

## Multiculturalism in Uruguay

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The coexistence of different cultures in a common social space is becoming more relevant due to two different causes. First, because there is an increasing demand for cultural diversity in a more globalised world which, in one sense, is more homogeneous if we consider the expansion of American culture through the media and communication systems. Secondly, because the quickest international immigration wave of all times has put face to face completely different cultures, situation that rises the challenge of peaceful coexistence without discrimination. The approximately 200 countries in the World host nearly 5,000 ethnic groups and almost two thirds have at least one minority group, which represents 10% of its population (UNDP 2004). While almost all countries should be considered as multicultural societies, only a few have developed multicultural policies or multiculturalism.

Specifically this article will analyze comparatively the present situation of nine immigration groups in Uruguay, a small country in South America: the descendants of Basques, Italians, Swiss, Russians, Armenians, Lebanese, Jews, Palestines, and Peruvians. At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century Uruguay received massive immigration, which usually tried to assimilate to the mainstream culture. Since the last fifty years there is almost no new immigrants, but our research shows that there is a strong revalorization of a new hyphenated identity (Lesser 1999) among many of the descendants of those immigrants, who define themselves as Lebanese-Uruguayan, Italo-Uruguayan, Basque-Uruguayan, or Armenian-Uruguayan.

How these groups have integrated to Uruguayan nationality? What has happened to their cultural traditions (language, religion, food, family ties)? Are they strengthening their link to their places of origin? The article will present the most relevant conclusions from a research based on 100 hundred in depth interviews coordinated by Arocena.

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