

Chapter 7: How can we respond to diversity in a society?

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7A: Responses to socio-cultural diversity

Responses of citizens

can respond constructively to promote understanding of cultural differences and strengthen social cohesion

Individuals

Citizens with common interests can organise themselves into formal or informal community groups to contribute towards specific needs or issues in society

Responses of government

Assimilation policies in France:

- Immigrants are expected to adopt the beliefs and practices of the majority group in the host country
- Identities of assimilated groups become identical to majority groups
- France believes that harmony is achieved when every individual puts aside his or her connections to race, ethnicity and religion, with the French national identity being prioritised

Integration policies in Singapore:

- Minority groups and immigrants retain their unique identities while forging common ground with the majority group in the host country
- Diverse socio-cultural identities and practices are respected and complement the Singapore national identity anchored in shared values
- Policies and programmes encourage interaction between locals, immigrants and foreigners.

Positive impacts of assimilation

- ↳ Stronger sense of unity and common identity ⇒ Everyone follows similar practices and gain a better mutual understanding
- ↳ Reduced social tensions ⇒ Reduces potential conflicts between different cultures, everyone conforms to dominant culture
- ↳ Streamlined governance ⇒ Easier for government to pass laws, do not need to accommodate to diverse groups of people

Negative impacts of assimilation

- ↳ Erosion of cultural identity ⇒ Loss of cultural practices and traditions among minority groups of people
- ↳ Marginalisation of minority groups ⇒ Those who fail to fully assimilate/resist assimilation may face discrimination, social exclusion or marginalisation
- ↳ Loss of social diversity ⇒ No opportunities to experience unique experiences, creativity and innovation (e.g. fusion of cuisines)

Positive impacts of integration

- Cultural diversity and innovation ⇒ Allows minority groups to maintain their traditional and cultural practices, contributing to a richer and diverse society
- Social harmony and inclusion ⇒ Fosters mutual respect and tolerance. Social cohesion is promoted through shared values, even amidst diversity
- Reduction in discrimination ⇒ Including legal and social frameworks to protect minority rights, reducing instances of discrimination and promoting equal opportunities

Negative impacts of assimilation:

- Risk of segregation ⇒ Isolated ethnic enclaves are likely to occur. Minority groups do not interact with broader society.
- Conflicting values ⇒ Values or norms of minority groups clashes with dominant group. (gender roles, education, religion)
- Slower social cohesion ⇒ Different groups have their separate identities and unifying them can be tough.