Forever Foreigners or Honorary White:
Anti-Asian Racism and the Politics of Silence

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Asian Voices Europe

ASIAN VOICES EUROPE

- ⋆ Our initial actions were
  - to call for a centralized **hotline** at the national/EU level
  - to provide **community-building** and peer-to-peer **psycho-social support** during lockdown
- ⋆ Started in March 2020 with an *ad hoc* survey documenting hate crimes during the Covid-19 pandamic.

→ included in the report of *Corona en discriminatiemeldingen in Nederland*

- ⋆ Our main goal is to facilitate communication and dialogue on the subject of anti-Asian racism (AAR) as well as to promote cultural diversity in Europe.

Debates on migration, racism, and integration

- In recent years, conversation across Europe have grown increasingly unsettled from debates over racism and migration to diversity initiatives.

> *The growing recognition of racism as a critical societal problem marks progress, as evidenced by surveys showing that about 90% of the population believe racism is an issue in Germany. (Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations und Migrationsforschung 2023)*

> *[...] the adaptability of racism by examining how modern states frequently use race-neutral or colourblind rhetoric to deflect accusations of racism while simultaneously enacting policies that uphold racial inequalities. (Goldberg 2008)*

Forever foreigners or honorary white?

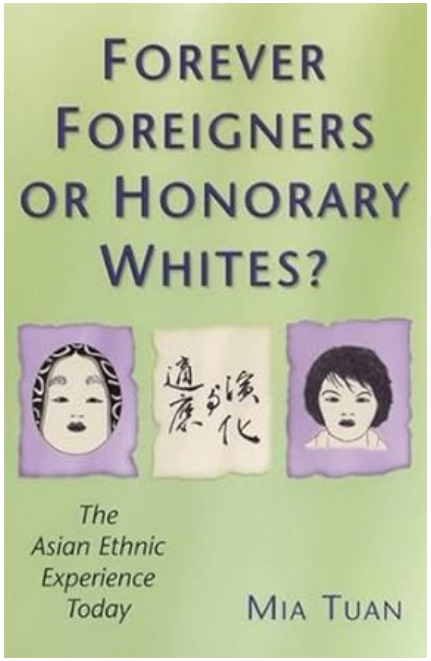


Figure 1: Mia Tuan, 1999

When I hear the phrase "Asians are next in line to be White," I replace the word "White" with "disappear." Asians are next in line to disappear. We are reputed to be so accomplished, and so law-abiding, we will disappear into this country's amnesiac fog. We will not be the power but become absorbed by power, [...] we're often listed as "Other" in polls and why we're hard to find in racial breakdowns on reported rape or workplace discrimination or domestic abuse. (Hong 2021: 35)

Questions:

- What are the forms and expressions of contemporary racism in Europe, particularly as experienced by Asian diaspora?
- Why does the recognition of racism often meet resistance or denial in European public discourse?
- What are the social and political consequences when individuals or communities challenge this silence?

The Roadmap

1. Overview
2. Anti-Racist EU?
3. Anti-Asian Racism in EU
4. Persistance of AAR
5. Counterframes

EU's National Action Plan against Racism

- The National Action Plan against Racism (NAPAR) 2020–2025 was adopted in response to structural racism as the first comprehensive action plan at the EU level.

> Structural racism persists in our societies. Discrimination on the basis of race or ethnic origin – as well as religion or belief – remains widespread, as shown in numerous reports. [...] It is not enough to be against racism. We need to talk about racism. We have to be active against it. (European Commission 2020b: 1,16, 19)

Goals of NAPAR

> The fight against racism must be mainstreamed: racism and racial discrimination must be tackled at all levels of governance, and across all policies. (European Commission 2020a: 18)

- ⋆ Promote anti-discrimination, equality, diversity, and pluralism.
- ⋆ Address the history of colonization and structural racism.
- ⋆ Law enforcement (e.g., racial profiling, excessive force), employment, housing, education, healthcare care.

Key Components of NAPAR

Based on the Guiding Principles by European Commission (2022), tackling racism should be approached through the following sectors:

EU legal framework

Extremism and hate speech

Fair policing and protection

Better data collection

Education and remembrance

Diversity in the EU

Economy, employment, housing, healthcare

Anti-Asian Racism in NAPAR

- AAR has had a long but largely undocumented history in Europe and was not even officially recognized as a distinct category of racism by the EU, either at the EU level until July 2022 (European Commission 2020a,b, Asian Voices Europe 2024).
- No specific unit, coordinator or dedicated strategy framework for AAR at the EU level or national level as of now.
- In Sweden, the recent action plan against racism in 2025 has not yet recognized the AAR, cf. Törngren et al. (2023).

> *[...] Based on the existing data on the incidence of racism in Sweden today, the Action Plan has a particular focus on anti-Muslim racism, antisemitism, anti-Black racism, antigypsyism and racism against Sami people.* (*The Government of Sweden 2025*)

- In the year 2020, the number of migrants from Asia to Europe was around 23 million (McAuliffe, M. and L.A. Oucho 2024).
- The number of migrants with a background in Asia-Pacific or in Northeast and Southeast Asia to Sweden in 2024 was 244,972 (Sweden 2024).

Anti-Asian Racism in NAPAR

- EU-level surveys or data collection on AAR are either nonexistent or scarce.
- (e.g., European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, European Values Study (EVS), European Social Survey (ESS), Eurobarometer)
- Engagement with civil society organizations is not adequately facilitated.

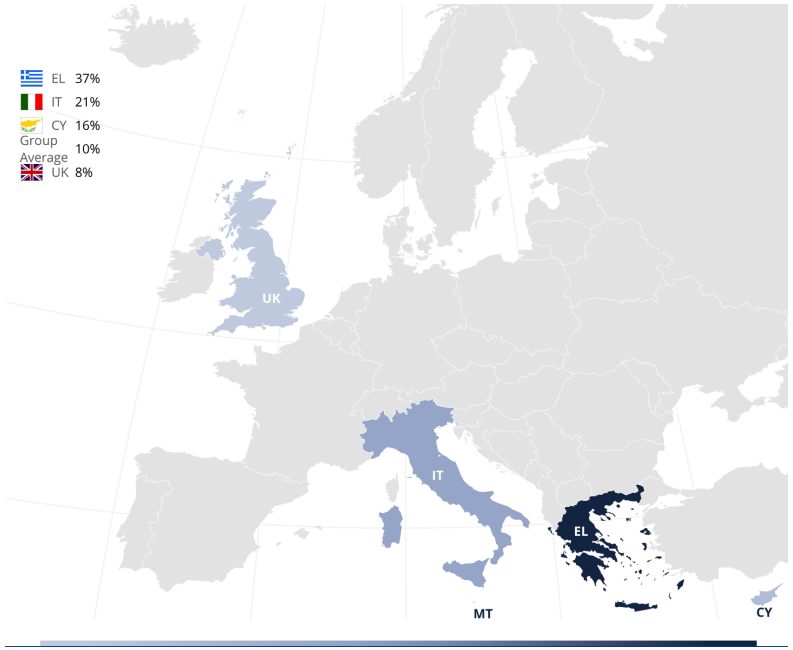
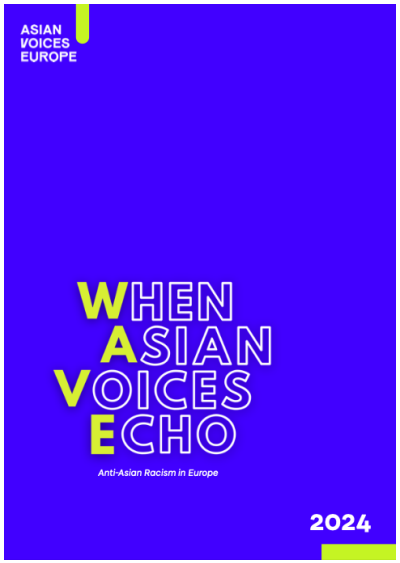


Figure 2: FRA's Survey on Minorities and Discrimination in EU - (South-)Asian Group

AVE Survey II - When Asian Voices Echo



(Asian Voices Europe 2024)

- ⋆ 855 out of 1,275 responses (consented and validated-all reside in Europe)
- ⋆ data collection: 14. June - 6. August 2021
- ⋆ via online survey in 10 different languages
- ⋆ the first Europe-wide survey of AAR
- ⋆ to identify perception of racism, lived experiences of racial discrimination and impact of the pandemic of Asian living in Europe
- ⋆ on-probability convenience sampling/snowballing/double coder strategy

AVE Survey II - When Asian Voices Echo

- The demographic of the respondents:

Gender	*Frequency*	*Percent%*
Women	689	**80.6%**
Men	139	16.3%
NBGD†	25	3.1%

† Non binary Gender Diverse

Country of residence	*Fequency*	*Percent%*
The Netherlands	259	**30.3%**
Germany	194	**22.7%**
France	122	**14.3%**
United Kingdom	113	**13.2%**
Others‡	167	19.5%

‡ scattered around Europe with lower response rates

Age	*Fequency*	*Percent%*
Under 19	33	3.9%
20-29	441	**51.6%**
30-39	261	**30.5%**
40-49	81	9.5%
50-59	26	3.0%
Over 60	12	1.4%

Racial Identity	*Fequency*	*Percent%*
East Asian	599	**70.06%**
South-East Asian	168	**19.65%**
Interracial & others	37	3.91%
Southern Asian	28	3.27%
Western/Central Asian/Others	23	3.12%

Experience of Discrimination by Asian Diaspora

The results reveal high rates of experiences in racial discrimination among Asians in their residence countries in Europe

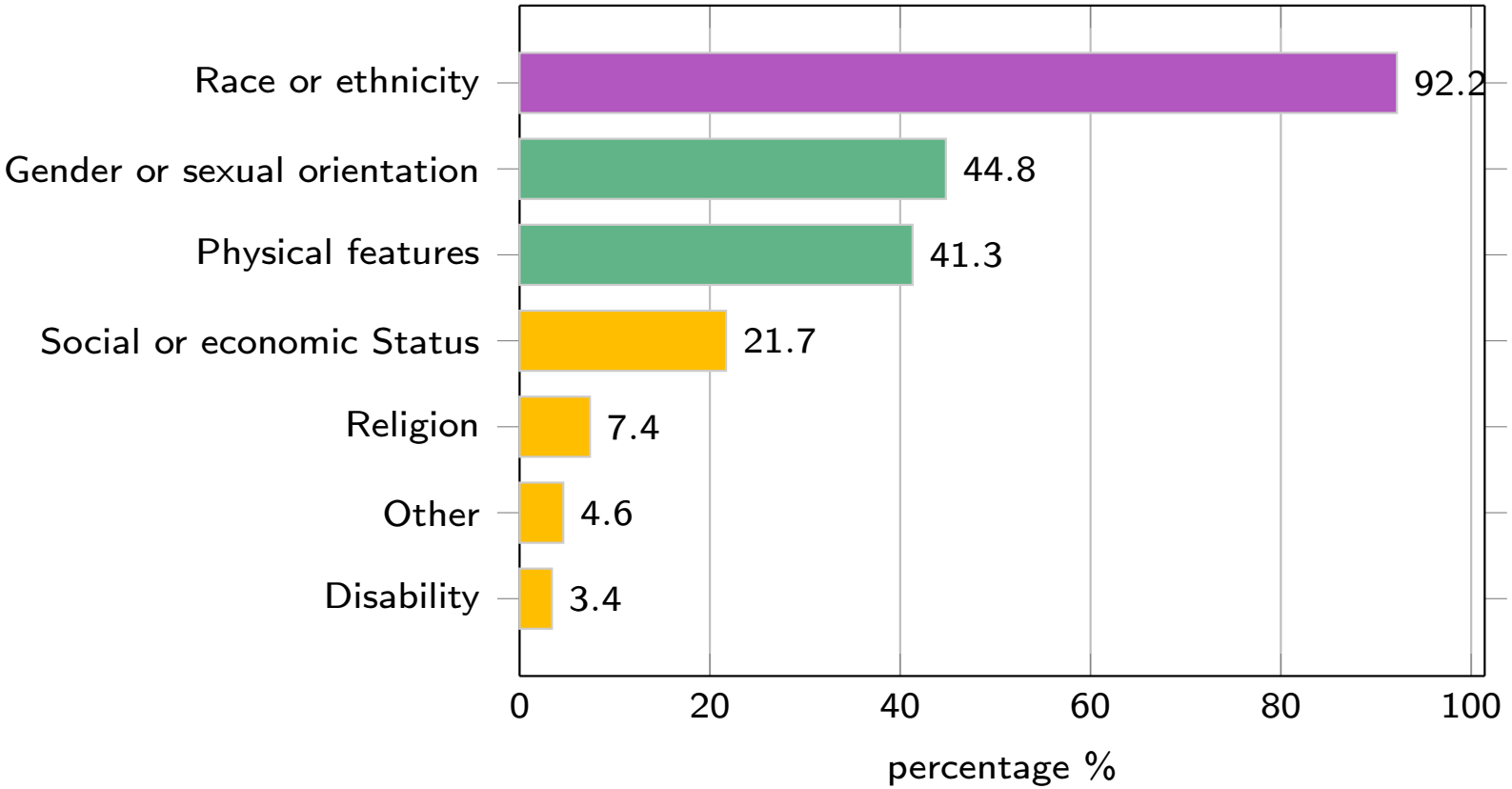
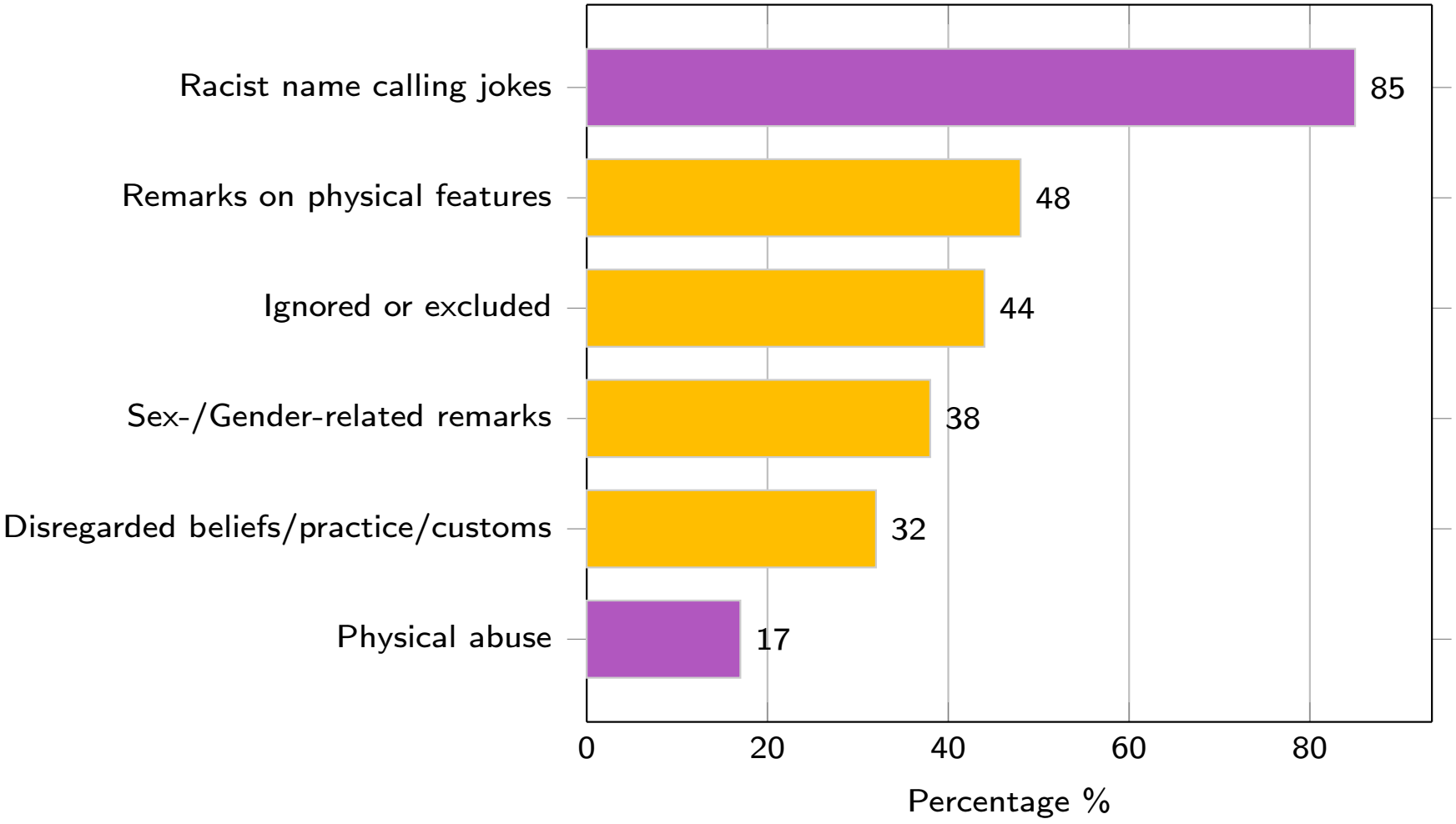


Figure 3: What type of discrimination have you ever been discriminated?

⋆ This figures (92.2%) surpasses figures from studies of Asian Americans, where 79.68% have

Experience of Discrimination by Asian Diaspora



Frequency of Racial Discrimination and Harassment

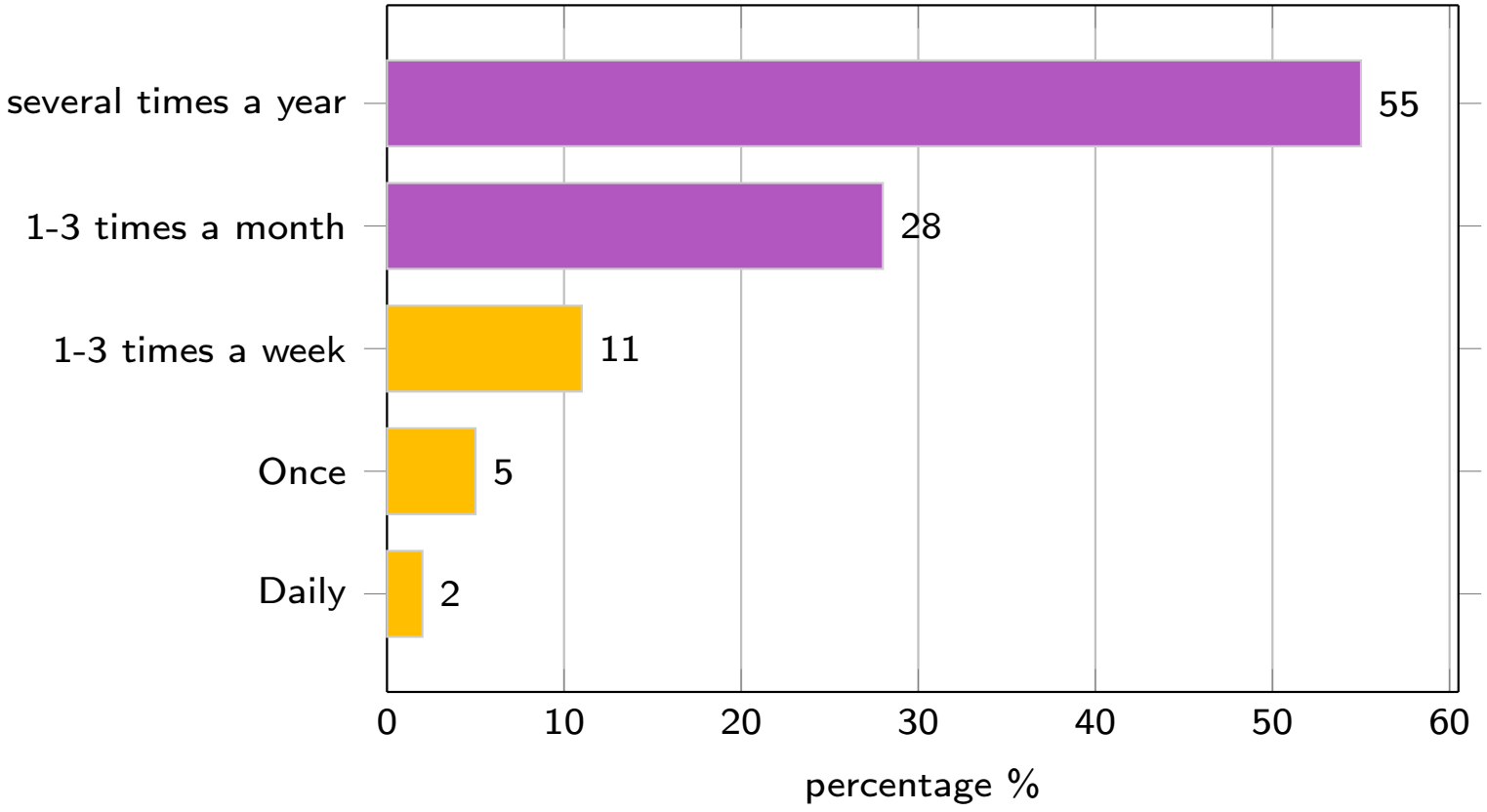
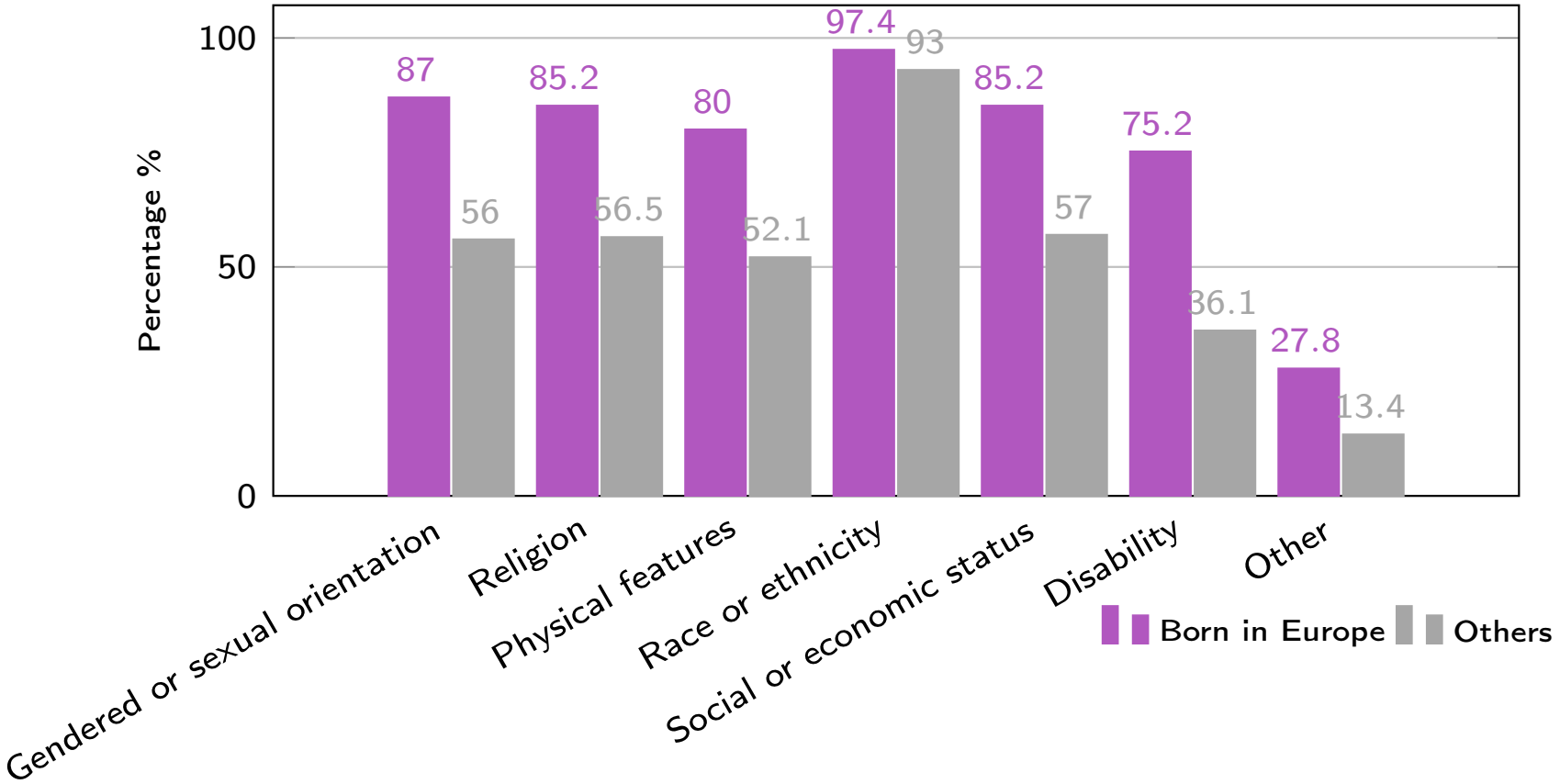


Figure 5: How many times/often have you been harassed?

Frequency of Racial Discrimination and Harassment

Experience of Discrimination by Asian Diaspora

This suggests that those who have lived in Europe for a longer period of time are more likely to be exposed to situations of racism and discrimination.



Microaggression

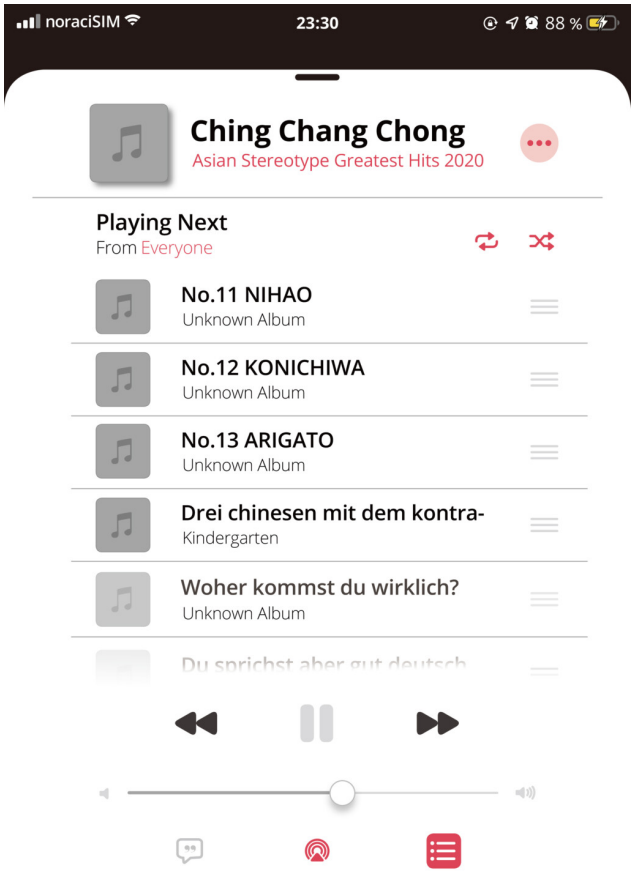


Figure 8: Poster by Leh Hwang

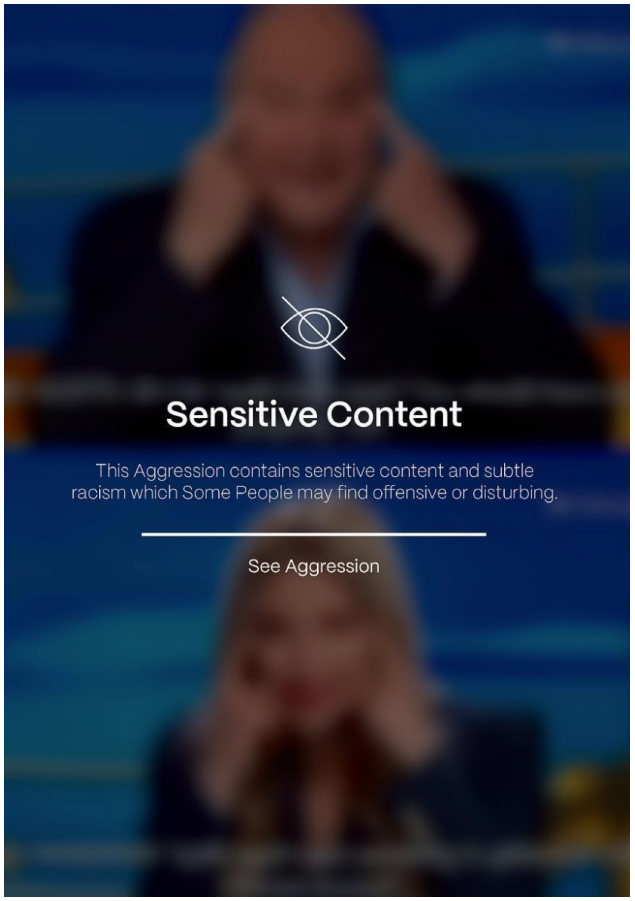


Figure 9: Poster by Leh Hwang

Microaggression - invalidaiton

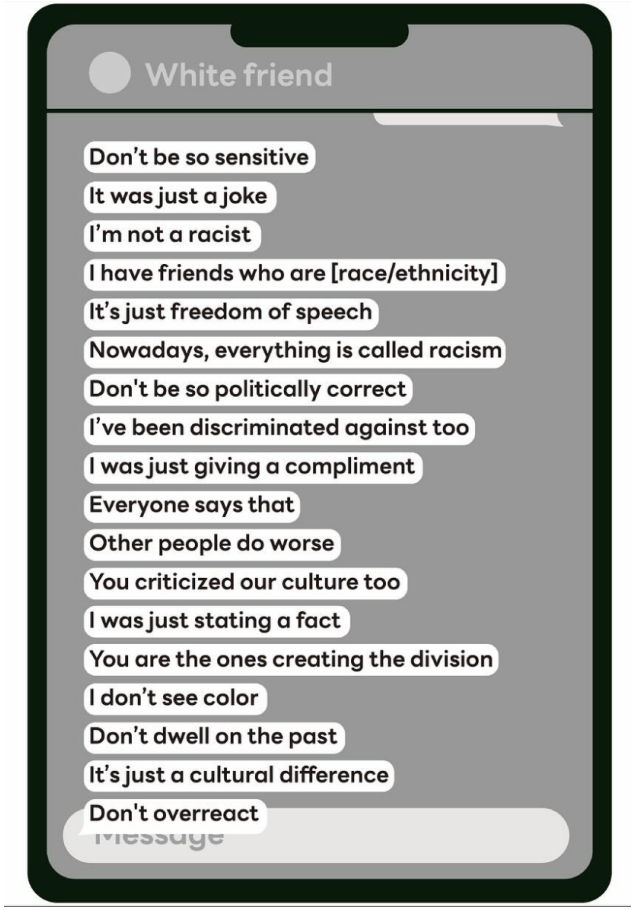


Figure 10: Poster by Leh Hwang

Verbal Abuse/Microaggression

(1) a. Some people shouted at me "Nihao," "Ching Chang Chong," and other [derogatory] comments at me [in a] mocking [way]. - *20s, woman, in Germany* (Asian Voices Europe 2024)

b. It's so routine to hear the words "Hey Chin[ese] or Nihao" in a mocking [tone] countless times [...] Sometimes I was walking down the street and people shouted [at] me "Konichiwa!" or "Foreigner!" - *40s, woman, in the Netherlands* (Asian Voices Europe 2024)

c. Irrespective of the pandemic, [even] before the pandemic, it was very annoying to be ridiculed in France for the gestures by [slanting] eyes or making [fun of] by people [who used to] be good friends. -*30s, woman, in France* (Asian Voices Europe 2024)

Physical Abuse

(2) I experienced an incident where two Caucasian men assaulted me in France. [...] they ridiculed me [...] and yelled insulting words like, "go back to your own country!". This assault happened inside [a] store with more than a dozen customers around, including the clerk, but nobody [came to] help me even though I was bleeding from my face. I asked the clerk to report the incident to the police, but he (clerk) dismissed it and said, "Nothing is happening here, so I am not going to report it. Just go home quickly." [...] The pain and swelling worsened, and I had to go to the emergency hospital for treatment. My nose bone was deformed, and I had to bear the medical expenses myself. I also tried to file a report with the police again, but unfortunately, there was no major investigation [undertaken], and all I heard was, "You had no luck." [...] Whenever I try to share this experience with people, they simply brush it off, saying "That is not a big deal". This leaves me with no one that I can [trust]. *-30s, man, in France* (Asian Voices Europe 2024)

Institutional Discrimination/Discrimination in Services

(3)a. My child (of Asian diaspora) was denied by the school to attend classes. The person [in charge of the school] asked me to make contact with other Asians [for] other schools. (Asian Voices Europe 2024)

b. I have also [had] the experience [of] being refused entry at restaurants and cafes, or being [served] with dirty tableware. Even when I pointed out [these issues] and asked for a replacement, my [requests] were denied. (Asian Voices Europe 2024)

c. I was searching for an apartment. I had to wait for a long time since I gave all my information to the hosing agency (*Immobilien*). I asked one German friend to call them and talk to them in german. When he mentioned my name (in Thai), the agency person said that I would not get the apartment, since I am a foreigner. - *30s, Woman, in Germany* (Shim 2021)

Gendered Discriminatory Experiences

The AAR trends have intersectional faces: Women & Non-binary and gender diverse (NBGD) groups more often, severely experience racism and discrimination.

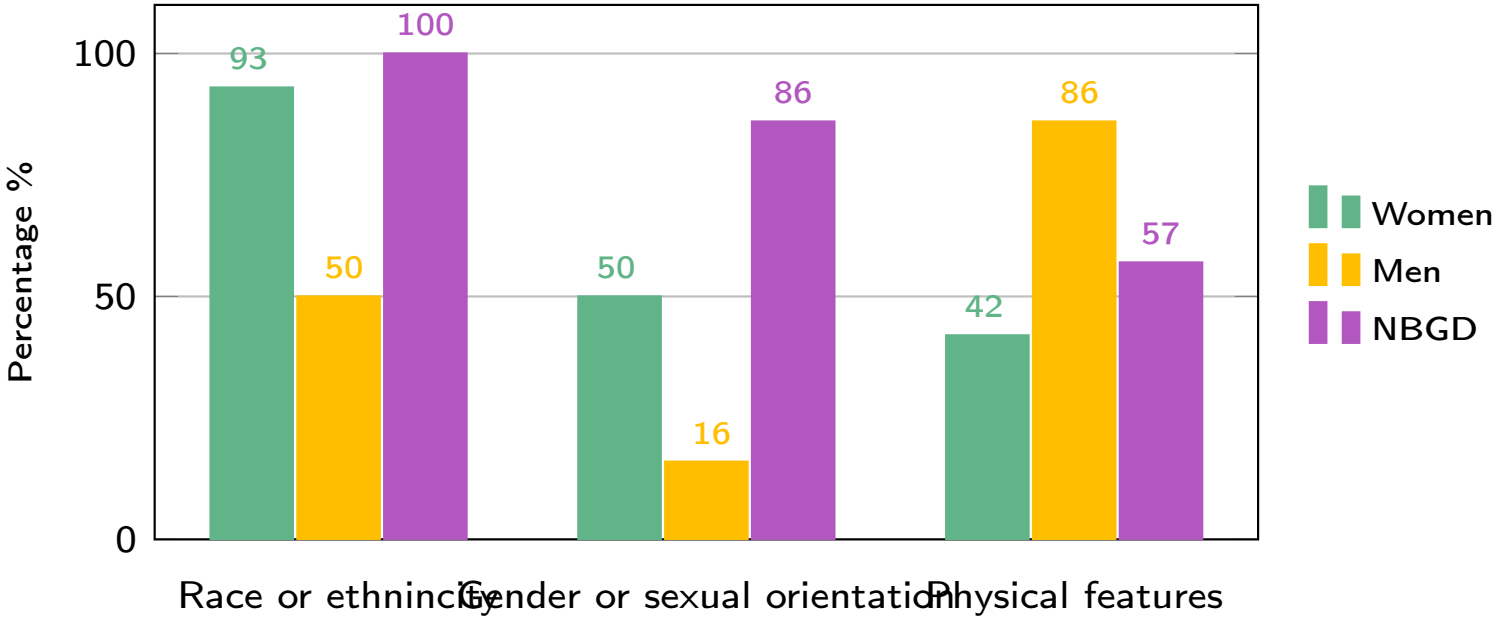


Figure 11: How do individuals across gender groups experience the top 3 forms of discrimination?

Gendered Discriminatory Experiences

There were clear gendered patterns of AAR, in particular with regard to incidents of sexual and physical remarks.

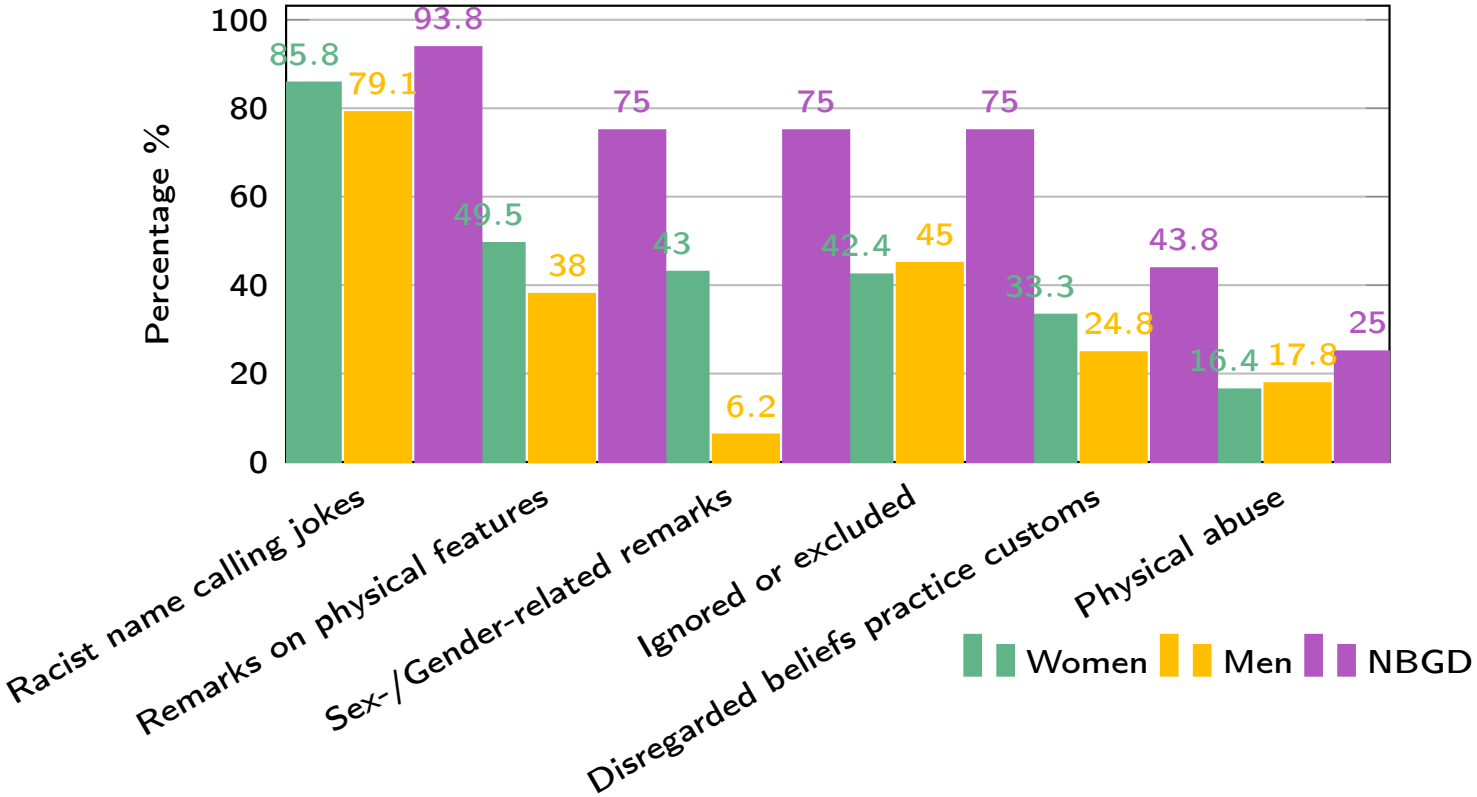


Figure 12: Forms of Racial Harassment and Discrimination - by Gender

Gendered Discriminatory Experiences

Sexual and gender-based violence experienced by Asians also exhibits gendered patterns in four European countries.

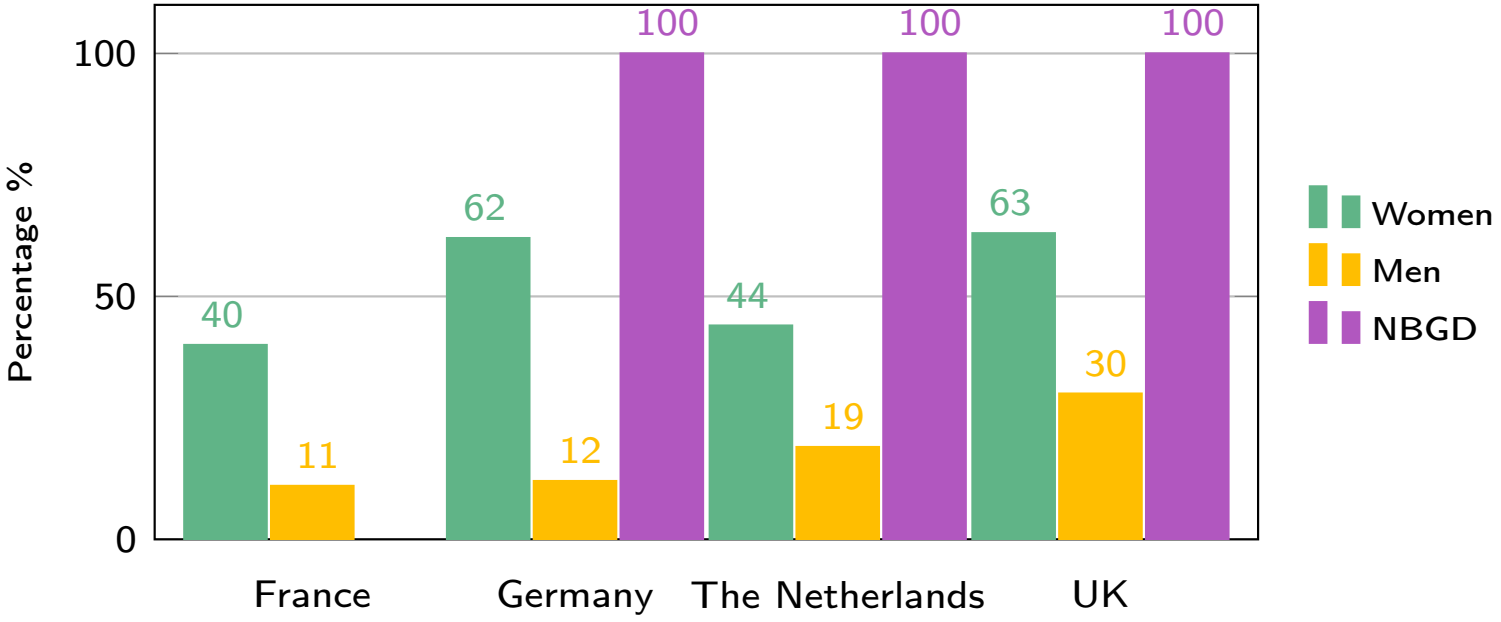


Figure 13: SGBV experienced by gender in four European countries

Gendered Discriminatory Experiences

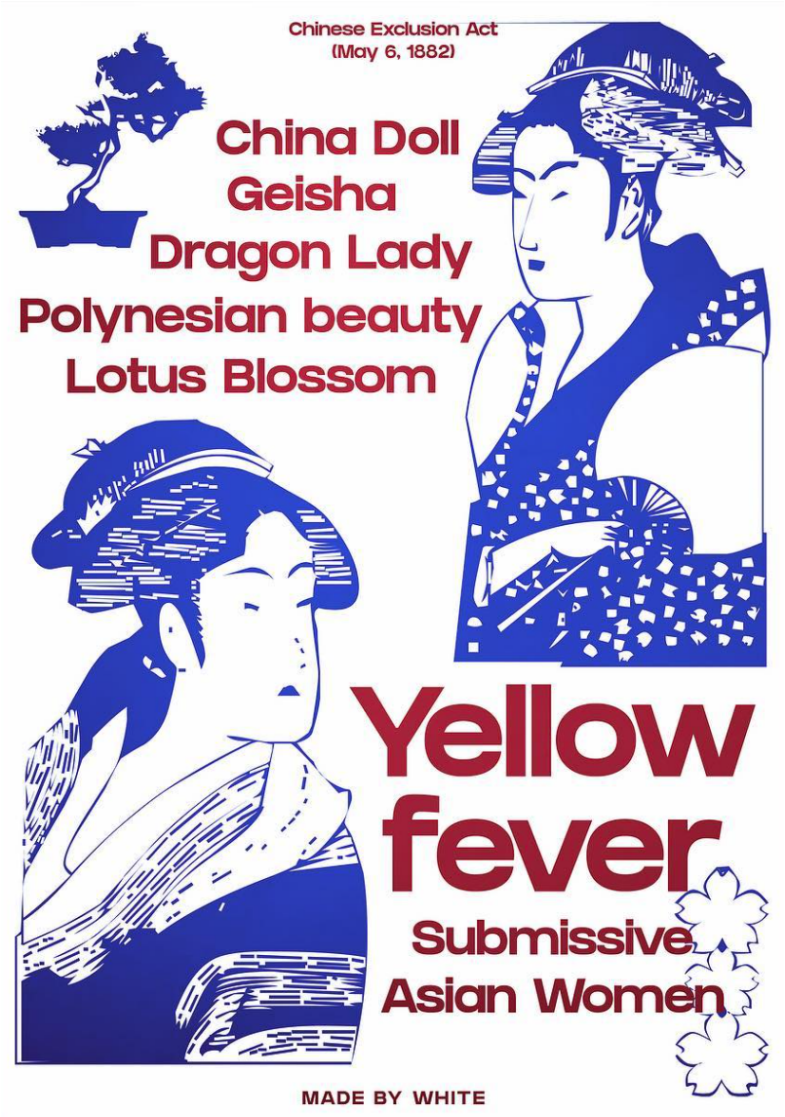
Country	EU Survey (2017)†	AVE Survey II (2021)
The Netherlands	44.9%	44%
France	44%	40%
United Kingdom	43.9%	**62%**
Germany	35.1%	**63%**
EU average	33%	**50%**

† Violence; Gender Equality Index, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2017)

Figure 14: Comparison of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Index

cf. See Aldemir (2024) for sexism and racism in NL

Gendered Racism



Gendered Racism

Fetishized (Yellow-fever), Sexual Harassment, and Stereotypes of Submissiveness

(4)a. [In] 2012, I took a train from Berlin to Potsdam. [...] [There] was a man riding the same train with me. When I got off at the station, he grabbed my butt, basically. [...] It (The disgraceful feeling) still stays. - *30s, Woman, in Germany* (Shim 2021)

b. I often feel like being fetishised, [when someone] says to me, "I like Asian women", simply because of my heritage. - *30s, Woman, in France* (Asian Voices Europe 2024)

c. [As a] Japanese woman, it's disheartening to [encounter] many men who believe in wrong gender stereotypes, such as assuming that we (Japanese women) are unrestrained in matters of sex. - *30s, Woman, in France* (Asian Voices Europe 2024)

Racialized Queerness

Queer spaces in Europe are created predominantly White circles, which were deeply ingrained in systematic racial biases and the subsequent exclusion of racial minorities from queer communities have enforced discriminatory practices against people of color (Monro 2020, Knoll and Hiery 1983, Ghaziani 2021, Walcott 2007).

(5) I've thought for a long time why I was never active in queer groups in Europe. There are plenty of youth groups and clubs for queers, but I realized that they are predominantly whites, and I didn't feel like I belonged as I often received racial slurs there [...] I've come to understand that it means a lot to me to identify as non-White individuals in a White society, especially in terms of our queerness. - *20s, NBGD, in Germany* (Gang 2023)

A Long But Undocumented History of AAR in Europe

- While AAR has become more visible to Whites* since the Covid-19 pandemic, colonial biases and stereotypical portraits of Asian diasporas living in Europe have predated a long ago - Appendix A.

  (Yeh 2020, Roberto et al. 2020, Chen and Wu 2021, Köhler and Suda 2023, Mai 2020, Suda et al. 2020)

* See Painter (2020, 2011) for the capitalized use of White.

A Long But Undocumented History of AAR in Europe

- Asians in Europe face a form of racism that manifests in seemingly paradoxical ways.
- The term 'Yellow Peril', since the 1890s, depicted Asians as villains or as undesirable members of society, who may pose existential threats (Keevak 2011).

„Völker Europas, wahret eure heiligsten Güter!"

"Peoples of Europe, preserve your most sacred goods!"

A Long But Undocumented History of AAR in Europe

- Asians continue to be assigned to the 'model minority myth', which is used to stereotype Asians, who are considered to be financially successful, hard working and socially well-assimilated in White culture.

  (Toupin and Son 1991, Daniels and Kitano 1988, Hsia 1988, Takagi 1992, Wei 2010, Hartlep and Bui 2020).

ZEIT ONLINE

Integration

Das vietnamesische Wunder

Die Kinder von Einwanderern aus Vietnam fallen durch glänzende Schulnoten auf. Ihr Erfolg straft Klischees der Integrationsdebatte Lügen

Von Martin Spiewak

22. Januar 2009 Quelle: DIE ZEIT, 22.01.2009 Nr. 05

The children of immigrants from Vietnam stand out with their brilliant school grades. Their success refutes clichés in the integration debate (Spiewak 2009).

A Long But Undocumented History of AAR in Europe

- This dual portrayal, encompassing both the 'Yellow Peril' and 'model minority' myths, draws from orientalist narratives deeply rooted in Europe's (post-)colonial history

  (Cho 2021, Hasunuma 2020, Kawai 2005, Shim 1998, Li and Nicholson Jr 2021).

- These narratives, acting as instruments of hegemony, reinforce simplistic stereotypes and overlook varied experiences of Asians in Europe (De Cook and Yoon 2021, Yeh 2014, De Leon 2020).

Impacts of racial discrimination

The cumulative effect of such seemingly minor, insidious acts can lead to significant psychological and emotional distress for those targeted.

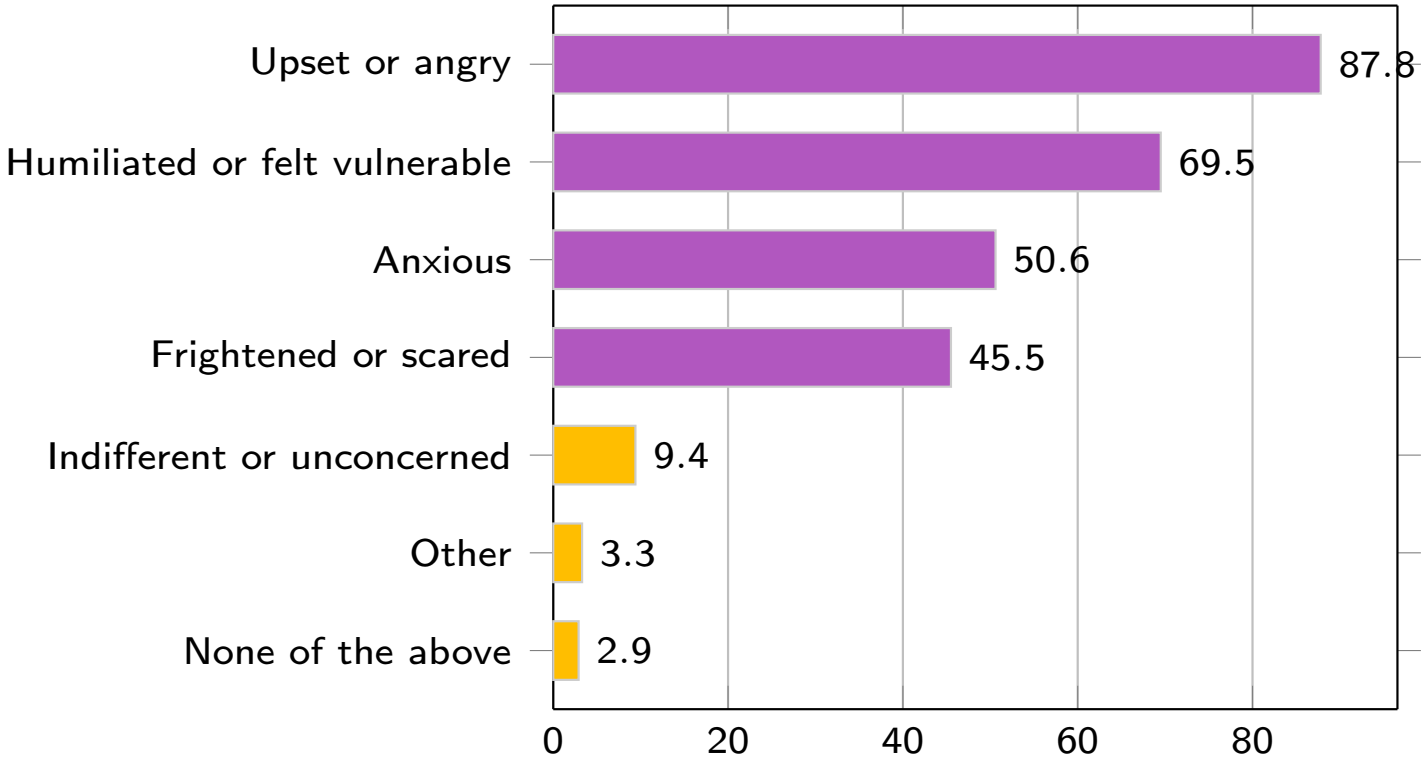


Figure 16: In general, how did you feel when you were harassed? Select all that apply.

Existential Impact of Racial Prejudice

The racial undertones of the remark evoke a sense of insecurity and existential threats, suggesting that their right to belong is conditional and fragile.

(6)a. And I also know that I was once caught in a brawl in the schoolyard by a teacher. I don't remember who started it, me or the other child, but the teacher came to me and said, watch what you do, because otherwise you have to go back home. [...] And in retrospect I understood what it was all about, that okay, everyone fights, but I am singled out and I am threatened with not being allowed to live in Germany anymore, although I actually already had the German passport at that time. *-30s, man, in Germany* (Gang 2023)

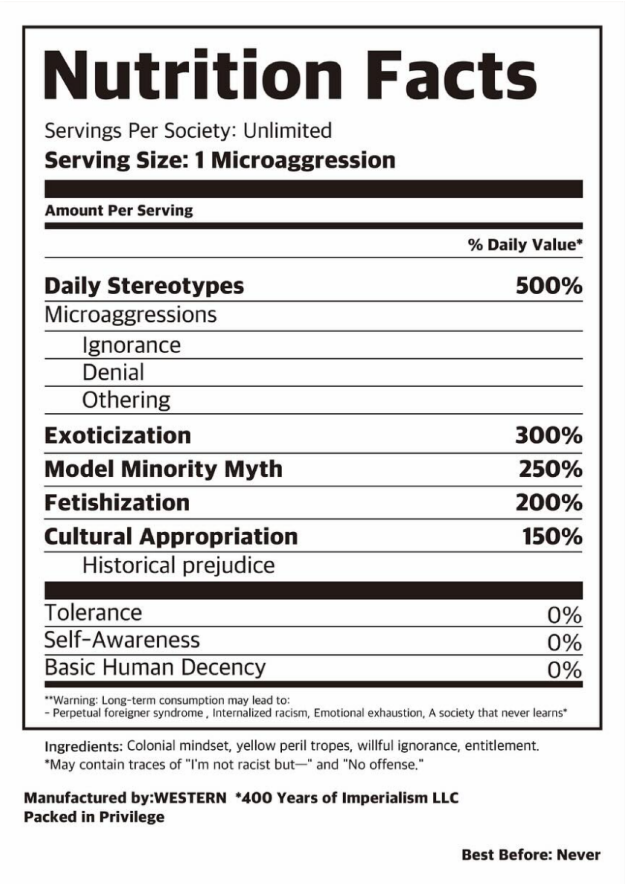
b. I was ashamed for a very long time of having a Vietnamese background, of not being white enough, and I thought that there's something wrong with me. It was very long time a lot, questioning oneself, doubting oneself, not trusting oneself, *-30s, NBGD, in Germany* (Gang 2023)

Existential Impact of Racial Prejudice

Confronted with constant marginalization, individuals may internalize these biases, leading to self-blame. In an effort to assimilate into predominantly White societies, they may suppress their identities and conform to Western cultural norms, perpetuating feelings of invisibility and exclusion.

(7) Reflecting on my background as the child of Vietnamese guest workers, [...] I wasn't even conscious of it, or of how I had internalized racism to the extent that I now understand. [...] I always avoided (asian) community events and any contact with Asian-looking people to deny my origins and blend in with White people. I even longed for a German name and resented my parents for not being German. [It was a result of] what I learned from my surroundings and society - this persistent desire to fit in the White society. [...] When I realized early that I looked different from my peers, I was frustrated [...] You had to prove your worth], so to speak. [...] The confirmation that my value is solely tied to my productivity has always forced me to justify my existence, especially under such princely guilt. - *30s, NBGD, Germany* (Gang 2023)

Normalization of embodied racism



Nutrition Facts

Servings Per Society: Unlimited

Serving Size: 1 Microaggression

Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value*
Daily Stereotypes	**500%**
Microaggressions	
Ignorance	
Denial	
Othering	
Exoticization	**300%**
Model Minority Myth	**250%**
Fetishization	**200%**
Cultural Appropriation	**150%**
Historical prejudice	
Tolerance	0%
Self-Awareness	0%
Basic Human Decency	0%

**Warning: Long-term consumption may lead to:
- Perpetual foreigner syndrome , Internalized racism, Emotional exhaustion, A society that never learns*

Ingredients: Colonial mindset, yellow peril tropes, willful ignorance, entitlement.
*May contain traces of "I'm not racist but—" and "No offense."

Manufactured by:WESTERN *400 Years of Imperialism LLC
Packed in Privilege

Best Before: Never

Figure 17: Poster by Leh Hwang

Microaggressions are not abstract offenses but embodied racialized experiences that influence how individuals repeatedly perceive themselves and navigate their identities (Lee et al. nd).

Normalization of embodied racism

- The persistence of racial discrimination reinforces new form of racism and social dominance.

  "[R]ather, racialized identities embedded in other salient social categories such as migration status, religion, or cultural heritage" (Juang et al. 2021: 186).

- The systematic denial of AAR disrupts inclusive societal structures by positioning Asian individuals as outsiders to the discourse on racism. They are not recognized as equal participants in this social dialogue, and their voices are often dismissed or minimized.

- Systematic denial of racism acts as a strategic adaptation that enables exclusionary practices to continue in seemingly less discriminatory ways (Bonilla-Silva 2015).

Neo-racism

- Scholars of racism have highlighted the ambivalences of antiracism, arguing that it can sometimes serve as a strategy to immunize racism from criticism, thereby contributing to its perpetuation (Kim and Steinhilper 2025).
- It may turn out as a *neo-racism* where traditional racial hierarchies are recast as narratives of incompatibility, maintaining the same exclusionary racial ideologies while escaping direct references to the discredited idea of biological race (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, Wolgast and Wolgast 2024)

Reaction to AAR

The discrepancy between the high rate of experiences of racism and the low rate of access to the police may contribute to individuals' hesitance in seeking intervention from official authorities, such as law enforcement, due to limited confidence in the effectiveness of these measures.

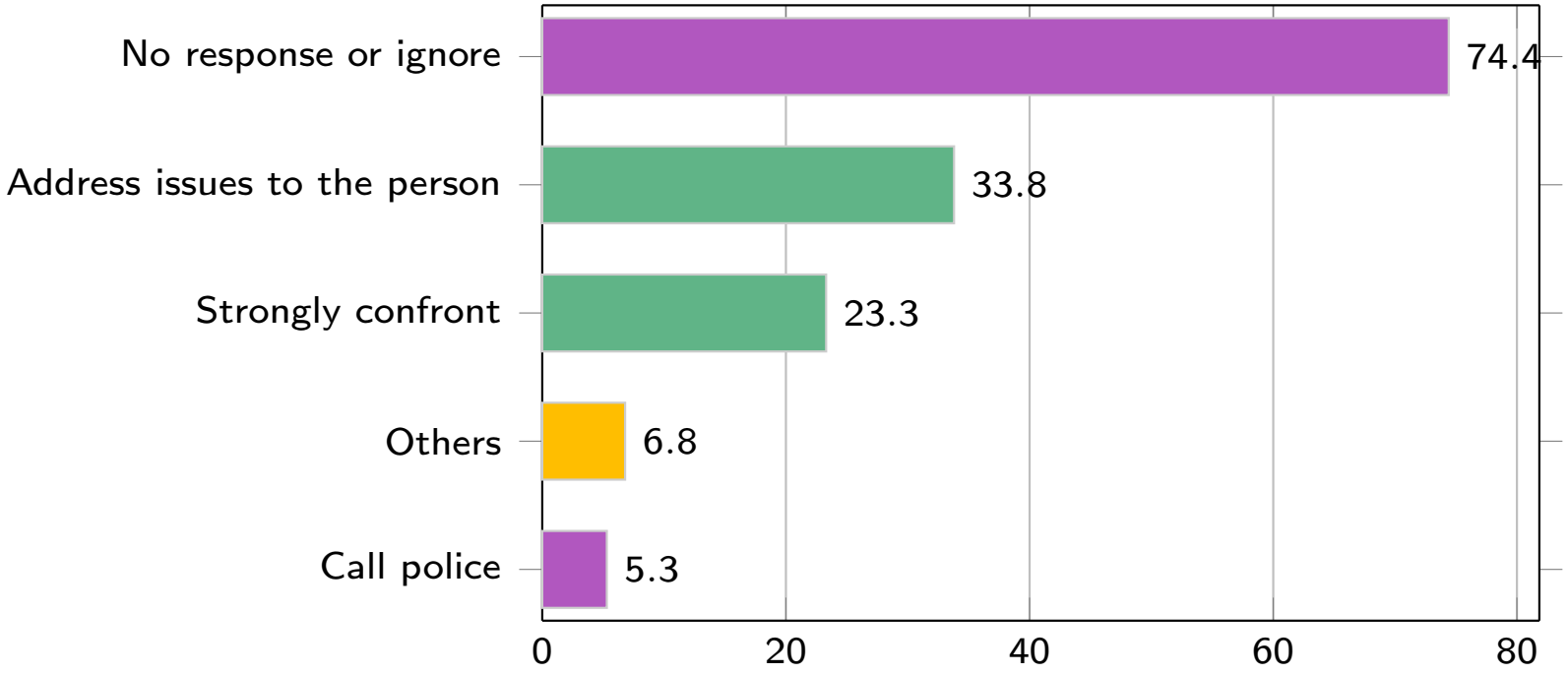


Figure 18: In general, how do you respond to racial harassment?

Challenges in the National Action Plan

- ⋆ European Commission (2024) calls for more comprehensive data collection and structural analysis regarding racism , highlighting a lack of inclusion in broader research frameworks.
- ⋆ Protection remains fragmented, and the anti-racism action plan strategy itself is non-legislative and not legally binding.

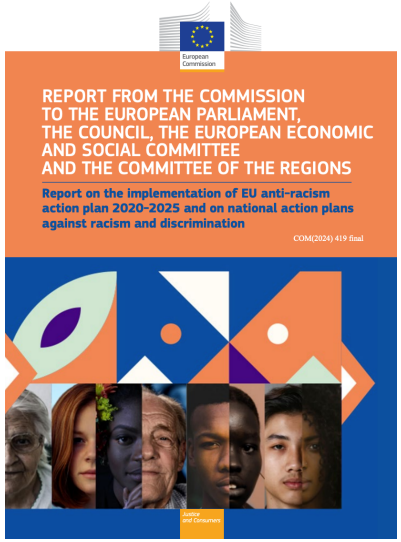


Figure 19: European Commission (2024): Report on NAPAR

> [...] It is therefore important that Member States further improve the collection of equality data at all territorial levels and urge all stakeholders to cooperate in the collection of data for equality and non-discrimination purposes
> European Commission (2024: 15)

Social Movements: Counterframes

- ⋆ Despite facing racism, discrimination and homophobia, many individuals of Asian diaspora are empowered and actively contribute positively to society through their activism and advocacy efforts, thereby facilitating a counterframe*** (Suda and Köhler 2023).

*** See also Blum (2007) for 'pluralistic solidarity'; Wang and Li (2023) for 'networked solidarity'; or Gould (2007) for 'overlapping solidaristic networks'.

Social Movements: Counterframes

Figure 20: Korientation Demo 28.03.2021, photo credit by Victoria Kure-Wu

- ⋆ E.g., AVE successfully lobbied the EC to take its first steps in officially recognizing AAR as a standalone category of racial discrimination to be documented and addressed.
- ⋆ See Asian Voices Europe (2024: 56) for the list of organizations which works on AAR.

Anti-Racist Initiatives

- One of the adverse consequences of anti-racist mainstreaming is that policies are decontextualized from the lived experience of racialized peoples and promotes a 'universalized vision of equality' (Lentin 2004: 439).
- Crenshaw emphasizes that if anti-racist initiatives only articulate racism along particular dimensions, anti-racist efforts employ 'strategic silence' (Crenshaw 1991: 1253), alerting that such interventions frequently perpetuate these silences.
- *[W]ithout a detailed analysis of the role of anti-racism in contemporary societies [...] we shall not be able to understand the changing dynamics of racial ideologies and political mobilizations or the possibilities for defeating racist movements.(Back and Solomos 1996: 103)*

Key Takeaway

- ⋆ Effective antiracism must confront not only overt acts of racism but also the cultural, policy, and institutional norms that perpetuate exclusionary practices (Goldberg 2008).
- ⋆ The anti-racist works should collaborate directly on civil society organizations from racialized and sexualized perspectives.
- ⋆ The superficial antiracist actions can unintentionally reinforce racism when they coexist with denial. In other words, saying '*I'm not racist*' without acknowledging structural racism helps immunize racism against critique. That's a dissonance we see often: *antiracist opinions without antiracist accountability*.

Key Takeaway

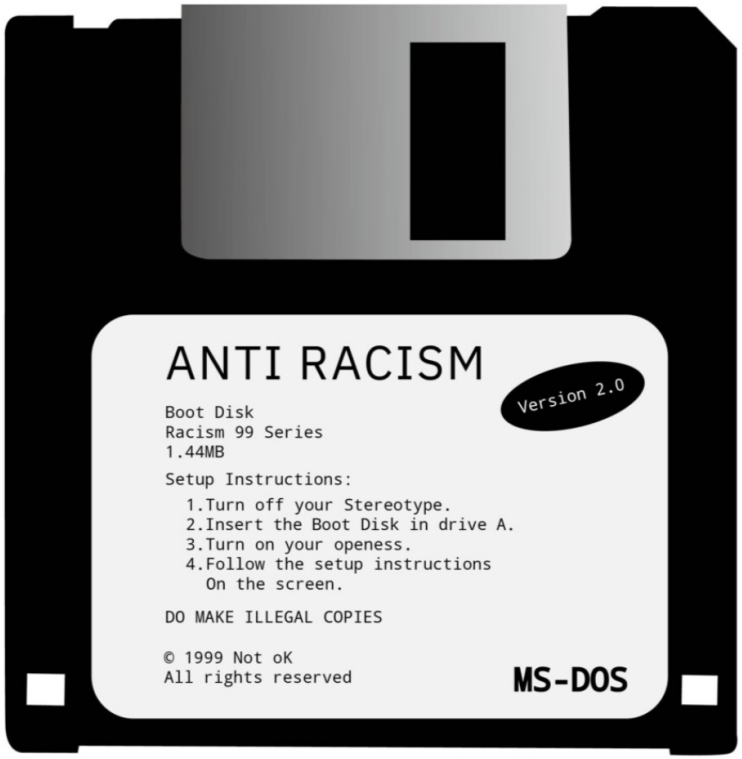


Figure 21: Poster by Leh Hwang

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Thank you!

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all of the respondents for sharing their opinions and experiences with us, to all volunteers for their amazing works and to AVE supports for their support and solidarity.

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Your support helps us cover **small but essential costs** like mailbox, monthly maintenance for banking accounts, domain hosting, so we can stay **independent, sustainable, and community-driven.**

AVE club

Together, we are stronger. We need you.

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Appendix A: Impact of Pandemic

Our findings suggest that while the pandemic may have acted as a trigger and exacerbated AAR, it is not the sole or ultimate cause of racism against Asians in Europe.

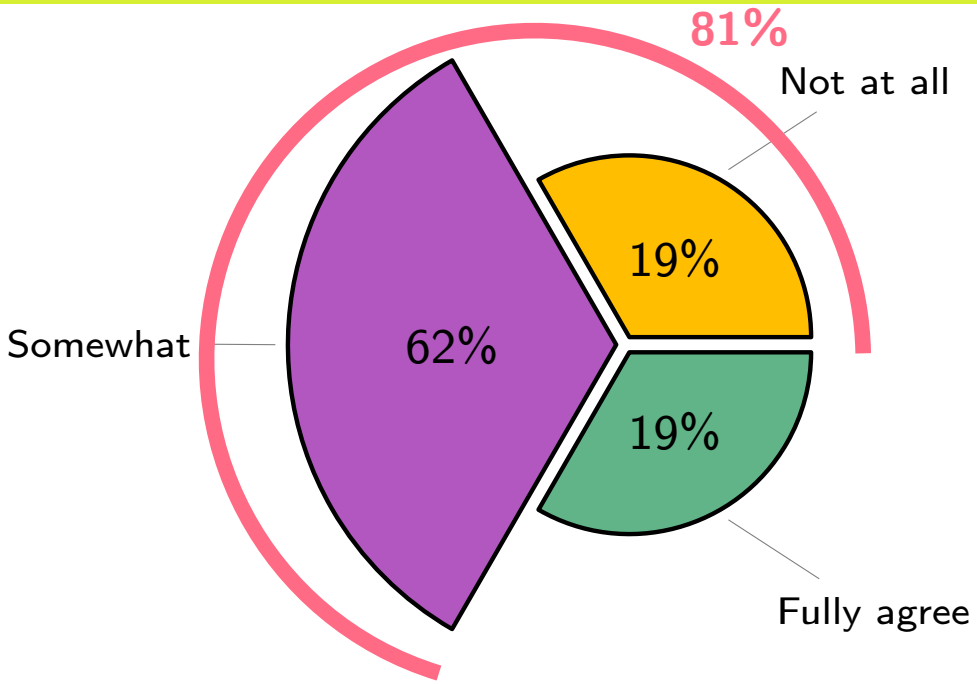

Figure 22: To what extent do you believe the racism you experienced in the last 12 months was the result of the pandemic?

Appendix B: Racism Denial Statements

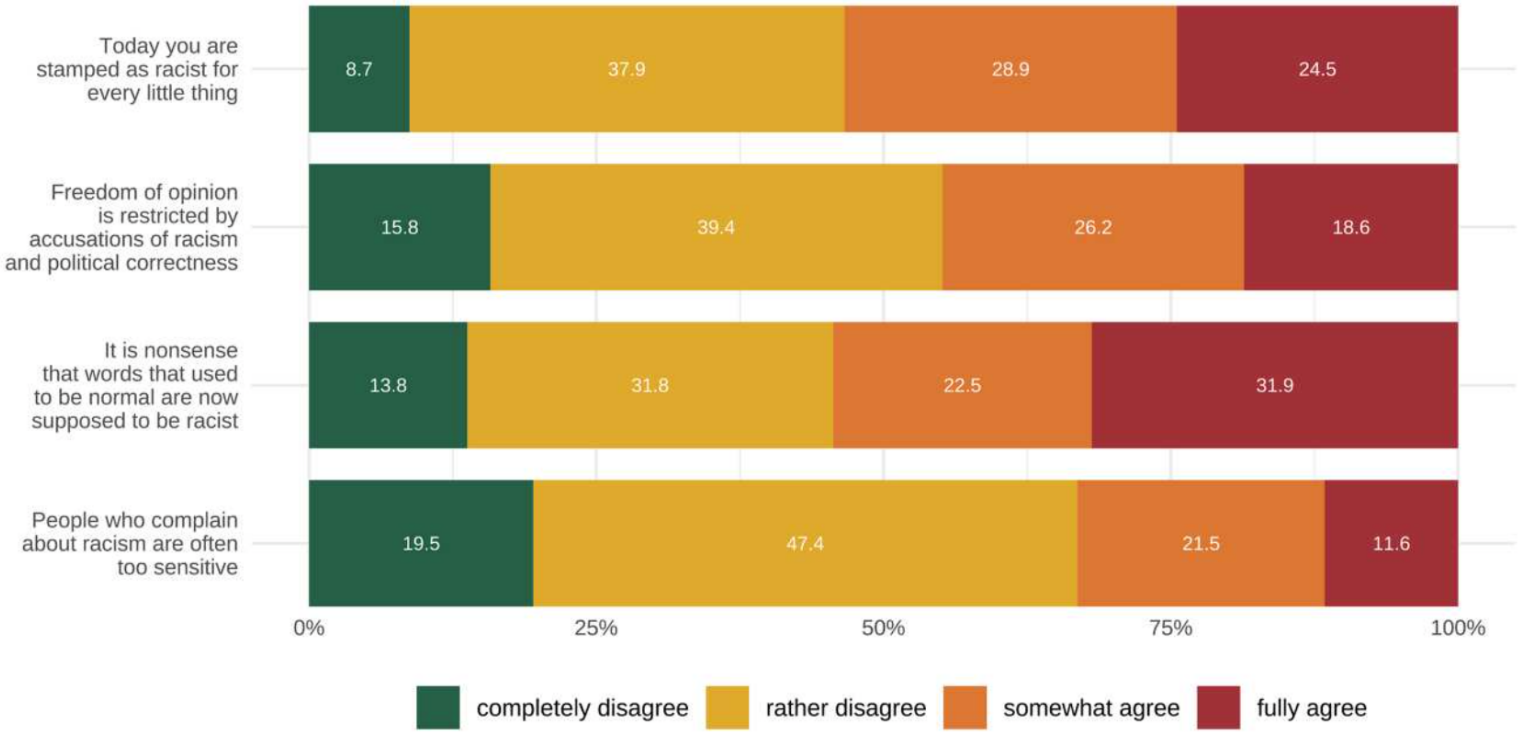

Figure 23: (Dis-)agreement with racism denial statements in Germany (N = 4.906–4.968).

- ⋆ Kim and Steinhilper's (2025) racism denial index revealed that 67% of respondents expressed agreement, which underlines that the majority of the population continues to harbour defensive or dismissive attitudes towards the existence of racism.