

Different ethnic groups 'not likely to join the same local clubs'

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Local sports clubs and associations are often as segregated as the neighbourhood they are in, suggests a new study. It says that rather than encouraging a mixing of different cultures, they may even reinforce rather than mitigate existing ethnic divisions in local communities.

The research, published in the *American Sociological Review*, focuses on how Turkish and Moroccan immigrants have integrated in the Netherlands in the last decade by looking at joining and leaving rates for sports, leisure and neighbourhood associations of different ethnic composition. It finds that Dutch natives are far more likely to join organisations that contain no members from ethnic minorities than organisations with even just a small number, while immigrants and ethnic minorities join clubs that are similarly segregated. This leaves little room for [people](#) from different [ethnic groups](#) to mix with one another, says the study. It also finds that Turkish and Moroccan immigrants have higher dropout rates from clubs and associations than Dutch natives, even though their joining rates are similar, and urges policymakers to identify specific measures that could keep people of all backgrounds involved.

The paper uses data from the Netherlands Longitudinal Life Course Study (NELLS), analysing surveys carried out among nationally representative samples of men and women of Turkish, Moroccan and Dutch origin. In total, around 2,600 individuals between the ages of 15 to 50 years were interviewed multiple times between 2008 and 2014. The analysis shows that 64% of Turkish and Moroccan respondents were members of an organisation as compared with 77% of Dutch natives during the period studied. Around one quarter of them (24%) were also involved in volunteering, compared with 39% for Dutch natives.

These differences are in line with a body of existing research that shows that ethnic minorities are less likely to take part in voluntary organisations. However, the paper says this does not mean that ethnic minorities join organisations less often, as Moroccan and Turkish respondents were as likely to sign up for membership and volunteer work as the Dutch natives. Instead, the different involvement levels reflect higher dropout rates among people of Turkish and Moroccan origin. For example, around 60% of Turks and Moroccans who reported

being a member of an organisation in their first interview said they had quit their membership in a follow-up-interview three years later – a much higher dropout rate than for Dutch natives at 40%. The NELLS survey does not reveal though why their dropout rates are higher, because those who left were not asked to explain why they had stopped their memberships.

Dutch natives were found to be ten times more likely to join an association without any [ethnic minority](#) members than one with more than just a few minority members, even when they had regular contact with people from other ethnic backgrounds in their own neighbourhood. Similarly, Turks and Moroccans were more likely to join associations with a high proportion of people from ethnic minority backgrounds, even though such organisations are much scarcer than organisations made up of mainly Dutch natives. The paper suggests that such segregation is not simply driven by hostility, or preferences for 'our kind of people', and cannot be explained by the ethnic composition of family and friendship networks either. It concludes that civic society is divided along the same ethnic lines found in the neighbourhoods. In other words, people living in the same streets are more likely to join the same clubs and associations. In this way, clubs and voluntary groups emphasise ethnic boundaries that exist in communities instead of breaking them down.

Study author Dr Dingeman Wiertz, from the Department of Sociology and Nuffield College at the University of Oxford, comments: 'This evidence suggests that people often join clubs that contain their immediate neighbours as neighbours are an important route into how we socialise and civic activities. If ethnic groups are segregated into particular streets or sections of the city, efforts to promote more civic engagement may even backfire, driving ethnic groups further apart.

'Given that we find large ethnic divisions in civic life in a relatively open

and multicultural society like the Netherlands, we have to assume that similar if not more pronounced trends exist in other countries too.

'But, on a more positive note, people who were part of multicultural organisations did not have higher dropout rates than people in organisations containing mainly members from their own ethnic group. This means that once someone has taken the step to join a multicultural association, their involvement can contribute to stronger social cohesion and better relations between ethnic groups.'

More information: D. Wiertz. Segregation in Civic Life: Ethnic Sorting and Mixing across Voluntary Associations, *American Sociological Review* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/0003122416651312](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416651312)

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