

Retreat of multiculturalism 'is a myth'

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Perceptions of a decline in multiculturalism as a means of integrating ethnic minorities are unfounded, research led at the University of Strathclyde has found.

The study, comparing [citizenship](#) programs in four European nations - the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark - concluded that, while the term 'multiculturalism' was being less frequently used with a positive meaning, the actual public policies designed to help ethnic minorities to integrate and remake citizenship remained in place and were, in fact, being expanded.

Dr Nasar Meer, a Reader in Comparative Social Policy and Citizenship at Strathclyde, led the research. He said: "As European societies have become more diverse, the task of developing an inclusive citizenship has become increasingly important. In recent years, however, there has been a backlash against multiculturalism as path to achieving this.

"The reasons for this include the way that, in some countries, multiculturalism is seen to have facilitated social fragmentation and entrenched social divisions, while for others, it has distracted attention away from socio-economic disparities or encouraged a moral hesitancy amongst 'native' populations. Some have even blamed it for incidents of international terrorism."

The research found that, even in countries such as Denmark and Germany where multiculturalism was never formally adopted, some public policies were being developed to recognise minority communities

and facilitate their participation in the labour market, educational systems and other key social sectors at local and national levels.

Dr Daniel Faas, of Trinity College Dublin's Department of Sociology, a co-author of the research, said: "Legislations have become more inclusive of diversity, and the large anti-far right demonstrations highlight the solidarity with migrants, but also show that multiculturalism is a fragile concept there."

In countries where some multiculturalism has historically been adopted, such as the UK and the Netherlands, the picture was more mixed but showed that newer approaches, such as civic integration - including citizenship education, naturalisation ceremonies and language classes - also built on and developed multiculturalism rather than erasing it. How national identities have been remade to be inclusive is a further example of this.

The research also involved Aarhus University in Denmark and Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona.

Dr Meer added: "Our study clearly shows that, where there have been advances in policies of [multiculturalism](#), these have not been repealed uniformly, or on occasion not at all, but may equally have been supplemented by being 'balanced out' in, or thickened by, civic integrationist approaches."

The research has been published in the journal *American Behavioural Scientist*.

Provided by University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

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