

SOS Détresse

Living in between two cultures

It is possible to feel good in the host country while being in harmony with our cultural origins, but it is not always easy. To integrate in the new surroundings, we don't have to give up our cultural origins; we do not have to choose one or the other culture. It is by valuing our cultural heritage that we better appropriate the other culture and its overflowing richness.

The level that we wish to be involved in the host society and the desire to keep our cultural identity varies from one person to the next. Many people strongly wish to belong to the host society, without having to give up their culture. We can be strongly attached to our origins, feel a strong belonging and identification to them. And preserving our values, our traditions, and our links with people of our origin does not prevent us from being in contact with other communities, as well as adopting new values and customs of the country of installation. Being committed to the culture of origin as well as the host culture contributes to us feeling better integrated.

But circumstances can also cause things to happen differently. We can be led to seek refuge only in our culture of origin and to isolate ourselves within our community. We idealise our own culture and are little or not interested in the host culture. Inversely, we can also want or be forced to resemble the new society. We thus reject the values of our country of origin as well as contact with our community, whilst idealising members of the host society. Eventually, we no longer recognise ourselves in either culture. In this case, we find it impossible to participate in one or the other.

Reaching a good balance between the two cultures is beneficial. The fact of being able to invest in the host country without losing our own identity, our values and traditions of the country, helps us to feel good in the host country. For many people, having a job, being in contact with other communities and knowing the local language also strongly contributes to this feeling. For others, this happens through the success of the children. Each will have priorities and criteria which will contribute to feeling integrated.

Migration is not only a period of transition, but also an evolution of a whole life and new way of being in exile.

Double belonging as an asset

It can be that at certain moments, the fact of belonging to a different culture is felt to

be an obstacle, because difficulties can ensue from it in everyday life. However, knowing or belonging to two cultures is an asset.

Integrating in another country means the advantage of being able to learn new things and to discover new skills which were hidden until now. If the decision to migrate already requires a certain degree of flexibility and openness, confronting another culture will reinforce these two qualities. Furthermore, through this experience, we realise the particularities of our own culture and get to better encompass our identity and values. By opening ourselves up to the other culture, we learn to know ourselves better and to realise that each culture has its own logic.

Migration can be a stressful event, but it is nevertheless a chance. By migrating, we are taking an active step to get out of a situation which no longer suits us and we are ready to accept something new. Migration thus offers the opportunity for a new start and a change.

Belonging to two cultures gives us more possibilities and freedom. We are faced with new ways of doing things and thinking, which adds to those we already possess, and so we have at our disposal a large repertoire of cultural references. In the end, in the new country, it is like having the freedom to become someone else. By freeing yourself from certain rules, roles and the opinions of others, we can dare to do more.