

SOS Détresse

Discrimination and prejudices; a barrier to integration

In a new country, differences can be present everywhere. It is normal to sometimes feel inadequate or misunderstood.

On the contrary, ascertaining unequal treatment, a distance or rejection due to our origins means being a victim of discrimination.

Discriminatory behaviours can take obvious forms, but more often they are subtle. It can be expressed by remarks, jokes, a disparaging image conveyed of a group of people, insults, discrimination at work or in accommodation, physical assaults...

Suffering discrimination is a painful experience which can have significant consequences on our physical and mental health, such as our self-esteem and our well-being. The turmoil it can provoke can sometimes even manifest as illness or physical pain.

If we repeatedly experience this behaviour, we can become disinterested in the host society and withdraw within our own group. We also risk developing our own prejudices. We may hastily accuse someone of discrimination or racism by mistake. Frustration or the feeling of failure that we may have when faced with certain difficulties can sometimes lead us to lack judgement or to not see the part of our own personal responsibility.

The feeling of being recognised and appreciated in one's cultural identity is important for integration. It reinforces self-esteem and facilitates the use of contributions from the culture of origin as an asset in the relationship with others and in the life of the host country.

What to do if you are victim of discrimination?

If you feel rejected or discriminated against because of your origins, do not hesitate to seek support and to talk to someone so as not to keep this pain inside.

It is important to be proud of your cultural origins and to encourage others to respect our customs in the same way we try to respect those of others. By cultivating our feeling of identity and belonging to our cultural group, within which we feel valued, we also feel stronger to counteract the negative impact of possible discrimination.

To get advice and information in case of discrimination: [CET - Centre pour l'égalité de](#)

Why do some people discriminate?

With the difference and complexity of everything that surrounds us, we are all led to categorise things. This allows us to simplify the world and to form rapid opinions; as well as satisfying our need for explanations to events that surround us and to keep a positive image of our group. This is how we may come to attribute a characteristic to a whole group of persons and by doing so resorting to fixed ideas or stereotypes.

Yet, by having a negative judgement towards one culture, there is the risk of judging a person coming from that culture solely based on them belonging to that group and without taking into account their individual particularities. The judgement regarding culture can influence opinion or lead to discriminatory behaviour.

Why does this happen? In situations where people are divided in groups, they resort to strategies to preserve a positive image of their group. Above all, they use negative judgement when they feel threatened or insecure. This can be due to negative experiences in the past, or a lack of contact and ignorance of the other culture. Another reason is the impression that the own values are put in danger by the introduction of other ways to approach life.

These ways of thinking are not always voluntary or conscious, but it is important to recognise them in order to surpass them. Undoing prejudices, which we can all have, requires acknowledgement and working on oneself. If we force ourselves to take distance from our generalisations and judgements, as well as putting ourselves in the other person's situation, we will be able to adopt more neutrality and openness to see a person as an individual, and not as a member of a group. We cannot be genuinely interested in others unless we put aside the prejudices that blind us and unwittingly influence our relationships. Instead of concentrating on differences, this can help to see the similarities between us and others.

Fear, judgement and discrimination do not contribute to general and individual well-being. Cultivating an open mind and enriching yourself by multiplying meetings and thereby discovering the particularities of each one are precious resources for living together, and improve life quality for everyone.