



# The Hague International Model United Nations

**Forum:** Special Conference on Culture & Heritage 2 (SPCCH2)

**Issue:** Building inclusive national identities while respecting cultural diversity

**Student Officer:** Dragos Stafiescu

**Position:** Deputy President

## Introduction

In a world that keeps getting more and more connected, building an integrated national identity is both more difficult and more important than ever. Over time, globalisation and migration have turned societies into blends of multiple cultures, languages and beliefs.

The narrative of nationhood however, remains central to the ways in which states organise political life and encourage solidarity. When citizens trust each other as part of a community, they are more willing to support redistributive policies and to engage in constructive decision making. Conversely, when national identity is defined closely along ethnic, religious or linguistic lines, it can cause exclusion, insecurity and conflict. The challenge lies in building national identities that are inclusive of cultural diversity while also maintaining social cohesion.

This challenge is not a new one, but its importance has only grown in recent decades. Global migration reached record levels in the 21st century, driven by conflict, economic inequality, climate change, and the increased ease of mobility. Many countries today are home to populations with multiple languages, religions, and cultural backgrounds. While some of these have been long-standing, others may have just arrived. As a result, traditional understandings of identity that relied on shared ancestry or a single national language are starting to be called into question. Member States must now find ways to define “belonging” in ways which reflect their demographic realities, without deepening social divides.

## Definition of Key Terms

### National Identity

An institution that binds people together through common political aspiration, particularly self-government and sovereignty. National identity differs from ethnic identity because it is inherently political, it can be based on shared values and citizenship rather than common ancestry.

## Cultural diversity

Defined by UNESCO as the manifold ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression. These expressions are passed on within and among groups and manifest themselves through varied modes of artistic creation, production, dissemination and enjoyment.<sup>1</sup>

## Interculturality

The existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect.<sup>2</sup>

## Multiculturalism

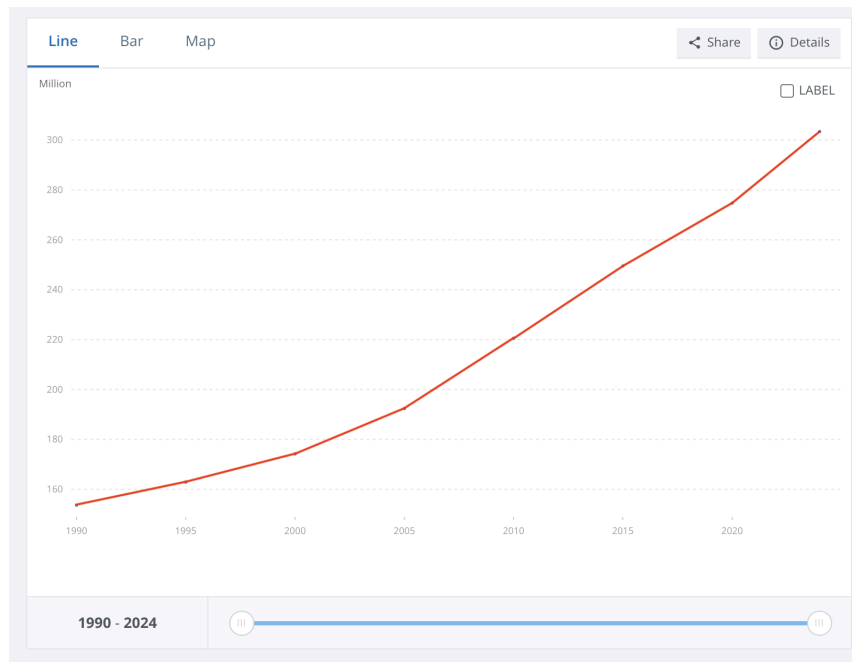
The view that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgement of their differences within a dominant political culture. It seeks inclusion of diverse perspectives while maintaining respect for differences.<sup>3</sup>

## Assimilation

The process where individuals of groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society. The assimilating group adopts the traits of the dominant culture to the point where it becomes socially indistinguishable. Assimilation may be voluntary or compelled, but forced assimilation has had negative consequences for minority cultures.<sup>4</sup>

## Background Information

Over the past decades, international migration and global interconnectedness have reshaped the demographics of many states. According to the latest United Nations (UN) estimates, the number of people living in a country other than their country of birth has risen from around 150 million in 1990 to over 300 million in 2024, nearly doubling in just three decades. This means that more and more societies are home to big communities that speak different languages, hold different religious beliefs, and have different cultural traditions.

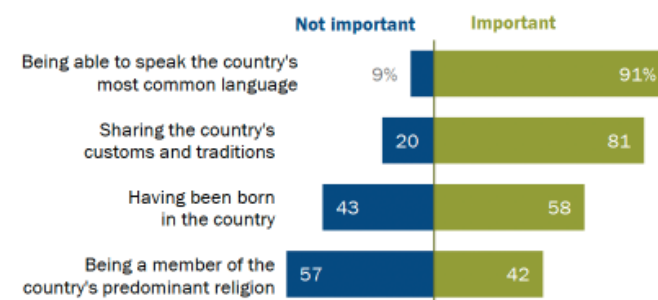


**Figure 1: UN measure of global migrant stock <sup>5</sup>**

This diversification is particularly visible in OECD countries, many of which have foreign-born populations of over 20%, with places like Switzerland, Luxembourg, Australia and Canada reaching even higher shares. These numbers show how national identity debates unfold into daily life, in schools, workplaces, and political agendas. At the same time, public understanding of what it means to truly belong to a nation is evolving. A 2023 Pew Research Center survey across 23 countries found many people agree that speaking the national language and sharing customs are more central to belonging than birthplace or religion. This suggests a shift away from ethnic or religious definitions of identity, and more towards the civic or cultural participation of migrants.

### Speaking the most common language and sharing traditions considered key aspects of national identity

% who say each of the following is \_\_\_ for being truly (survey country nationality)



Note: Language and religion percentages are medians based on 21 countries. Customs and birthplace percentages are medians based on 23 countries. Language was not asked about in Nigeria or South Africa. Religion was not asked about in Japan or South Korea.  
Source: Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey, Q44a-e.

"Language and Traditions Are Considered Central to National Identity"

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**Figure 2: Public perceptions of key factors for national identity <sup>6</sup>**

The same data shows notable ideological and generational differences. In many countries,

people on the political right, and older groups, place more weight on birthplace and religion than those on the left, and younger groups. This divide highlights how national identity debates are shaped not only by culture, but also by politics and social change.

### Identity politics and sovereignty narratives

At the same time, identity has become a powerful political force. In many regions, economic anxiety, social fragmentation, the rapid technological change, and polarisation have all created the perfect foundation for exclusionary narratives. These narratives often form diversity as a threat rather than an asset, contributing to discrimination, xenophobia, and mistrust between communities. Additionally, such narratives can normalise the idea that some groups are “more truly” part of the nation than others. In several states, political leaders have employed these narratives of cultural protection to gain public support and divert attention from issues such as corruption, weak institutions, or economic inequality. This can damage democratic institutions, weaken social protection systems, and further fuel political instability. When national identities are, however, built around shared civic values such as equality, dignity, and justice, they can support more resilient and cohesive societies.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### UN and UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the leading international organisation that promotes cultural diversity. The 2005 Convention asserts that cultures flourish through free interaction and emphasises respect for all cultures and the sovereign right of states to protect cultural expressions. Additionally, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes Indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination, languages, lands and culture. Canada’s implementation of the Declaration exemplifies how states can use international instruments to build inclusive identities.

- UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2 November 2001 (UNESCO General Conference)
- Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 20 October 2005 (UNESCO Convention)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 13 September 2007 (A/RES/61/295)

### India

India embodies diversity, having 22 official languages, dozens of scripts and over 1600 dialects. There are also a multitude of recognized religious groups within India, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, and Jews. The constitution secures equality and freedom of religion and protects minority interests. However, despite its pluralist framework, India faces challenges including communal violence, regionalism, economic disparities, and political exploitation.<sup>7</sup>

## Canada

Canada is one of the nations that pioneered multicultural nation-building. In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced that Canada would pursue a policy of “multiculturalism within a bilingual framework”, affirming cultural freedom and respect for individual identity. Canada’s official languages, English and French, reflect its bilingual heritage. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 also expresses the government’s commitment to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians and to promote the full participation of all citizens.<sup>8</sup>

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
December 10 <sup>th</sup> 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopts the principle of equal dignity and rights for all
July 21 <sup>st</sup> 1988	Canada becomes the first country in the world to promote its multiculturalism policy in legislation, when their Parliament passed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act
October 20 <sup>th</sup> 2005	UNESCO adopts the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions
September 13 <sup>th</sup> 2007	The UN adopts the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
October 13 <sup>th</sup> 2012	Singapore conducts the “Our Singapore Conversation,” engaging citizens in dialogues about national identity
June 21 <sup>st</sup> 2021	Canada implements the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Historically, many states used assimilation to build national unity by pressuring minority groups to adopt the dominant culture, often suppressing languages, religions and traditions. These policies sometimes produced short-term uniformity, but frequently caused exclusion and long-term cultural loss. Canada and Australia, however, formalised multiculturalism to recognise that cultural diversity can strengthen national cohesion. Although these models expanded participation for minorities, critics argue they can produce fragmentation or parallel communities, and both remain challenged by persistent inequalities.

An alternative approach is France's universalist model defines national identity through equal citizenship rather than cultural difference. In practice, this has promoted integration for many immigrants and their descendants, but at the cost of numerous debates around religious expressions and the limits of cultural visibility. Policies like restrictions on religious symbols illustrate ongoing tensions between formal equality and actual day-to-day diversity.

## Possible Solutions

Delegates may consider developing some frameworks that promote shared civic values while recognizing the cultural rights of minority groups. These frameworks could include language learning support, public participation mechanisms, and national campaigns that present diversity as part of the collective identity. Delegates may also consider measures that strengthen equal access to cultural life. This could involve expanding cultural education in schools, increasing funding for local cultural organisations, or ensuring that national institutions such as museums, media agencies and heritage councils represent diverse communities equitably.

Additionally, delegates could consider improving institutional safeguards to prevent discrimination and foster social cohesion, including clearer anti-discrimination laws, independent monitoring bodies, and community-based dialogue platforms to address tensions before they escalate. Lastly, delegates can consider integrating digital policies that protect cultural expression online and counter misinformation that polarizes identities. States can cooperate with technology platforms to promote accurate cultural representation and reduce harmful narratives targeting minority groups.

## Endnotes

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