Chapter 12

Social cohesion and immigrants

The nature of the relationship between a host society and its immigrant population is a critical factor in integration. If such social cohesion is strong, it will promote integration. If it is weak, immigrants will find it harder to fit in. Social cohesion is hard to measure but can, however, be estimated from certain kinds of information produced by satisfaction surveys.

Discrimination against immigrants is one factor that can have a deeply adverse impact on social cohesion, thought its real extent is hard to quantify. It is essential to measure discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, race or nationality, however, because it undermines immigrants’ willingness to invest in education and training, which are the best ways to improve the integration process. Opinion polls are a means of assessing the levels of discrimination that immigrant populations perceive (Indicator 12.1).

Social cohesion can also be measured by analysing the host country’s degree of acceptance of immigration. A high level of acceptance will indirectly promote the conditions for successful integration – if the immigrant population is welcomed, it will be better able to contribute to the life of the community. This report assesses acceptance by gauging public opinion of its perceived impact and with respect to the perceived local conditions for immigrant settlement (Indicator 12.2).

The section entitled “Data limitations” at the end of the chapter discusses in detail the social cohesion indicators and the issues they raise.
Key findings

- In the OECD and EU areas, between 2002 and 2012, one immigrant in seven felt that they were discriminated against on the grounds of their origin.
- Perceived discrimination is more widespread among men and people born in lower-income countries. Foreigners born abroad also perceive more often to be the target of discrimination than their peers who have naturalised.
- The groups most exposed to ethnic discrimination (young people, the unemployed, and the elderly) vary widely from one country to another.
- In 2012, a quarter of the host-country population in European countries considered the economic impact of immigration to be negative. Views on the economic impact of migration were mostly positive in Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries. Opposite views are observed in most countries of southern and central Europe.
- In the settlement countries, most people consider their area a good place for immigrants to live in, whereas the opposite is the case in most countries of southern and central Europe.
- Immigrants felt less discriminated against in 2008-12 than in 2002-06 even though the share of people who consider their area to be a good place to live for immigrants slightly declined.
12.1. Perceived discrimination

**Background**

**Indicator**

Ethnic discrimination is generally understood as unfairly treating an individual or a certain group of people on the grounds of their ethnicity, race, or citizenship. It can come in various guises and may be inherent in individual behaviour and institutional structures and practices. This indicator measures ethnic discrimination perceived by people born abroad. Depending on the country, it reflects discrimination that is perceived personally in a given situation or by the respondent’s entire ethnic group.

**Coverage**

Foreign-born people aged between 15 and 64.

In all European countries between 2002 and 2012, 14% of immigrants claimed to belong to a group that had been subjected to discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, nationality, or race (Figure 12.1). Levels were particularly high in Greece, Latvia and Austria, where a quarter of the foreign-born population felt they were discriminated against. In general, immigrants to southern Europe and the Baltic countries were more likely to feel discriminated against than in Scandinavia, and Luxembourg. In non-European OECD countries about one in seven respondents felt personally discriminated against.

In all countries, higher proportions of immigrants from lower-income countries report discrimination against their community (Figure 12.1). In the European Union, and especially in the EU15 countries (particularly Portugal, France and Belgium), they were 12 percentage points more likely to do so than their peers from high-income countries, while in Greece and Austria, up to 35% felt discriminated against. In North America and Australia, the share of immigrants born in lower-income countries who said they had experienced discrimination was almost 10 percentage points higher than those from high-income countries, with the rate in Australia standing at one in four in 2012-13.

Between 2002 and 2012, having a foreign nationality has been associated with intensified perceptions of ethnic discrimination. It is difficult to ascertain whether obtaining the host-country nationality protects people from further discrimination, or whether meeting the often integration-related criteria to qualify for nationality makes people less likely to be discriminated against. Whatever the case, around 17% of foreigners in the European Union claimed discrimination against themselves or the group to which they belonged (Figure 12.2).

Country rankings by level of perceived discrimination is broadly the same whether on the grounds of country of birth or nationality. In southern Europe, especially in Greece, Portugal, and in Austria, foreigners born abroad are far more likely to report discrimination than naturalised immigrants, with the rate as high as four out of ten in Greece (Figure 12.A1.1). Conversely, foreigners born abroad living in northern Europe, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom often say they are less subject to discrimination than naturalised immigrants, although they are more likely than immigrants with the host-country citizenship to be so in the United States and Australia, as in other European countries.
Figure 12.1. **Share of 15-64 year-old immigrants who consider themselves members of a group that is discriminated/has been discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity, nationality or race, by place of origin, 2002-12**

![Graph showing the share of 15-64 year-old immigrants who consider themselves members of a group that is discriminated/has been discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity, nationality or race, by place of origin, 2002-12.](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933213084)

Figure 12.2. **Share of 15-64 year-old foreigners who consider themselves members of a group that is discriminated/has been discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity, nationality or race, 2002-12**

![Graph showing the share of 15-64 year-old foreigners who consider themselves members of a group that is discriminated/has been discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity, nationality or race, 2002-12.](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933213093)

Notes and sources are to be found at the end of the chapter.
Although all OECD countries share some patterns of perceived discrimination – e.g. higher levels of perceived discrimination against immigrant men than women, and against those from lower-income countries than from higher-income countries – there are differences that may spring from the country’s migration history and socio-economic factors. Some differences may also be attributable to methods of measuring discrimination from one country to another (see “Data limitations” at the end of the chapter).

Within the European Union, between 2008 and 2012, immigrants born in Africa were most likely to feel their group was discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity, race, or nationality. One quarter reported discrimination – twice the average for all immigrants (Figure 12.3). Younger people of working age were more likely to report discrimination than those aged 55 and older, who were coming to the end of their careers. It is, however, unclear whether the higher incidence is the effect of age or generation (younger cohorts may be more likely to perceive discrimination than older cohorts).

People with traits that might hamper labour market integration feel most discriminated against – 19% of unemployed immigrants, for example, and 17% with a low level of education. Immigrants whose native language is not that of the host country are also more likely to complain of discrimination. However, immigrants to the European Union have reported less ethnic discrimination in recent years, with a 1 percentage point drop between 2002-06 and 2008-12. Yet, immigrants born in North Africa have become more likely to feel discriminated against as members of an ethnic group than they were in the mid-2000s.

In Canada in 2009, Asian immigrants were the most likely to report discrimination (20%). By contrast, immigrants from Africa do not report higher levels of discrimination than the foreign-born in general. Unlike Europe, immigrants to Canada are most likely to report discrimination when they are well integrated in the labour market: 17.5% of the highly educated report being discriminated against, compared to 9% of their low-educated peers (Figure 12.4). One explanation could be that Canada selects most of its highly qualified immigrants, which may raise their expectations of favourable treatment and help explain why immigrants in work report more discrimination than those who are unemployed. Finally, while the oldest immigrants are the least likely to report unfair treatment on the grounds of ethnic identity, the youngest, in the 15-24 year-old age bracket, are more likely to complain of discrimination (20%), just as they are in Europe.

As in Canada, Asian, young, or highly qualified immigrants in Australia and New Zealand were most likely to report discrimination in 2012-13, while people with jobs felt more discriminated against than those who were not in the labour market.

In the United States, where discrimination figures between 2004 and 2012 are available for only the employed, immigrants born in Asia reported less discrimination than the foreign-born as a whole. As in Europe, immigrants with the fewest qualifications were the most likely to perceive discrimination (20%). However, ethnic discrimination at work was a much greater problem for older immigrants, who reported being singled out twice as often as immigrants aged under 25. Again, more detailed research would be needed to establish whether that more widely perceived sense of discrimination is related to age or to generation.
Figure 12.3. Share of 15-64 year-old immigrants who state that they have been discriminated against, EU countries, 2002-06 and 2008-12

Notes and sources are to be found at the end of the chapter.
12.2. Host-society attitudes towards immigration

**Background**

Unlike previous indicators, this one seeks to assess the integration of immigrants from the point of view of the host country, as positive attitudes make integration easier. Host country opinions of immigration have been assessed using various questions: is the respondents’ city or area of residence a good place for migrants to live – which can be considered an indicator of welcoming – and what impact does immigration have on the economy and cultural life. The latter question is not asked in surveys of non-European countries.

**Coverage**

People aged 15 and older, both native-born and immigrant.

In 2012, an average of 73% of the population of the OECD area considered the place where they lived to be a good place for immigrants to settle. At 69%, that opinion was not quite as prevalent in the European Union (Figure 12.5).

Levels differ widely between countries. In most central European countries, the Baltic countries, Greece, and Israel, people generally think their area is not a good place for immigrants to live in. Just one-third of Israelis say that their neighbourhood is a good place for immigrants.

Lower-income countries (such as Mexico and Turkey) generally perceive the welcoming of immigrants in their area more sceptically than richer ones. Settlement countries, particularly Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, have more favourable views, with nine out of ten people agreeing that their place of residence is a good place for migrants. The same is true of Scandinavian countries, especially Iceland and Sweden. In the other OECD countries (the United States and the EU15), most people think that immigrants will have a good place in their area.

In 2012, public opinion in OECD and EU countries was, on average, slightly more sceptical on this issue than in 2007. In 2007, most people everywhere – with the exception of Israel – considered their neighbourhood to be a good place for immigrants to settle. That balance has reversed in five countries, however. In Greece, for example, the share of the population who agreed that where they lived was a good place for immigrants to settle fell from 67% to 41% (Figure 12.6). Here again, countries with lower living standards and those worst-affected by the financial crisis have become less accepting of immigration. By contrast, public opinion has grown more positive on this issue in the EU15 countries that were the least impacted by the crisis, except in the Benelux countries and France. Germans, Austrians, and particularly Scandinavians viewed their area of residence as a good place for immigrants. In settlement countries, public opinion varies: people in Canada are currently perceiving their area more welcoming than five years ago, whereas positive views in Australia have fallen by 3 percentage points.

Public opinion on the settlement of new immigrants closely reflects public opinion on the impact of immigration. Across all European countries between 2008 and 2012, 26% of the population saw immigration as having an adverse impact on the economy, and 29% a positive effect (Figure 12.7). In Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, and Hungary, at least 45% of the population felt the economic impact was negative, while more than 40% of the respondents in Scandinavia and Switzerland viewed it as positive. Immigration’s effect on cultural life is widely seen as more positive than its impact on the economy with 43% expressing their approval in the OECD (Figure 12.A1.2). Country rankings against the culture criterion reflect opinions of immigration’s economic impact.
Figure 12.5. **Share of the population who think that their city or area of residence is a good place for migrants from other countries to live, 2012**

![Graph showing the share of the population who think their city or area of residence is a good place for migrants from other countries to live, 2012.](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933213122)

Figure 12.6. **Changes in the share of the population who think that their city or area of residence is a good place for migrants from other countries to live, 2007-12**

![Graph showing changes in the share of the population who think their city or area of residence is a good place for migrants from other countries to live, 2007-12.](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933213135)

Figure 12.7. **Perceived economic impact of immigration, 2008-12**

![Graph showing the perceived economic impact of immigration, 2008-12.](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933213140)

Notes and sources are to be found at the end of the chapter.
Data limitations

Discrimination

Measurements of perceived discrimination remain highly subjective. People perceive discrimination differently, depending on their attributes, those of their community, and even public discourse on integration in the host country. Victims may not recognise a discriminatory practice when they encounter it or they may, alternatively, attribute to discrimination obstacles or disadvantages that are in fact due to other factors. Self-reported data on discrimination should therefore be treated with caution.

There exist other, more objective measurements of discrimination, but they are difficult to apply in international comparisons. There are, for example, econometric methods of measuring the residual difference between the immigrant and native-born populations for some indicators, adjusted for observable characteristics. After adjustment, the remaining difference is the unexplained part, which includes factors such as discrimination. It is impossible, however, to measure the real extent of discrimination within those non-observable characteristics. First, observable data vary depending on the source. Language proficiency, for example, can be included either in the observable adjustment criteria or in the unexplained part, according to whether it was measured in the survey. Second, even in surveys in which as much data as possible are observed, there always remain factors that cannot be measured objectively, such as personal networks, understanding of the procedures and culture of the host country, and personal motives.

There is also one further objective method for measuring discrimination: testing in real conditions. Such tests compare the results of applications for jobs or housing sent simultaneously by two people with equivalent profiles and whose only distinctive attribute is the migration profile, often indicated by the first and last name. It assesses discrimination as a function of the difference in the number of return calls, interviews, or property viewings received by the candidates. That kind of testing is more rigorous, but difficult to use in international comparisons because the methods used vary so widely between tests.

The evaluation of discrimination in this report is based on questions put to immigrants in various surveys. Every survey words the question differently, and the data are therefore not directly comparable. In Canada, New Zealand and the United States, immigrants are asked about their experience of discrimination based on ethnicity, race or nationality. In Australia, they are also asked about discrimination on the grounds of religion. Further, respondents are not always interviewed in the same conditions. In the United States, only job discrimination is measured, so the level of perceived discrimination and the factors that influence it are not comparable with those that emerge from other studies. In New Zealand, Australia and Canada, the same question is asked, but over different periods: last year prior to 2012 in New Zealand and prior to 2012 or 2013 in Australia but for the last five years prior to 2009 in Canada, which automatically increases the number of immigrants who suffer from discrimination in Canada. Nor are the results of the European Social Survey comparable to non-European OECD countries because the question it asks does not concern personal experience, but whether respondents belong to a group that is discriminated against. This is a slightly ambiguous measurement of perceived discrimination because it blurs the line between personal experience and the general perception of the overall situation of the ethnic group to which the respondent belongs, which tends to bias perceived discrimination upwards.
Opinion in host countries

Opinion in host countries, or public opinion, is measured by surveys, with the most frequent responses seen as “the will of the people”. The results of that kind of survey must be qualified. First, they are influenced by the sampling method, the size of the sample, and the design of the questions. Second, sociological research is now questioning whether public opinion is really the aggregate result of individual answers to opinion surveys. For one thing, surveys are based on the assumption that everybody has an opinion on every subject – tantamount to ignoring non-response, which is information in itself. Moreover, the strength and importance of the views may largely differ from one individual to another. Lastly, public opinion surveys are based on the assumption that there exists a tacit consensus as to which issues people are interested in.

More importantly, the question whether the area of residence is a “good place to live for immigrants” is only a crude measure of welcoming. It can refer to many other things than acceptance and welcoming of immigrants by the society, and can notably be interpreted by the respondents as an indication of local economic conditions or the quality of the amenities available to immigrants.

Notes, sources, and further reading

Notes for figures and tables

Indicator 12.1: Data on European countries refer to the sense of belonging to a group that is discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnicity, or nationality. Australian data refer to immigrants who report being discriminated against on the grounds of colour, ethnicity, or religion. Canadian data refer to immigrants who have experienced discrimination or have been treated unfairly in the past five years because of their ethnicity, culture, race, or colour. Data for the United States refer to respondents in employment who feel, in one way or another, discriminated against at work because of their race or ethnicity. Data for New Zealand refer to immigrants who report having been treated unfairly or having had an unpleasant experience within the prior 12 months because of their ethnicity, race, or nationality. The relative sampling error for New Zealand is 30-49% for men, people aged 25-54 years old, those born in high-income countries, people with an average or high level of education, people in work, or those who are inactive. It is 50-99% for those aged 15-24 or 55-64, the low-educated, and the unemployed.

Indicator 12.2: Non-responses are not included.

Figures 12.5 and 12.6: 2011 data for Chile, Germany, Japan, Korea, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. 2006 data for Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus,1, 2 Finland, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Switzerland. 2008 data for Iceland, Luxembourg, and Malta.

Data for Luxembourg, Italy and Austria are not available from 2008 to 2012.

Note to Israel

Information on data concerning Israel: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602.
Notes to Cyprus\textsuperscript{1, 2}

1. Note by Turkey:

The information in this document with reference to “Cyprus” relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of the United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the “Cyprus issue”.

2. Note by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Union:

The Republic of Cyprus is recognised by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Sources


Figure 12.7: European Social Surveys (ESS) 2008-12.

Further reading


ANNEX 12.A1

Additional tables and figures

Figure 12.A1.1. Share of 15-64 year-old immigrants who consider themselves members of a group that is discriminated/has been discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity, nationality or race, by citizenship, 2002-12

Note: Data on European countries refer to the sense of belonging to a group that is discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnicity, or nationality. Australian data refer to immigrants who report being discriminated against on the grounds of colour, ethnicity, or religion. Data for the United States refer to respondents in employment who feel, in one way or another, discriminated against at work because of their race or ethnicity.

Figure 12.A1.2. Perceived impact of immigration on cultural life, 2008-12

Source: European Social Surveys (ESS) 2008-12.

StatLink  
http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933213168