backgrounds. Jade also points out the legal constraints: *"In France, we're not allowed to conduct surveys on ethnicity or race."*

But others see such measures as a strong political signal: *"That would be very interesting. It would help to reaffirm the principle of non-discrimination and send a message to all students."* (Anne). Agathe is also in favour of it, though she sees it as a transitional measure: *"Initially, positive discrimination is somewhat necessary to change attitudes. And then, once people have been able to access positions on an equal footing with others, we could do without it."*

²¹ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter>.

²² <https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/scarborough-charter/>.

²³ The charters, commitments and working groups on anti-racism at the University of Toronto can be found at <https://commitments.utoronto.ca/> and at <https://people.utoronto.ca/inclusion/anti-racism-strategic-tables/>. Accessed on 12/03/2026.

Other participants express the view that a temporary scheme can be “useful for correcting imbalances”, whilst highlighting its fragility: “*The day we remove this scheme, parity is over.*” (Pierre). For Armelle, “*such a framework would at least allow us to demonstrate a clear commitment*”, whilst Juliette points out that “*the conceptual tools already exist, but France is lagging behind in their implementation*”.

Aware of the obstacles of transposing English-speaking models of anti-racism charters to French the national context, Rania observed: “*There will always be people who oppose it... many people prefer to avoid the subject or find it taboo.*” Ada acknowledged that “*a charter of commitment like the UK’s Race Equality Charter would be desirable*”, whilst admitting that “*in the current political climate of rising unabashed racism and white supremacy in Europe and the West, such an initiative has little chance of success, but we must try*”.

Amel continued: “*In France, it’s complicated... it’s clear that there is also a desire to keep the concepts vague.*” This conceptual vagueness contributes to a structural invisibility of the racial issue, keeping it at a distance from the arenas of power and strategic thinking.

Camille, for his part, stressed the need to move beyond symbolic gestures: “*Charters are just three words on a piece of paper. What matters is providing proper training, breaking down taboos, and making people understand that we are part of a racist system and that it is everyone’s responsibility to educate themselves so as not to perpetuate these patterns.*” However, he remains clear-eyed about the risks of circumvention: “*Introducing charters and parity requirements gives ammunition to the movement. But if nobody wants to change, nothing will change, even with a charter.*” (Camille).

Behind this remark lies a critique of institutional performativity: posters and slogans are no substitute for the groundwork required to address enduring colonial representations and practices.

The comparisons with anti-racism initiatives abroad (UK, the US and Canada) inspired interest and reflection, but participants emphasised the specific characteristics of a French culture and history, characterised by a denial of structural and systemic racism and by a fear of “making race a criterion”. They feared the risk of tokenism, where symbolic representation would take precedence over the actual transformation of power relations. The issue of diversity within governing bodies therefore elicited a nuanced consensus: representativeness is deemed necessary, but its implementation raises concerns.

Finally, some participants feared that people of colour might be exploited for political ends or overburdened, which risks of exacerbating their isolation and thus leading to physical and mental exhaustion (race battle fatigue). Several participants advocated putting in place procedural measures: anonymous recruitment process, statistical monitoring of applications, the adoption of an explicit anti-racism charter or the conscious diversification of selection panels, the introduction of an annual survey on perceptions of racism, tougher sanctions against offending teaching staff, or the systematic inclusion of the issue of racial discrimination in the initial training of administrative staff.

Between the defense of meritocracy – at the risk of perpetuating *de facto* inequalities, as we are not all equal in front of opportunities – and the need for regulation, a middle ground emerged: that of a **binding but non-numerical public commitment**. These positions reflect a desire for a careful recognition: making injustice visible without resorting to the symbolism of quotas, encouraging institutional commitment, reporting, and measurable institutional sanctions.



Participants called for a public commitment from their leadership teams, in the form of binding charters and mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of anti-discrimination policies put in place.

The plurality of experiences and perspectives revealed by these 56 interviews provides a wealth of material for understanding how tensions arising from ethno-racial and social inequalities within French HERIs are constructed, expressed and managed.

IV. Convergence between the findings of the quantitative and qualitative phases

A comparison the two phases of the survey – quantitative and qualitative – conducted across the seven HERIs provides a more detailed understanding of how racism manifests itself and is managed within these institutions. The two parts of the survey do not merely provide parallel findings: they respond to and complement one another, painting a picture of an institutional landscape where selective visibility, forms of avoidance and persistent grey areas intermingle. Whilst the quantitative phase enabled a statistical mapping of perceptions, behaviours and attitudes towards racism, the qualitative phase revealed its underlying drivers, the logic of avoidance and its subjective effects. Together, the two phases paint a contrasting picture in which the institutions' professed openness coexists with a form of structural denial and the invisibilisation of the phenomenon.

Both approaches agree on one key finding: racism is indeed present within the institutions, but it remains largely **under-reported, trivialised and inadequately addressed**. The quantitative survey highlighted a recurring paradox: whilst a majority of respondents said they felt relatively comfortable talking about racism, **more than half of them stated that they did not know who to turn to in the event of a racist incident**. This discrepancy between acknowledging the problem and activating institutional reporting mechanisms is fully confirmed by the interviews, in which participants described a climate of mistrust, of fear of direct or indirect reprisals, and deep skepticism regarding the effectiveness of existing procedures. The reported ease of speaking out does not, therefore, translate into actual action. The contrast between what is said and what is experienced highlights the persistence of **epistemic self-censorship**, which curtails the institution's capacity for self-criticism.

Mistrust of internal mechanisms for reporting discrimination is another point of convergence between the two phases of the survey. Whilst the figures indicate a significant prevalence of racist behaviour, few people use official channels to report it (1 in 10 racist incidents). **The very low proportion of reported incidents in both phases of the survey is therefore a second point of convergence**. The interviews help to understand the reasons behind this mistrust: participants describe experiences where reported incidents were reclassified as 'interpersonal difficulties', thereby stripping the racial dimension of its political and institutional significance. Many mentioned reports that went unaddressed, points of contact perceived as distant, and units whose existence is considered purely theoretical. These accounts highlighted a tendency towards the administrative neutralisation of racism, which is perceived as a reputational risk to be contained rather than a structural phenomenon to be addressed as such.

The interviews also revealed other reasons for not reporting incidents: fear of reprisals, lack of confidence in the confidentiality of the reporting mechanisms, a sense that the process is futile, the exorbitant psychological cost, and the risk of isolation. The decision not to report thus appears to be a rational strategy for coping and self-protection in an environment perceived as hostile or unresponsive. In other words, **silence is not a lack of awareness, but the consequence of an institutional under-response that perpetuates the normalisation and impunity of perpetrators**.

Both phases of the survey also point to the **institutional prioritisation of discrimination**. The questionnaire reveals that, although racism is identified as the primary cause of discrimination, the few awareness-raising and training initiatives remain largely invisible, little known and poorly attended, and are ultimately ineffective compared to the resources allocated to other issues deemed more institutionally legitimate. The interviews confirm this perception by showing that the fight against racism often appears to be relegated to the background, treated as an *ad hoc*, optional or

outsourced issue, thereby contributing to a sense of invisibility and of continued impunity for perpetrators.

The fourth point of convergence concerns understanding of the various concepts related to racism. Whilst most participants in both phases understood the meaning of everyday or interpersonal racism, **few understood the distinctions between systemic, structural or institutional racism.** The majority of respondents associate racism with individual behaviour, rarely with structures. However, the interviews reveal its more systemic nature: racism manifests itself through recruitment processes, the under-representation of minorities, hierarchies of knowledge and forms of academic elitism. **This disconnect between individual racism and structural racism** highlights the limitations of a statistical approach to a phenomenon deeply rooted in social and organisational dynamics.

The gap between institutional discourse and lived experiences is equally evident in the cross-analysis of the data. The quantitative results establish a statistically significant link between ethn racial self-identification and exposure to racism: **people who identify as racialised are more likely to be victims of or witnesses of racial discrimination than those who identify as white.** The interviews provide empirical depth to this finding: islamophobic insults, colonial stereotypes in academic assessment, discrimination based on patronyms, physical appearance or religion, and under-representation in promotions or decision-making spaces. These accounts show that racism operates less through visible aggression than through repeated microaggressions, implicit doubts about competence, normalised jokes and constant judgmental looks. This asymmetry in experiences is the most consistent finding across both methods: racism is not distributed evenly and is rooted in hierarchical social relations.

There is also a strong consensus regarding the central role played by **hierarchical relations** in the creation and perpetuation of racism. Quantitative analysis shows that Faculty members were the category most identified as perpetrators of racist remarks or behaviour, whilst students were the main victims. The interviews expanded on this finding by showing how the academic and administrative dependence of students, PhD students and staff on precarious contracts considerably limits their ability to speak out. The position of authority held by the perpetrators makes any challenge risky, or even costly in professional and psychological terms.

The spatialisation of racism is another key point of convergence. Quantitative data showed that reported incidents occurred more frequently in enclosed spaces governed by institutional norms—classrooms, examination boards, one-to-one interactions—than in public places. Participants who confirmed having been victims or witnesses rarely mention street scenes or places outside the institution, but rather describe experiences situated at the very heart of academic systems: thesis defenses, thesis marking, and authoritarian teaching relationships. This finding is sociologically significant as it indicates **that racism in HERIs is institutionally mediated, embedded in academic routines, power dynamics and settings where the scientific legitimacy and symbolic standing of individuals are judged.** Thus, everyday academic life is structured as a space where racism can remain discreet and muted, yet all the more destructive because it affects the intellectual recognition and careers of those concerned.

The combined analysis also reveals a strong demand for antiracism education, aimed not only at students but above all at teaching, research and administrative staff. The interviews highlighted the limitations of current policies: training courses are perceived as being too theoretical, too general, and disconnected from everyday university life. Several participants called for more interactive formats, grounded in real-life situations and capable of bringing about a genuine change in perceptions, capable of moving beyond the neutral republican framework that erases power relations related to

the clearly visible differences in bodies. Participants lamented the lack of effective policies that translate these statements of intent into concrete educational practices.

Finally, the most significant structuring convergence is the **dearth of people of colour in leadership positions** within the university. Whereas the questionnaire tended to isolate specific acts, the interviews highlighted mechanisms instead. Participants expressed a **strong expectation of diversity in leadership roles**, and the interviews confirmed that the presence of people of colour in governance will be seen as a catalyst for change. The lack of diversity is not merely a deficit in representation, but a symptom of the structural elitism embedded in HERIs in France, which contributes to excluding socially marginalised groups (based on social background, ethnicity or gender) from the most prestigious courses and positions.

Whilst there are many points of convergence, certain points of divergence emerged between the quantitative and qualitative results; these are not contradictions, but rather **methodological effects** that reveal the complexity of the phenomenon under study. The quantitative survey makes it possible to objectify general trends — proportions of victims, witnesses, levels of awareness or reporting — but it tends to smooth over individual experiences and underestimate the cumulative, emotional and biographical dimensions of racism. Interviews, by contrast, provide insight into the depth of life trajectories marked by repeated microaggressions, symbolic humiliations and pervasive discrimination, the accumulation of which has lasting effects on mental health, careers and the sense of belonging to the institution.

A notable divergence concerns the stated **ability to identify racism**. Quantitatively, a majority of respondents claimed to be able to classify a behaviour or remark as racist rather than as another form of discrimination. The interviews however significantly nuance this assertion: in real-life situations, the implicit, trivialised or humorous nature of many remarks makes it difficult to classify them as such, particularly when victims anticipate accusations of playing the victim or of exaggerating. This divergence highlights the gap between a stated ability and the practical difficulty of identifying racism in highly hierarchical institutional contexts.

The interviews also revealed aspects that were largely overlooked in the questionnaire, notably **the coping and survival strategies adopted by people of colour**: silence, avoidance, downplaying, over-investment in work or identity, or even a gradual withdrawal from the institution. These strategies, whilst effective in the short term for self-protection, paradoxically contribute to the perpetuation of racism by preventing its visibility and collective recognition. They thus shed light on the low reporting rates observed in the quantitative survey, demonstrating that past institutional inaction fuels a lasting sense of fatalism towards existing mechanisms and drives victims to silence.

Taken together, the findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases do not merely corroborate one another: they complement and reinforce each other. The quantitative approach enables us to situate individual experiences within broader collective trends and to objectively assess the scale of the phenomenon, whilst the qualitative approach reveals the **institutional, symbolic and emotional** mechanisms that explain the persistence of racism. This triangulation highlights a form of racism that is at once structural, pervasive and largely invisible, the management of which remains hampered by measures perceived as inadequately tailored and by an organisational culture characterised by avoidance, the prioritisation of other issues and by silence.

This situation is characteristic of a system of ‘selective visibility’: certain types of discrimination are addressed by clear and robust policies – particularly sexism and gender violence – whilst the racial dimension, despite being a structurally decisive factor in students’ and staff educational experience, remains marginalised and difficult to articulate.

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Appendix 1

Detailed description of the questionnaire variables

	Question	Variable type	
1	A1 - Gender	Categorical	Single-choice (3 options)
2	A2 - Age group	Ordinal	Single-choice (5 options)
3	A3 - Status	Categorical	Single-choice (7 options)
4	A4 - Years in higher education and research	Ordinal	Single-choice (5 options)
5	A5 - Academic discipline	Categorical	Single-choice (8 options)
6	B1 - Comfort in discussing racism	Ordinal	Rating scale (5 options)
7	B2 - Knowing who to turn to in the event of racism	Binary	True/False + comment
8	B3 - Reports made regarding racism	Binary	True/False
9	B4 - Recipient of the report	Multiple categorical	Multiple-choice (14 options)
10	B5 – Clarity of information regarding the handling of the incident	Ordinal	Rating scale (4 options)
11	B6 – Assessment of the handling of the incident	Ordinal	Rating scale (5 options)
12	B7 – Proposals for awareness-raising on racism	Multiple categorical	Multiple-choice (5 options) + comment
13	B8 – Awareness of awareness-raising activities on racism	Binary	True/False
14	B9 – Participation in these activities	Binary	True/False + comment
15	B10 – Usefulness of awareness-raising initiatives	Binary	True/False + comment
16	C1 – Awareness of the levels of racism	Multiple categorical	Multiple choice 6 options
17	C2 – Ability to identify discrimination	Categorical	Single choice 3 options
18	C3- Having been a victim and/or witness of racism	Categorical	Single choice 4 options
19	D1-E2-F1 – The perpetrator of racism	Multiple categorical	Multiple choice 7 options
20	A3-C3-E1-F2 – Status as a victim or witness of racism	Multiple categorical	Multiple choice 7 options
21	D2-E3-F3- Grounds for discrimination	Multiple categorical	Multiple choice 10 options + comment
22	D3-E4-F4- Manifestations of racism	Multiple categorical	Multiple choice 8 options + comment
23	D4-E5-F5 – Locations of racism	Multiple categorical	Multiple choice 10 options
24	D5-E6-F6 – Reactions to racism	Multiple categorical	Multiple choice 8 options
25	D6-E7-F7 – Frequency of racist behaviour	Ordinal	2 choices 8 options
28	D7-E8-F8 – Effects on victims	Multiple categorical	Multiple choice 9 options
27	G1 – Ethno-racial self-identification	Multiple categorical	Multiple choice 9 options + comment
29	G2 – Migrant background	Multiple categorical	Multiple choice 5 options

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<p>Réponses négatives (n=6)</p>
<p> Aix-Marseille Université* (participation via des listes syndicales) Université Côte d'Azur* (participation à l'enquête ACADISCRI) Université de Nantes Université de Toulouse 3 Université de Franche-Comté Université Marie et Louis Pasteur Besançon </p>
<p>Non contactés car participant aux enquêtes ACADISCRI ou ONDES (n=7) sur les discriminations</p>
<p> Université de Bordeaux Université de Rennes 2 Université de Lorraine Université Paris Nanterre Université de Strasbourg Université de Gustave Eiffel Université de Montpellier </p>