

# Well-integrated immigrants report more discrimination: Study examines this paradox

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They have become part of their new country's middle class and have good education, jobs and solid language skills. Many may also live in a country that has a reputation for ensuring immigrant rights and an open

approach to new citizens.

Yet, these successful [immigrant](#) groups and their descendants are more prone to report discrimination than other immigrants when asked about their [everyday lives](#).

This is according to a new meta-study that has collected and analyzed no fewer than 42 studies from a wide range of countries. At the same time, the new meta-study paints a clearer picture of the underlying mechanisms of what is also known as the '[integration](#) paradox'.

"Better integration seems to go hand in hand with more reports of discrimination and exclusion. We see that people who actually have [good access](#) to [middle class](#) society report more experiences of exclusion. It is counterintuitive and somehow paradoxical," says Professor Merlin Schaeffer, who conducted the study together with Judith Kas from the WZB Berlin Social Science Center.

## **Education and social inclusion open eyes to inequality**

By combining 42 studies, the [meta-analysis](#) can provide much more solid insights into what creates the integration paradox.

First and foremost, the analyses show that the more well-educated immigrants and their descendants become, the more they report discrimination. On the other hand, their labor market attainment seems to have little or no effect.

Another important factor is immigrants' participation and engagement in public life. If they have good language skills and high local media consumption, they are more likely to experience discrimination. The same applies if they are exposed to the majority population in their everyday lives, for example through involvement in civic associations or

by living in neighborhoods with a high proportion of residents from the majority population.

Ultimately, it comes down to what degree the individual immigrant or descendant is able to recognize and speak up about discrimination in everyday life. This ability grows with better education, language skills and more social contact with the surrounding society. At the same time, immigrants will experience more discrimination if they clearly stand out from the majority, for example through their way of dress.

"In my opinion, there is no whining among immigrants. Rather, with better integration, they get a better understanding of the remaining inequalities. They become more visible, and the immigrants themselves become more sensitive to inequalities that seemed less important in the times with more discrimination," says Schaeffer.

"Finally, it can be about self-confidence. If people are generally better established, they will more likely speak up about discrimination."

This can be observed across national borders. In the new study, the researchers compare immigrants' experiences of discrimination with their new home countries' rankings on the so-called 'Migrant Integration Policy Index' (MIPEX), which measures the inclusiveness of a country's policies towards immigrants.

The pattern is clear: better established immigrants are more likely to report discrimination in countries that have more inclusive integration and anti-discrimination policies.

## **Politicians should understand the background of experienced discrimination**

This is yet another variant of the integration paradox, which, according to Merlin Schaeffer, creates its own political challenges:

How should politicians react to complaints about discrimination if they increase in strength after political reforms in the area of integration that are supposed to address the issue? And how should they interpret complaints, which can both stem from real progress in the field and cover ongoing discrimination?

"Politicians may rightly ask why people complain when things have actually improved. Here, the results suggest that it is important to understand the reasons for dissatisfaction before concluding whether complaints are unjustified or not. Conversely, the absence of reports of discrimination does not necessarily mean that everything is fine. Both point to the importance of seeking dialogue with the people in question before reacting politically," says Merlin Schaeffer.

## About the study

The new study 'The Integration Paradox: A Review and Meta-Analysis of the Complex Relationship Between Integration and Reports of Discrimination' has been published in the journal *International Migration Review*.

In the article, the two authors, Merlin Schaeffer and Judith Kas, shed light on the so-called 'integration paradox', which refers to the fact that well-integrated immigrants and their descendants generally report more [discrimination](#).

By analyzing a total of 280 statistical estimates from 42 individual studies, the meta-analysis confirms the existence of the integration paradox and suggests some underlying mechanisms.

The integration paradox at the center of the study is a variant of the more general 'Tocqueville paradox', named after the French politician and political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville. In the mid-1800s he described how political and social progress often leads to greater dissatisfaction and frustration among the population, as the remaining inequalities become more exposed and visible.

**More information:** Merlin Schaeffer et al, The Integration Paradox: A Review and Meta-Analysis of the Complex Relationship Between Integration and Reports of Discrimination, *International Migration Review* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/01979183231170809](https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183231170809)

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