



Quality of life in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods

Executive summary

Overview

Many European countries have experienced a high level of immigration from all parts of the world in the past two decades and the population of visible minority ethnic groups has grown rapidly. Neighbourhoods with a high percentage of minority ethnic groups are expected to be relatively disadvantaged in social and economic terms. The in-movement of an economically disadvantaged population will itself change the social character of a neighbourhood, increasing the average level of social exclusion and deprivation.

This report presents the results of a research programme that analyses the quality of life in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in EU15 countries (Member States before the 2004/7 accessions) based on the 2007 European Quality of Life Survey (EQS). The focus of the analysis is on the comparative situation of neighbourhoods in which respondents to the EQS state that the share of the population from racial or ethnic groups different from the majority population is relatively high ('high-diversity neighbourhoods'). The analysis concentrates on the EU15 aggregate and 10 selected countries within it. The selection of these countries was pragmatic and reflects the available sample size within the EQS of respondents who report that they live in these areas. A large majority of the respondents who report that they live in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods are native to their host country, as are their parents. Hence, this report does not provide a detailed picture of the lives of ethnic minorities.

Policy context

It is expected that the emergence of multiethnic neighbourhoods will contribute to areas of relative deprivation characterised by relatively high levels of poverty, low levels of educational attainment, poor quality of life and poor-quality housing. The mix of people from more socioeconomically disadvantaged groups in the

indigenous population, combined with an emerging migrant population may in turn contribute to increased levels of ethnic, racial and religious tensions. Low levels of cohesion within such communities can result in potentially serious and persistent conflicts, sometimes culminating in violence.

Conditions in specific local neighbourhoods therefore create a serious challenge to the social inclusion and cohesion policy of the European Union, which remains an important policy objective within the EU's Europe 2020 strategy of 'inclusive growth'. In addition, the EU has agreed on greater coordination between the Member States on integration activities for migrants at the local and neighbourhood level as well as the national level. This resulted in the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU (2004), followed by the Common Agenda for Integration by the European Commission (2005) and the Stockholm Programme for 2009 to 2014.

Actions to promote migrant integration at the neighbourhood level are supported by the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals and the European Refugee Fund, which finances projects run by voluntary sector organisations. Action to support integration of third-country migrants into the labour market and combat discrimination is also supported by the European Social Fund.

Key findings

- Data from the EQS reveal that those living in ethnically diverse areas are more likely to be single, young and have no dependent children and, perhaps surprisingly, are also less likely to report suffering from a long-term limiting illness. They are also more likely to live in a city or city suburb and are less likely to be owner-occupiers. On average, they complain more about crime and litter in their neighbourhoods.

- Relative levels of deprivation and difficulties with meeting housing costs are found to be higher within neighbourhoods that have high levels of ethnic diversity.
- Housing conditions are difficult in high-diversity neighbourhoods. Socioeconomic and spatial factors combine to produce relatively high rates of overcrowding and a poorer physical quality of housing.
- Social exclusion resulting in lower social cohesion is a dominant feature in multiethnic neighbourhoods. Respondents living in areas of high ethnic diversity are more likely to report being socially excluded and are more likely to report a perceived lack of knowledge of and access to welfare services. In terms of social support, respondents living in areas of high ethnic diversity are more likely to indicate that they are socially isolated and are less likely to report that they participate in voluntary activities.
- As expected, subjective quality of life is lower in multiethnic neighbourhoods. Satisfaction with life as measured across a variety of dimensions shows a clear decrease from areas of low ethnic diversity to areas of high ethnic diversity. Deteriorating conditions of everyday life, related to higher levels of crime and litter within an area, are found to explain a significant proportion of dissatisfaction with life in multiethnic neighbourhoods.
- Perceived levels of ethnic tension reported by EQLS respondents are relatively high overall and highest in the Netherlands and France. These findings appear to reflect events within these countries over the past decade that have increased levels of discourse surrounding policy towards migrants and have contributed to a polarisation of opinions.
- Not surprisingly, ethnic and religious tensions, and tensions over immigration are found to be higher in areas of increased ethnic diversity. In terms of personal characteristics, people with lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to report the presence of such tensions. In terms of neighbourhood characteristics, those living in cities are least likely to report higher levels of tensions. Contrary to what would generally be expected, rural areas seem to be more susceptible to societal tensions than cities.
- Concerns regarding deteriorating conditions of everyday life, such as higher levels of crime and litter, are associated with increased perceptions of tensions, pointing to the possible importance of the disintegrating fabric of the local community in contributing to such tensions. Existing and observed tensions definitely reduce the social cohesion of multiethnic communities. This will not automatically lead to a breakdown of societal norms. To what extent it will increase the probability of open conflict and even violence is difficult to estimate on the basis of this research.

Policy pointers

The findings confirm that material poverty (lack of income, restricted access to public services and poor housing) often occurs in parallel with higher degrees of social exclusion, hence suggesting the need for an integrated and comprehensive social and housing policy intervention with strong involvement of local communities. In particular, a targeted social housing policy on the part of public authorities seems to be important in order to improve conditions. Continued EU regional policy intervention therefore seems advisable, with the objective to improve living conditions and enhance social inclusion in deprived neighbourhoods.

Deteriorating conditions of everyday life have a negative effect on subjective quality of life in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. Good community policing and support measures to improve the self-responsibility of citizens regarding the quality of everyday life seem to be of utmost importance.

Existing ethnic, religious and migrant tensions reduce the social cohesion of multiethnic communities. Research from the European network of cities for local integration policies for migrants (CLIP) looking at the local integration policy of 35 European cities shows that a preventive intercultural policy based on tolerance, recognition of cultural differences and the 'law of the land' can contribute significantly to reducing those tensions.

Further information

The report *Quality of life in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods* is available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1122.htm>

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