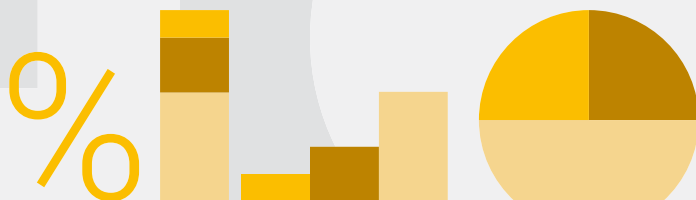




## FSO News



01 Population

Neuchâtel, March 2022

Survey on diversity and coexistence  
in Switzerland: results of the 2021 Diversity module

# Attitudes towards Diversity and commitment to anti-racism

Switzerland's population is made up of various social groups and persons of different affiliations. This diversity is enriching but can also create challenges. Questions can arise on the acceptance and rejection of certain groups. In this context, the current publication addresses the population's attitudes and perceptions towards otherness.

The 2021 module of the survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland (VeS) aims to present an accurate picture of the issues raised by the coexistence of different groups living in Switzerland. It addresses the issues of acceptance, tolerance and exclusion, looking at how people perceive diversity and racism. The data collected are used to complement the main VeS survey. They provide an opportunity to explore themes such as discomfort in the face of otherness and personal commitment to anti-racism.

### Survey and methodology

The Diversity module is part of the diversity and coexistence in Switzerland survey (VeS). This survey is carried out as part of the Federal Statistical Office's omnibus series of multiple-theme surveys. It is carried out on a sample of 3000 persons aged from 15 to 88 years, selected from administration registers using a strictly random procedure. It is a mixed mode survey which means it can be answered either by completing an online questionnaire (CAWI) or by a telephone interview (CATI). The in-depth module completes the information collected. The theme varies according to need.

The figures presented in this publication refer to three key areas: the context of coexistence in Switzerland, attitudes towards diversity and the feeling of discomfort that this may cause and the population's commitment to anti-racism.

1. Context: diversity, acceptance and exclusion	1
2. Attitudes towards diversity	2
3. Commitment to anti-racism	4

## 1. Context: diversity, acceptance and exclusion

Switzerland's population has always been diverse and is made up of persons of different affiliations. First of all, there was linguistic diversity (German, French, Italian, Romansh), religious diversity (Catholics, Protestants) and different ways of life (nomadic, sedentary). The gradual increase in international migration has led to greater variety of nationalities.

Today, diversity remains a key characteristic of the population living in Switzerland. In addition to the four national languages, about ten languages are widely spoken, i.e. spoken by many people on a daily basis. This is the case, for example, for English, Portuguese and Albanian, which are reported as main languages by 6%, 3.5% and 3% respectively (Structural survey – SE, 2019). In addition, the Swiss religious landscape is also varied. More than ten main religious communities are counted in the census. While 35% and 23% of the population are Catholic and Protestant respectively, 5% are Muslim or linked to an Islamic community, 2.5% are Orthodox and 28% have no religious affiliation (SE, 2017–2019 combined).

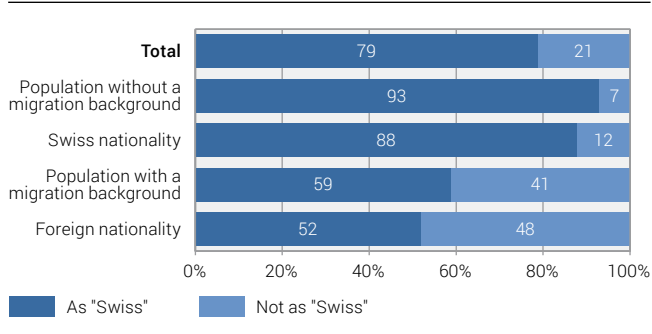
This cultural diversity is also accompanied by a diversity of nationalities and places of birth. The proportion of foreign nationals in Switzerland's permanent resident population is 25% (STATPOP, 2020). It counts almost 200 different nationalities. The most represented nationalities are Italian (15% of the permanent foreign resident population), German (14%), Portuguese (12%), French (7%) and Kosovan (5%). The composition of Switzerland's population is therefore notably marked by European immigration, particularly from neighbouring countries. In addition to this to this variety of nationalities, among Swiss passport holders one in eight was born abroad and therefore has experience of migration (STATPOP, 2020). In 2020, the proportion of the population with a migration background was 38% (SLFS, 2020).

Some groups carry visible signs of a migratory past or belonging to a particular group (physical appearance, skin colour, etc.). According to the results of the 2021 module, 21% of people living in Switzerland say that they are not perceived as "Swiss" and are thus perceived as "foreign". This rate is 12% among persons with Swiss nationality and 48% among those with foreign nationality, i.e. 4 times greater. This difference is also observed by migration status: among people without a migration background, 7% think they are not perceived as "Swiss" in terms of physical appearance, compared with 41% of people with a migration background (G1).

91% of the permanent resident population aged 15 to 88 identify with Switzerland, in particular with its values and culture<sup>1</sup> (Diversity module, 2021). There is no difference between nationals and non-nationals when it comes to this feeling of identification with Switzerland: foreign nationals feel it just as much as Swiss nationals.

### Proportion of the population who think they are perceived as "Swiss", by migration status and nationality, in 2021

G1



Source: FSO – VeS-2021, Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Diversity module 2021 © FSO 2022

In this context of diversity, issues of coexistence and integration often surface. While 64% of the population believe that the integration of migrants is generally working well, 58% think that racism is an important social problem (VeS, 2020). The Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland (VeS) also shows that negative opinions on foreign nationals or target groups persisted and remained stable over the period 2016–2020. 6% of the population had negative attitudes towards foreign nationals (xenophobia index) and between 6% and 11% showed hostile attitudes towards Muslims, Black and Jewish people (hostility indices). In the self-declared experiences, 28% of the population said that they had been a victim of discrimination in Switzerland. Despite the prevailing openness and acceptance, the daily life of certain groups is therefore marked by experiences of exclusion that hinder coexistence in Swiss society<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In the survey, the terms "values" and "culture" are stated without being defined.

<sup>2</sup> Publication: 2021, FSO. Diversity and coexistence in Switzerland: in-depth analysis of the results for 2016–2020. Neuchâtel: FSO

## 2. Attitudes towards diversity

Observing attitudes towards diversity contributes to feeling the pulse of multicultural coexistence in a given society. Positive attitudes indicate a climate of openness and acceptance, while negative attitudes indicate a climate of closure or rejection. Although negative attitudes (closure, rejection) towards diversity do not necessarily imply acts of direct discrimination against target groups, it can be assumed that they provide a breeding ground for negative acts and forms of exclusion.

Asking people about their feelings of discomfort towards otherness is one way of understanding attitudes towards diversity. Does a feeling of discomfort towards ethnic or cultural differences exist among the population? If this is the case, how prevalent is this feeling and who are the target groups?

### 2.1 Discomfort felt

In 2021, 9% of the population felt discomfort and said that they can feel a sense of unease in their daily life because of the presence of persons from different groups.

In an open question, those disturbed by diversity (9%) mention certain groups that are more likely to cause this discomfort<sup>3</sup>. The five most cited groups are presented below and ranked by how often they were mentioned (see infographic).

#### *Non-compliance with rules*

The most mentioned group (29%) is made up of persons who do not comply with the country's rules or who due to their behaviour contribute to creating a feeling of insecurity. For example, violent and noisy people were mentioned as were those under the influence of drugs and those in gangs. It is therefore a question of discomfort due to behaviour and not individual characteristics such as nationality. Disturbing behaviour is generally seen in public spaces, especially "on the street".

#### *Foreign nationality and migration*

The second most often mentioned group (26%) are persons with foreign nationality, those with a migration background or in the asylum process. In most cases, specific nationalities are not mentioned, but rather "foreigners", "migrants" or "asylum seekers"

<sup>3</sup> The mention of these groups is done in free form as part of an open question "Which groups in particular cause you discomfort?" The categories presented here are therefore established based on ex post coding. This open question is also asked every two years in the survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland (VeS). While its initial aim was to identify the emergence or crystallisation of tensions around new target groups at an early stage, the results are currently disseminated in a descriptive way on the FSO's website: Look for statistics → Population → Migration and integration → Diversity and coexistence → Diversity.

Key figures	2021
Discomfort linked to diversity	
Discomfort felt (2.1)	9%
Discomfort caused (2.2)	10%
Target groups mentioned	
1 non-respectful or violent persons (insecurity)	29%
2 migrants or foreign nationals (migration)	26%
3 non-integrated persons or persons from other cultures (culture)	20%
4 Muslims (religion)	14%
5 Persons who benefit from the system (abuse)	11%
Behaviour	
Need to adapt in public	77%
Ability to act freely in private	81%
Individual factors	
Sex – migration status	
Contact – experience of discrimination	

in general are cited instead. Only certain nationalities or groups of nationalities are explicitly mentioned: Germans, Eritreans, people from Eastern Europe, former Yugoslavia and Turks<sup>4</sup>.

#### *Lack of integration*

The third most mentioned group (20%) is again linked to a behaviour instead of a belonging to a particular group or an affiliation: a lack of integration in Swiss society or, from another perspective, the maintenance of the country of origin's values and culture. While some people experience discomfort from the presence of groups perceived as "non-integrated", others do not refer to the process of integration (as a goal to be achieved), but rather to maintaining a culture or way of life that is different from that of the majority.

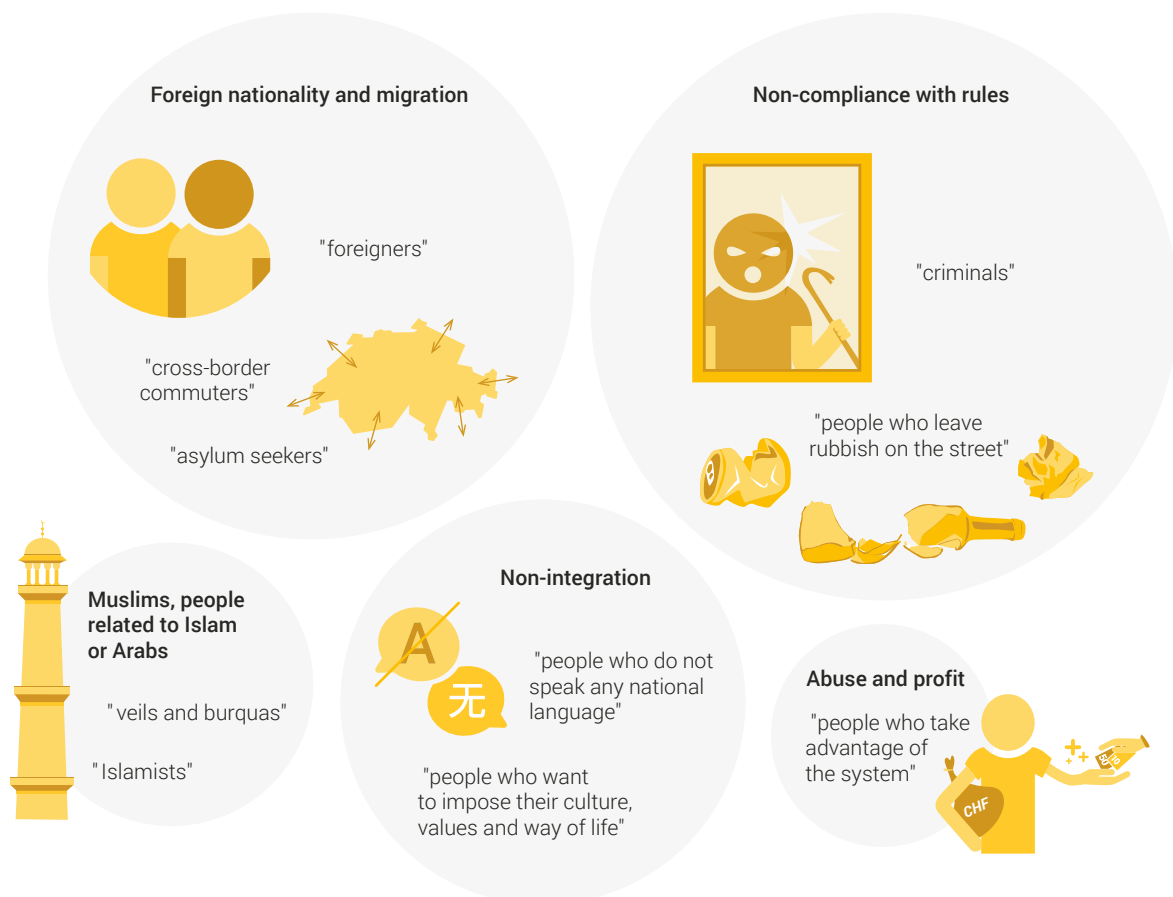
#### *Muslims, persons linked to Islam or Arabs*

The fourth most mentioned group (14%) are Muslims. In several cases, Islam and the religious practices associated with this are specifically mentioned. Visible signs linked to the religion are, in some cases, indicated as a cause of discomfort: for women, it is the veil or the burka while, for men, it is a beard. Some people who feel discomfort refer to Arabs without reference to a religion.

<sup>4</sup> The sample size is too small (n < 50) to present rates by specific nationalities or nationality groups.

## Open question: "Which groups in particular cause you discomfort?"

Categories (bubble titles) deduced from freely formulated answers (examples in inverted commas)



Sources: FSO – VeS-2021, Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Diversity module

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### Abuse and profit

The fifth most mentioned group (11%) again refers to behaviour. These are people who – from the perspective of those who feel discomfort – take advantage of the Swiss welfare system. The issue of potential abuse therefore tends to cause discomfort.

The feeling of discomfort seems to be based more on differences in behaviour, lifestyles, practices and values than on national or ethno-racial differences. This trend is also seen across the results of the survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland (VeS). In this survey, as in the 2021 module, it is not target groups that are mentioned as the main source of discomfort, but it is instead behaviour that is considered inappropriate or deviant.

The question of behaviour was addressed in the 2021 module through the distinction between the public and private spheres. Reflecting the results of the feeling of discomfort, 77% of the population believe that in public it is better to adapt and, by implication, to behave in a compliant way. Agreement with this statement concerning a need to adapt varies in particular by age. It is less important among the youngest age groups (59% between 15 and 24 years) and more important among the oldest age groups (87% from 65 years onwards). While the need to adapt in the

public sphere is widely accepted, 81% of the population believe that people should be able to behave as they wish in private. Once again, agreement with this statement varies by age. The greatest degree of agreement is recorded between the ages of 15 and 24 (88%), then it falls gradually with the lowest degree of agreement from age 65 onwards (74%).

## 2.2 Discomfort caused

Information on discomfort in the face of diversity can be understood from another angle: that of the discomfort people feel they may cause others because of personal characteristics which earmark them as different.

In 2021, 10% of the population reported belonging to a group that tends to unintentionally cause discomfort or disturbance to others. The feeling of being a nuisance seems to be linked to the feeling of being perceived as "Swiss" since, among those who think that they are a source of discomfort, 38% believe they do not look "Swiss" (compared with 20% for the total population). However, it is not linked to identification with Switzerland, as 85% of those who say they cause discomfort report a strong attachment to the country.

The prevalence of causing discomfort due to difference varies according to the individual characteristics of those who experience it. Young people aged 15 to 24 (16%) and 25–39 year olds (15%) feel more often that they cause discomfort than older groups (8% among those aged 55–64). People of foreign nationality (14%) and those with a migration background (15%) are also more affected by the feeling of causing others discomfort than Swiss nationals (9%) or people without a migration background (7%). Furthermore, this feeling is less prevalent among those who do not have daily contact with people different to themselves (5%). Conversely, it is more common among those with such contact (15%). Finally, a link was found between the feeling of causing discomfort and the experience of discrimination: people who felt that they were causing discomfort were more likely to report having experienced discrimination (21%) than those who had not experienced it (5%).

*Summary: Diversity-related discomfort affects 1 in 10 of the permanent resident population aged 15 to 88 years. The feeling of causing discomfort (10%) is as widespread as the feeling of discomfort (9%). The discomfort seems to stem more from behaviour than from personal characteristics such as nationality or specific ethno-racial criteria.*

## 3. Commitment to anti-racism

Another aspect of multicultural coexistence is the analysis of how people see racism as a social problem. Does the population consider racism to be a significant problem in Switzerland? Is the country willing to commit to fighting racism and if so what specific actions is it willing to undertake?

During the period 2016–2020, almost 60% of the population considered racism to be a serious social problem needing to be addressed (VeS, 2016–2020). It believes that it is primarily up to the state to take action against racism. However, apart from this duty to act attributed to the state, 22% of the population nevertheless consider that the fight against racism requires a personal commitment and is each individual's responsibility.

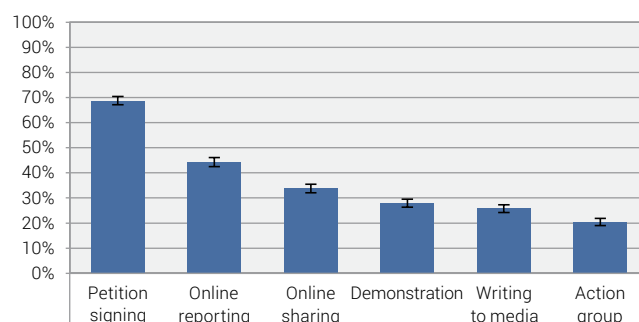
## 3.1 Willingness to engage and intervene

Key figures	2021
Willingness to engage (3.1)	79%
Unwillingness to engage (3.2)	20%
Engagement through actions	
1 Sign a petition, referendum, initiative	69%
2 Report racist comments in the internet	44%
3 Share documentation on the internet	34%
Willingness to intervene (3.1)	8%
Unwillingness to intervene (3.2)	37%
Intervention in situations	
Racial profiling by the police	15%
Racist joke at work	33%
Racist act on public transport	50%
Individual factors	
Sex – age – migration status	
Degree of urbanisation – contacts – experience of discrimination	

Almost 80% of the population say they are willing to make a personal commitment to fighting racism through at least one concrete action such as signing a petition, an initiative or referendum, reporting racist comments online or by participating in an authorised demonstration. Of the various actions proposed in the survey, signing a petition, an initiative or a referendum was the most popular and involved the least amount of time. For the other actions, the rates are between 20% and 44% (G2). Joining a non-governmental organisation (NGO) or other action group is

### Proportion of the population willing to engage against racism, by type of action, in 2021

G2



└ confidence interval (95%)

Source: FSO – VeS-2021, Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Diversity module 2021

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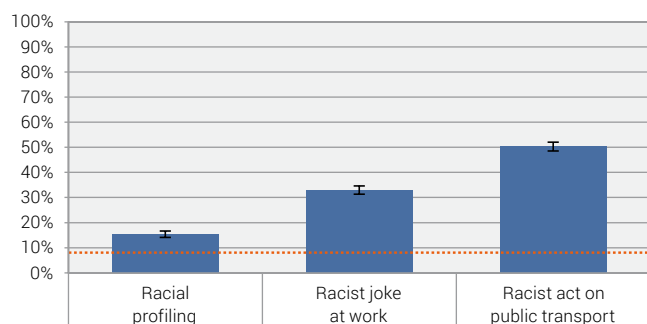
the activity least favoured by those willing to engage in the fight against racism (20%). This action is the most time-consuming and requires greater involvement.

The willingness to take action varies according to certain personal characteristics, including age, language region and degree of urbanisation of the place of residence. The willingness to engage is strongest between the ages of 15 and 24 (88%) and lowest among those aged 65 and over (70%). At regional level, people living in densely populated areas (85%) show a greater willingness to act against racism, compared with people living in a low population density area (73%). Furthermore, those in contact with diversity in their daily life (83%) but also those who have experienced discrimination themselves (86%), are more likely to take action than people who do not have such contact (74%) or have not been adversely affected (76%).

In concrete situations – racial profiling by the police, a racist act on public transport or a racist joke in the workplace – the proportion of the population who say they intervene to help the victim in all three cases is 8%<sup>5</sup>. In relation to the potential willingness to engage (80%), systematic intervention in the event of a racist act (8%) is 10 times less common. The level of intervention such as reporting is particularly low in the event of police stopping a foreign-looking person for no obvious reason (15%). In the workplace, when faced with a stigmatising joke directed at a colleague, a third of the population say they would act (33%). The highest proportion of the population (50%) intervene when someone is the victim of a racist act on a bus (G3).

In contrast to the willingness to engage in fighting racism through targeted action (such as a petition, letter, demonstration or reporting), the willingness to systematically intervene in a racist situation shows little variation by people's individual characteristics. In the situation involving the police, there are the least differences by these characteristics. For other situations - in

### Proportion of the population willing to intervene, by situation, in 2021 G3



..... Proportion of the population willing to intervene in the three situations (systematic intervention)  
 I confidence interval (95%)

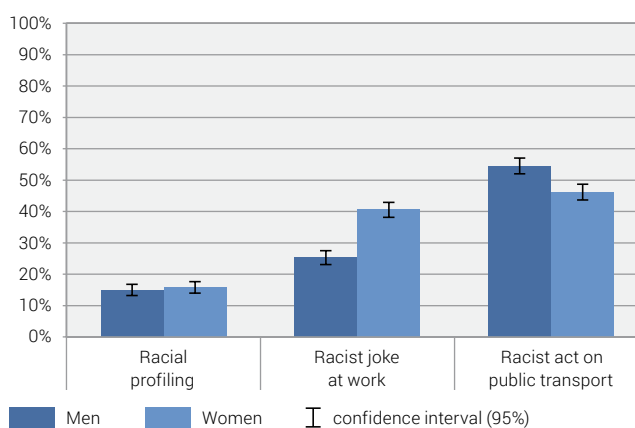
Source: FSO – VeS-2021, Survey on and coexistence in Switzerland, Diversity module 2021

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<sup>5</sup> In the 2021 module, people were asked to imagine their actions in concrete situations and indicate whether they would intervene in such a situation.

public transport and the workplace - sex (G4), migration status (G5) and experience of discrimination (G6) play a role. When witnessing a racist joke directed at a colleague, women intervene more frequently than men (41% compared with 25% for men). On public transport, people with a migrant background (59% compared with 45% for those without) and people who have already experienced discrimination (60% compared with 45% for those who have not) react more.

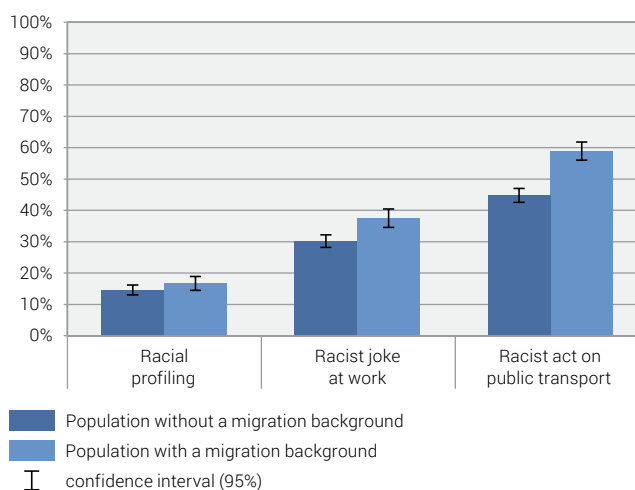
### Proportion of the population willing to intervene, by situation and sex, in 2021 G4



Source: FSO – VeS-2021, Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Diversity module 2021

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### Proportion of the population willing to intervene, by situation and migration status, in 2021 G5

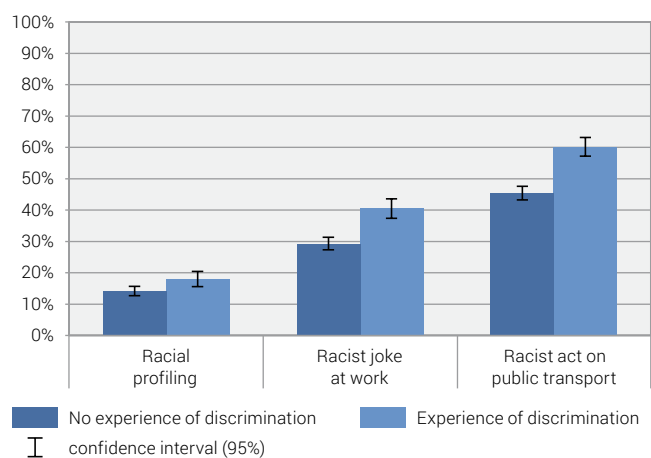


Source: FSO – VeS-2021, Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Diversity module 2021

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### Proportion of the population willing to intervene, by situation and experience of discrimination, in 2021

G6



Source: FSO – VeS-2021, Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Diversity module 2021 © FSO 2022

Among those willing to take action against racism through targeted action, 96% believe that social justice and equal rights are important reasons for action. The desire for social cohesion, peace and solidarity are considered by 95% of persons as reasons for engagement. Being a victim of racism oneself and being personally involved is considered a valid reason by 81%. The least important reason was considered to be religious beliefs (47%).

### 3.2 Unwillingness to engage and intervene

Around 20% of the population say they do not want to take action against racism. These people do not want to engage in any of the proposed forms of action: they do not want to work in an NGO or action group, participate in a demonstration, write to a newspaper, report racist comments seen on the internet, share material online or sign a petition. If signing a petition, referendum or initiative is excluded from the analysis, the proportion of the population not willing to engage increases to 34%.

Like a willingness to engage, an unwillingness to engage varies by age, the degree of urbanisation of the commune of residence, contact with diversity and experience of discrimination. Although less visible than a willingness to act, the proportion of the population that would not undertake any of the proposed actions varies statistically significantly by migration status: the non-migrant population (22%) is more reluctant to act than the migrant population (17%).

In addition to refusing to take concrete action such as signing a petition, participating in a demonstration or reporting racist comments online, some people are generally unwilling to engage in the fight against racism. Among those rejecting all forms of action proposed (20%), 64% state that they do not want to engage in the fight against racism in general and on principle. The rest – 34% and 2% – see other forms of engagement as possible or do not give their opinion on this issue. The rejection of engagement

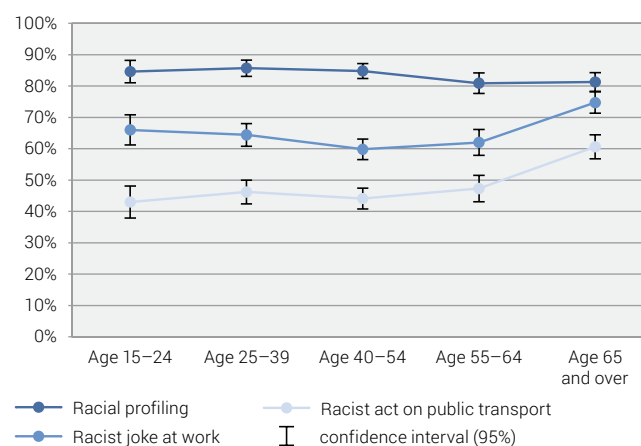
is generally greater among men (70%) than it is among women (58%). It is also higher among people without a migration background (71%) compared with those with a migration background (52%). However, this categorical refusal does not vary by age or type of region.

In the concrete situations of racial profiling, racist act on a bus or racist joke in the workplace that people may witness, 37% say they do not intervene. In the case of racial profiling by the police, 84% of people would not intervene, for example, by reporting the incident to a higher authority.

In contrast with interventions, there are statistically significant differences in the rates of systematic non-intervention by individual characteristics. Among those aged 65 and over, 49% say that they do not intervene in any of the three situations; while in the younger age groups, the rate is between 32% and 36% (G7 – detailed results by situation). While 29% of people with a migrant background also say they do not intervene, this rate is 42% for people without a migrant background. Geographically, the proportion of the population who say they would not intervene in the event of racial profiling by a police officer, on public transport or at work in the case of racist treatment is smaller in dense areas such as urban centres (31% compared with 40% in sparsely populated areas) (G8). Finally, the frequency of contact with diversity and an experience of discrimination influence the rates of non-intervention in the case of a racist act: they are higher in the absence of contact (47% compared with 31%) (G9) and where there is no personal experience of discrimination (42% compared with 28%). Although in different proportions, the same differences are observed for the three situations.

### Proportion of the population unwilling to intervene, by situation and age, in 2021

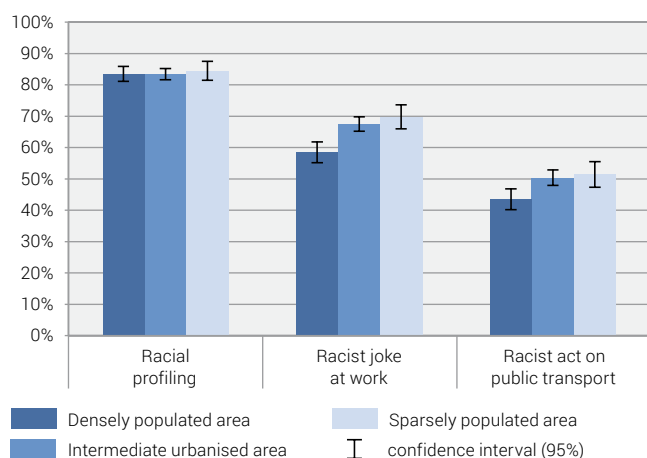
G7



Source: FSO – VeS-2021, Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Diversity module 2021 © FSO 2022



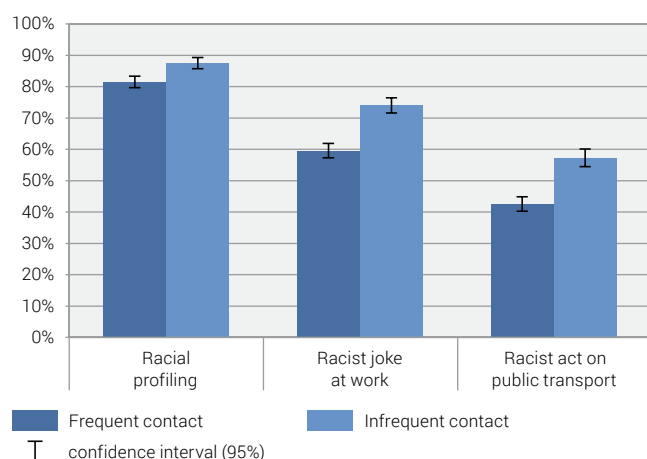
### Proportion of the population unwilling to intervene, by situation and degree of urbanisation, in 2021 G8



Source: FSO – VeS-2021, Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Diversity module 2021 © FSO 2022

*Summary: Among Switzerland's permanent resident population aged 15 to 88, 8 out of 10 people say they are willing to engage in the fight against racism by signing a petition, reporting racist content on the internet, participating in a demonstration or by working in an action group. However, when people witness a racist act, they are less likely to intervene (8%). The unwillingness to engage or intervene varies not only depending on the case or situation in question but also by people's individual characteristics. Men, older people, those without a migration background, those who do not experience diversity through contact and those who have not experienced discrimination themselves are less willing to take action.*

### Proportion of the population unwilling to intervene, by situation and frequency of contact, in 2021 G9



Source: FSO – VeS-2021, Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Diversity module 2021 © FSO 2022

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