



Participation and Belonging in Germany's Immigration Society

Diversity Barometer 2025 Focus Report

Key findings in brief

Germany is an immigrant country and is therefore characterized by ethnic and religious diversity. However, acceptance of diverse ethnic backgrounds and religions has sharply declined in recent years, according to the Diversity Barometer 2025. While 78 % of respondents in 2019 reported that they always learned something new when spending time with people from other countries, only 54 % feel this way now. Additionally, 59 % currently believe that nowadays one could be “labeled as racist for the slightest thing”.

Under these circumstances, how can we enable participation and belonging in an immigration society for as many as possible? How do people living in Germany – those with and without a migration background – view the different aspects of diversity? What are the foundations of togetherness? The present focus report, “Participation and Belonging in Germany’s Immigration Society”, from the Diversity Barometer 2025 by the Robert Bosch Stiftung, offers answers to these questions.

To this end, we have analyzed and interpreted previously unpublished survey items from the Diversity Barometer 2025 that focus on the diversity dimensions of ethnic background and religion. For this research project, 4,761 people aged 16 and older, including 1,074 individuals with a migration background, were surveyed online throughout Germany in May 2025. This allows for comparisons of the opinions and behaviors of people with and without a migration background.¹

1 → People with a migration background are defined as individuals who themselves – or who have at least one parent who – were born abroad or do not hold German citizenship.

People with and without a migration background have different views on diversity

In terms of general acceptance of diversity, there is hardly any difference between people with and without a migration background. On a scale from 0 (no acceptance) to 100 (full acceptance), people without a migration background score an average of 63 points, while those with a migrant background score an average of 62 points.

More pronounced differences emerge for the various diversity dimensions. People without a migration background have considerably higher acceptance scores for the dimensions of age (72 vs. 69 points), disability (83 vs. 80 points), gender (76 vs. 71 points), sexual orientation (72 vs. 63 points), and socio-economic weakness (53 vs. 50 points), than those with a migration background. However, the situation is reversed for the dimensions of ethnic origin (54 vs. 62 points) and religion (31 vs. 41 points).

The greatest differences between people with and without a migrant background are found in the dimensions of ethnic background (8 points), sexual orientation (9 points), and religion (10 points).

West Germans and city residents are more open to diversity, particularly with regard to ethnicity and religion

People without a migration background who live in West Germany or urban areas are considerably more accepting of diversity than those who live in East Germany or rural areas.

Conversely, for people with a migration background, their attitude toward diversity is affected by their place of residence. Their overall acceptance scores are similar to those of people without a migration background in East Germany or in rural areas.

With regard to ethnic and religious diversity, acceptance scores of people without a migration background are lower in East Germany and rural areas than in West Germany and cities. The difference amounts to 5 points for the dimension of ethnic background (urban/rural and West/East Germany) and 2 points (urban/rural) and 5 points (West/East Germany), for the dimension of religion, respectively. Among people with a migration background, regional differences are less pronounced. In addition, they generally show greater acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity than people without migration background.

Although people with a migration background tend to evaluate the current state of German society more positively, there is widespread dissatisfaction in society in general

Compared to people without a migration background, those with one assess Germany's economic situation more positively. They also have greater confidence in policymakers' problem-solving abilities and feel somewhat better represented, except when it comes to the police.

Meanwhile, 43 % of all respondents said they feel like second-class citizens. This sentiment particularly prevalent among East Germans (48 %) compared to individuals with a migration background (41 %). Additionally, half of all respondents believe that the needs of minorities are more important than the well-being of the majority. This view is shared by 52 % of people without a migration background and 46 % of those with a migration background.

Whether or not people are welcome largely depends on the immigrant's region of origin, their reason for migration, and the their willingness to integrate

The majority welcomes immigration from Western countries, with approval rates of 81 % and 80 % for immigration from Northern and Western Europe, respectively. In contrast, immigration from Eastern Europe (approval rate: 45 %), South Asia (41 %), Africa (36 %), and the Middle East (28 %) is viewed much more critically.

Broad support exists for the immigration of international students (75 %), refugees (72 %), and workers (71 %). However, there is little willingness to accommodate those who migrate due to poverty (34 %) or the consequences of climate change (31 %).

According to the respondents, the most important criteria for belonging to the German society are respecting local laws (91 % agree), speaking German (86 %), and having a job (78 %). Only a minority of respondents believe that people must have a German passport (47 %), be born in Germany (28 %), or have German ancestors (24 %) to belong to German society.

Discrimination is a reality, particularly for people with a migration background, and it influences their behavior

Those with a migration background are more likely to feel discriminated against than those without (73 % vs. 61 %). They mainly feel discriminated against because of their appearance (23 %), their accent (13 %), or their clothing (10 %).

While for people without a migration background the experience of discrimination has no impact on their acceptance of other social groups, people with a migration background who have experienced discrimination are considerably more accepting of other marginalized groups.

Although religion can strengthen a sense of belonging and participation, it does not necessarily lead to acceptance of other social groups

For people with a migration background, religious communities provide a sense of meaning and purpose. They are also places of belonging and (civic) participation. In particular, Muslims believe that religious communities make an important contribution to our society (70 % agree; 45 % of Christians agree).

However, religious residents of Germany with a migration background are slightly less accepting of diversity (62 points) than non-religious residents with a migration background (63 points) or religious residents without a migration background (64 points).

Recommendations for living together in an immigration society

The results make it clear that we all – from politicians and administrators to the private sector, members of the media and civil society to everyone in our country – must work together to promote positive coexistence in our diverse society. More specifically, the Robert Bosch Stiftung believes the following measures could be helpful:

1. Practice and protect acceptance of diversity where needed

The study results show that both people with and without a migration background still fail to recognize the realities of our diverse society in various areas. For people without a migration background, this relates particularly to the acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity as well as related rights such as freedom of religion or the right to asylum. For people with a migration background, it relates to liberal values, such as gender equality and sexual self-expression.

Against this backdrop, it is crucial to offer various groups opportunities to share and reflect information and their own views. More specifically, this means acknowledging the diversity in our country and learning how to navigate it. We must defend democratic values and demand that they be upheld. Discrimination by anyone and in any form – whether racism or homophobia – is unacceptable and must be prosecuted.

2. Recognize and shape realities; take people seriously

The higher levels of acceptance of diversity in West Germany and in urban centers across Germany – particularly with regard to ethnic background and religion – essentially confirm the so-called *contact hypothesis*. Religious and ethnic diversity are more widely accepted in places where they have long been a reality. Since even rural areas depend on immigration due to demographic changes, it is advisable for the affected regions to actively shape immigration processes. Alongside attracting workers, they should address the rising religious and ethnic diversity constructively.

One driving force could be the more positive view that people with a migration background have of Germany's society: Greater optimism and creative power also propel the community forward. At the same time, it is crucial to address the feelings of being overlooked that many people experience. Words of encouragement alone are not enough. Policymakers must actively improve people's lives, not downplay their concerns.

3. Facilitate integration and participation, but also demand it

Contrary to some assumptions, people are very willing to welcome refugees in Germany. Immigration into the labor market is also welcomed. However, it is also clear that people living in Germany have certain expectations of immigrants: clear rules and the willingness to contribute to society (e. g., by working, learning the language, and, what goes without saying, obeying the law).

Against this backdrop, policymakers must steer immigration in line with (economic) requirements and humanitarian obligations. They must also enable new immigrants to participate fully in German society and integrate into the labor market. Without the opportunity to work or access German language courses, new immigrants will find it difficult to become part of or be accepted by German society.

4. Pay more attention to religion as a factor

For many people, religion plays a central role in their identity and their daily lives. Religious communities provide guidance and a sense of belonging, as well as opportunities for social engagement. As a result, many religious people contribute to social cohesion in Germany.

It is crucial to promote all religious communities – Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and others – as places of participation and responsibility. It is also important to accept people's religious identities. Religious communities play an essential role in building bridges in a pluralistic society.

Article 4 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany guarantees freedom of faith and religious practice, regardless of denomination. In a liberal, secular state, this freedom is based on mutual tolerance: Those who demand this freedom for themselves must also grant it to others.

About the study and focus report

The Diversity Barometer of the Robert Bosch Stiftung is a representative survey on social diversity and coexistence in Germany. It provides data on opinions across various dimensions of diversity, namely age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ethnic background, and religion. Data collected as part of the Diversity Barometer are also compiled into an overall diversity index, which provides information on the degree to which diversity is accepted at the federal and provincial levels.

This focus report uses data from the Diversity Barometer 2025, which surveyed 4,761 German-speaking individuals aged 16 and older, including 1,074 with a migration background, online in May 2025. In addition to previously published results, the report utilizes, evaluates, and interprets unpublished data addressing questions of belonging in an immigration society, religion, participation, discrimination experiences, political trust, and representation in depth. Occasional references are also made to the Diversity Barometer 2019, which involved a representative telephone survey of 2,937 people conducted in the early summer of 2019. The authors' weighting renders the data from both years representative of the population with respect to core socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

Diversity is a fact of our society. At the same time, public discourse on the importance of increasing diversity for social processes and social cohesion is largely speculative. Therefore, this Robert Bosch Stiftung project aims to make the debate on cohesion in a diverse society more objective and evidence-based.

Published by

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To cite

Robert Bosch Stiftung (2025): Participation and Belonging in Germany's Immigration Society. Diversity Barometer 2025 Focus Report. Stuttgart: Robert Bosch Stiftung.

About the Robert Bosch Stiftung

The Robert Bosch Stiftung is active in the areas of health, education, and global issues. Through its funding, the Foundation works for a just and sustainable future. It is non-profit, independent, and non-partisan, and is rooted in the legacy of Robert Bosch. In his legacy, the entrepreneur and founder formulated a dual mission: securing the company's future and continuing his social commitment. The Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH maintains its own facilities, develops innovative projects, and provides support at both the international and local levels. The Foundation contributes findings from these projects to the professional world and public debate.