

Ethnic minorities and migration

What does the term “ethnic minorities” mean?

Minorities are disadvantaged ethnic, national, religious, linguistic or cultural groups who are smaller in number than the rest of the population and who may wish to maintain and develop their identity. Lack of quantitative and qualitative data makes it difficult to assess how many minority and indigenous communities exist around the world. Many states believe that recognizing ethnic, religious or linguistic differences will have a negative, disruptive and even destabilizing effect on a country.

The fundamental difference between indigenous peoples and minorities lies in indigenous peoples’ ties to their territory of origin or specific livelihoods when nomadic. In many indigenous belief systems, land has a symbolic and spiritual value, as well as a social and economic function within the group, even for those who live outside of the homeland.

Source: Minority Rights Group International. MRG: State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2009. <http://www.minorityrights.org/>

Researchers distinguished 822 ethnic groups in 160 countries

Restricting attention to groups that had at least 1 % of the country’s population, the US American professor James D. Fearon distinguished 822 ethnic groups in 160 countries.

This is no easy task as there are multiple plausible ways of listing a country’s ethnic groups. To differentiate between groups, he used diverse ethnic and cultural markers: people who share the same descent, have a common language, religion and customs, and/or share the same history as a group. Ideally, members and non-members should recognize this grouping as an ethnic group.

A second dimension of diversity was linguistic diversity. Fearon compared different languages, and cultural proximity of the languages for every country.

The illustration shows the ethnic-cultural and linguistic diversity in some selected countries. A higher score indicates a more diverse population consisting of different ethnic groups. Fearon states explicitly that his work, which is based on data from secondary sources from the 1990s, should be viewed as work in progress.

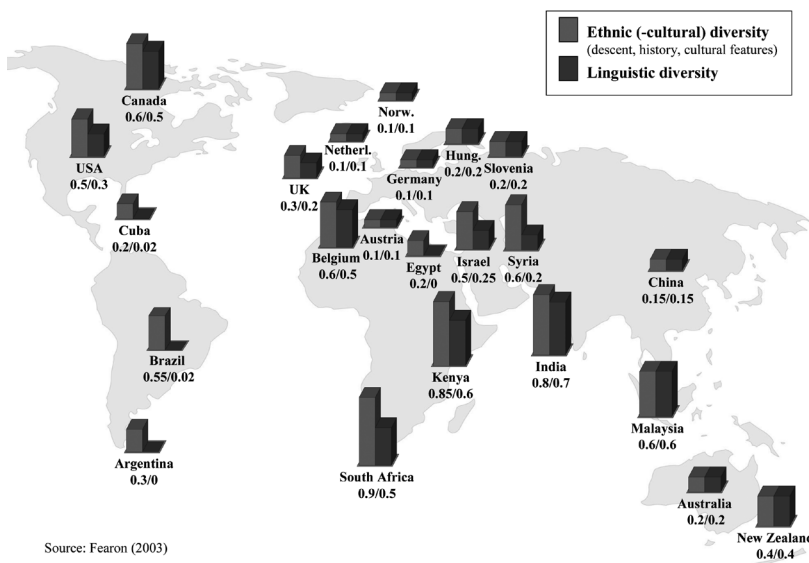
Source: Fearon, James D.: Ethnic structure and cultural diversity around the world. In: Journal of Economic Growth, 8, pp. 195-222, 2003.

According to estimates, there are 370 million indigenous people

Although they make up less than 6 % of the global population, they speak an overwhelming majority of the world’s estimated 7,000 languages, and are the stewards of some of the most biologically diverse areas accumulating an immeasurable amount of traditional knowledge about their ecosystems.

Indigenous, rural or nomadic people often live in marginalized areas where access to basic facilities such as health care and education is limited. They are also less likely to be registered at birth and are more prone to poor health and low participation in education. Evidence shows that 1 million Peruvians and 87 % of Bolivians living in indigenous and rural areas do not hold identity cards. This means that they have limited access to public health care and education, and are barred from political participation.

Source: United Nations, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/SOWIP_web.pdf, Minority Rights Group International. MRG: State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2009. <http://www.minorityrights.org/>



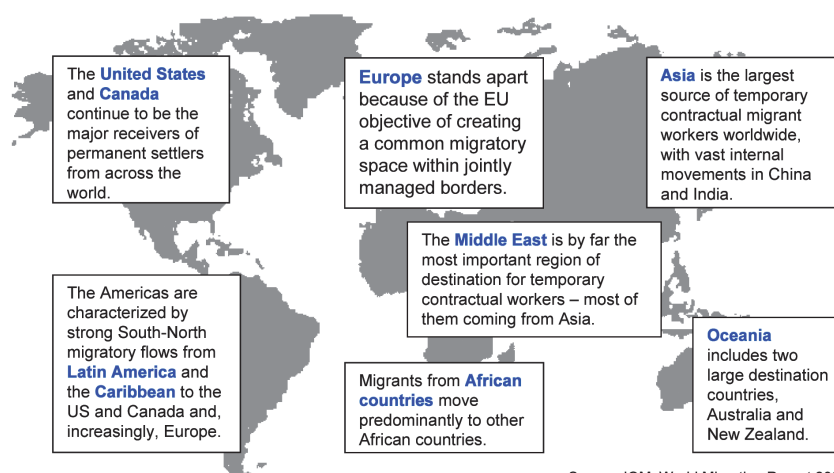
Source: Fearon (2003)

Ill. 1: Ethnic-cultural diversity and linguistic diversity in selected countries (0 = homogeneous population, 1 = maximally diverse population)

There are 214 million estimated international migrants in the world today

The number of the migrants worldwide would constitute the 5th most populous country in the world. Women account for 49 % of global migrants. The stock of international migrants remains concentrated in relatively few countries: 75 % of all international migrants are in 12 % of all countries (see ill. 2 for an overview on global trends).

Source: United Nations' Trends in Total Migrant Stock: The 2008 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/migration>



Source: IOM: World Migration Report 2008

Children and teenagers in migration

Globalization threatens both the identities of the original residents of the areas in which newcomers settle and those of the immigrants and their children. Although for many immigrant families migration results in substantial gains, it provides several challenges to the individuals involved: It removes individuals from many of their relationships and predictable contexts. The first generation is largely concerned with surviving and adjusting to the new context. The dual frame of reference, by which immigrants can compare their current situation with that left behind, often allows them to feel relatively advantaged in the new context. Immigrants who arrive as adults maintain a sense of identity rooted deeply in their birthplaces. The path for children, the second generation, is less straightforward, offering a variety of pathways. For these youths, forging an identity may be their single greatest challenge. Participation in a series of ethnic activities as well as the dominant culture's activities and social practices, is one of the clearest ways in which cultural identity is performed. The general social climate plays a critical role in the adaptation of immigrants and their children. If hostility in the dominant cultures exists, research suggests that immigrant children are keenly aware of it. Immigrant chil-

Ill. 2: Overview on global trends in international migration

dren who find themselves structurally marginalized and culturally disparaged are more likely to respond to the challenges to their identities by developing an adversarial style of adaptation. The large majority of children, however, creatively fuse aspects of 2 or more cultures – the parental tradition and the new culture into a “hybrid” identity (see also Elias/Lemish in this issue).

Source: Carola Suárez-Orozco: Formulating identity in a globalized world. In: Suárez-Orozco/Qin-Hilliard (eds.): Globalization. 2003.

What is culture?

Culture is that aspect of our existence which makes us similar to some people, yet different from the majority of the people in the world ... it is the way of life common to a group of people, a collection of beliefs and attitudes, shared understandings and patterns of behaviour that allow those people to live together in relative harmony, but set them apart from other groups of people.

Source: Friedl, J. and Pfeiffer, J.E.. 1977. Anthropology, New York: Harper's College Press.

Protection of the diversity of cultural expressions

The principles of cultural diversity and media pluralism are today acknowledged and defended internationally by the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions. The Convention fills a legal vacuum in world governance by establishing a series of rights and obligations, at both national and international level, aimed at protecting and promoting cultural diversity.

A new UNESCO report from 2009 puts forward new strategies to facilitate intercultural dialogue, improve the relevance of educational contents, and overcome stereotypes in the media:

“As is obvious from the limited range of representations in circulation, the media participate in the creation of stereotypes through what is often called the process of ‘othering’, namely the determination of what separates me from other individuals, groups and communities by cataloguing them as ‘others’. There are 3 main reasons for the persistence of such representations: 1) the ubiquity, saturation and repetitiveness of mass media seem to reinforce the longevity of these representations; 2) profit-driven commercial media systems proved to have difficulties introducing more complex representations in order to undermine problematic ones; and 3) the media seem to be too closely aligned with the elites in societies to be interested in changing the status quo.”

Source: UNESCO, <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/>, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001852/185202E.pdf>

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