

# Studies: France is a melting pot but discrimination lurks

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A woman dressed up as Marianne, a woman symbol of the French republic since the 1789 revolution, holds a French flag during a May Day demonstration in Marseille, southern France, May 1, 2022. Two landmark new studies in France are busting myths about immigration, at a time when xenophobic far-right discourse has gained ground, highlighting that immigration is melting into society but also pointing out persistent discrimination against some groups with immigrant backgrounds. Credit: AP Photo/Daniel Cole, File

Two landmark new studies in France are bursting myths about immigration at a time when xenophobic far-right discourse has gained ground. They show that the children of immigrants are increasingly melting into French society but some with African and Asian backgrounds face persistent discrimination.

Karima Simmou, a 20-year-old French-Moroccan student at the prestigious Paris university Sciences Po, embodies the phenomenon.

She comes from a working-class family of eight children, with a mother who raised the family and a father who worked as a miner in western France. She was pushed by her family to go to the elite school.

"As a child of immigrants my parents, from their experience, told me that I needed to do more than others to succeed," Simmou told The Associated Press.

Advocates who fight discrimination welcomed the new data published this month that gives a rare insight because France follows a universalist vision that doesn't differentiate citizens by ethnic groups.

The surveys published by the state statistics agency and the French state Institute for Demographic Studies, Ined, provide national data and statistics about the path of immigrants to France, their children and—for the first time—their grandchildren. It's an updated and more extensive version of a similar survey made 10 years ago. It includes a representative sample of more than 27,000 people drawn from the national census who responded to extensive questions about topics such as family life, income and religion from July 2019 to November 2020.

[One of the reports](#) found that a large swath of France's population has an immigrant ancestor—an estimated 32% of people under 60—and that children and grandchildren of immigrants are increasingly integrated into

French society.

Nonetheless, immigration isn't evenly spread across France. Patrick Simon, one of the Ined researchers, said that about 70% of France's population aged under 60 has no immigrant heritage over the past three generations and that ethnic diversity depends heavily on where in France people live.

The report brushed aside the "great replacement," a false claim propagated by some extreme-right figures that the white populations of France and other Western countries are being overrun by non-white immigrants.

"Population with immigrant backgrounds share a profound bond with the population who have no direct immigrant parentage. In every family, people have a less or more direct link with immigration," Simon told The AP.

Over the generations, the immigrant heritage is diluted, the survey notes.

It found that 66% of people with at least one immigrant parent are married to people without recent immigrant heritage, while nine out of 10 people of France's third generation of immigrant families have only one or two immigrant grandparents.

French immigration covers a wide range of origins, partly reflecting the country's colonial history. Young generations with immigrant backgrounds tend to have North African or sub-Saharan roots while older ones tend to have European roots. The survey said 83% of people under 18 in France who have at least one immigrant parent trace their origins to countries outside Europe, especially Africa. In contrast, more than 90% of second-generation immigrants over age 60 have Italian, Spanish, Polish, Belgian, German or other European parents.



A crowd watch French President Emmanuel Macron and centrist candidate for reelection arriving in the village of Spezet, Brittany, April 5, 2022. Two landmark new studies in France are busting myths about immigration, at a time when xenophobic far-right discourse has gained ground, highlighting that immigration is melting into society but also pointing out persistent discrimination against some groups with immigrant backgrounds. Credit: AP Photo/Jeremias Gonzalez, File

The children and grandchildren of immigrants from Africa and Asia are well integrated in the French educational system compared with their elders, according to [another report](#). Data show they have increasingly higher education levels than their parents, though many struggle to attain comparable educational levels to French people without immigrant



heritage.

And getting jobs is harder, too: 60% of those with non-European roots hold intermediate or high-level jobs, compared with 70% of French people without direct immigrant kinship.

Ined researcher Mathieu Ichou noted two possible explanations for the hiring discrepancy.

"Several surveys, data and audit studies backed up that hiring is not favorable to minorities, and they experience discrimination. France is pretty bad regarding this issue, compared to other European countries," he said.

Also, Ichou said, "minorities tend to be underrepresented in the French elite schools."

Simmou joined Sciences Po thanks to a special program for students from underprivileged areas. But she is well aware that her journey is exemplary and unusual.

Goundo Diawara, an educational adviser and member of a union of parents in working-class neighborhood schools with large immigrant communities, is a firsthand witness of how France's school system fails to eradicate inequality.

"In daily life, we report issues like the struggle with orientation in schools in underprivileged areas. Most of the time, these students don't know these elite schools. In addition, having a child who is doing long studies costs more for poor families," she told the AP.

Still, she praised the two reports for providing "useful resources."

Even though Simmou has been studying at one of France's most prestigious universities for three years, she still feels a gap between herself and her classmates.

"During my second year at Sciences Po, people reminded me that I have immigrant roots, trying to put me in a box, whereas I want to choose who I want to be," she said.

But the 20-year-old hopes that her journey will inspire others.

"If we don't set examples to hold on to, it is difficult to widen our horizons and imagine another future," she said.

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