

# Australia 'world champions of diversity'

**JEFF TURNBULL**

*December 1, 2009 - 12:09AM*

## **AAP**

Australia's attitude to immigrants remained positive during the economic downturn but discrimination and safety were still concerns for people living in migrant areas, according to a new study.

The Scanlon Foundation report - Mapping Social Cohesion 2009 - also showed that the majority of Australians believe migrants make the nation stronger.

Foundation chairman Peter Scanlon said the report proved Australians continue to be "world champions of cultural diversity".

"This is a brilliant effort for a country of such ethnic diversity to embrace immigration during tough economic times," he said.

"Some people fear that immigration undermines and threatens our culture but the reality is that Australia's culture is built on immigration."

The report's author, Professor Andrew Markus of Monash University, said he had expected a shift in attitude toward immigrants because of the economic downturn and was surprised by the positive outcome.

"In previous times of economic uncertainty attitudes towards immigration have traditionally been extremely negative," he said.

"Our research has shown Australians' attitudes towards immigration remains positive."

But the report, which surveyed 2,000 people nationally as well as 1,800 in several different socio-economic areas of Melbourne and Sydney, also showed that the reported incidence of discrimination was 50 per cent higher than the national level.

Of residents in areas of high immigration, around half the number of non-English speaking people were worried about becoming victims of crime, compared to 32 per cent on a national level.

Mr Scanlon said many of these communities were working hard to solve the issues but it needed better coordination of government and community services to overcome the problems.

Prof Markus said Australia was in a good position to tackle issues such as discrimination now rather than wait until another riot, such as that in Cronulla in 2005.

He said the recent assaults on Indian students had caused damage to Australia's reputation as a tolerant nation.

The research showed that Indians and Sri Lankans reported the highest level of discrimination.

The national snapshot also showed:

- \* only one in 10 Australians hold strong negative views on issues related to immigration and cultural diversity;

- \* 68 per cent agree that accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger;

- \* Nine out of 10 migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds who live in areas of high immigrant concentration agree that Australia is a land of opportunity;

- \* 93 per cent migrants agree that maintaining the Australian way of life and culture is important.

© 2009 [AAP](#)