

How to increase social cohesion in New Zealand



RESEARCH

‘Ethno-cultural conflict in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Balancing indigenous rights and multicultural responsibilities’

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Background

New Zealand has greater cultural diversity than Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, or the Netherlands.

While New Zealand, in general, maintains a socially cohesive environment, tensions do exist between Māori, Pākehā, and other migrants.

The Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, part of Victoria University of Wellington, undertook a study about cultural conflict and how to balance indigenous rights and multicultural responsibilities.

Main research findings

From an economic, educational, and health standpoint, Māori and people in New Zealand are disadvantaged.

Asians have a higher level of education than other New Zealanders, although they have the lowest median income of all ethnic groups.

In contrast, immigrants from the UK, Australia and the USA have a higher median income than people who were born in New Zealand.

Employment outcomes and income levels for refugees are poor.

These socioeconomic inequalities can have a negative impact on ethnic relations. They can lead to prejudice, hostility, a lack of trust between groups, and feelings of being socially and financially threatened by other groups.

These feelings of threat may cause negative reactions and hostility from Pākehā New Zealanders to disadvantaged groups and vice versa.

They can also cause animosity between Māori and immigrant groups, particularly if the latter do not accept the status of Māori as the indigenous people of New Zealand.

Relevance of findings to New Zealand

The findings are relevant for New Zealand given the number of migrants and different cultural groups who call New Zealand home.

The majority of New Zealanders (82%) agree that migrants should maintain their own culture while at the same time adopting New Zealand culture. However, only 10% of New Zealanders are prepared to change aspects of their own culture to integrate the culture of migrants.

To avoid ethnic tensions which occur in other countries and to work towards racial equality, New Zealand needs to move towards more harmonious ethnic relations.

The following recommendations are relevant for policy makers in New Zealand:

- New Zealand needs to work towards the elimination of social inequality, for example discrimination in the workplace.
- Biculturalism and multiculturalism are not opposing concepts. The acceptance of both bicultural and multicultural principles is a prerequisite for healthy ethnic relations.
- New Zealand could work towards an inclusive ‘superordinate’ identity that permits the maintenance of cultural heritage and ‘hyphenated identities’, for example Chinese New Zealander.