

# #FriendsMatter: Friendship Networks of Immigrant and/or Ethnic Minority Women, and Their Impact on Social Integration

Section: Society and gender

written by Elisabeth Torras-Gómez | October 21, 2024



The [#FriendsMatter](#) project, led by the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM), focuses on studying the role of friendship networks in the social integration of young women from immigrant backgrounds and ethnic minorities during their 'early adulthood,' the period between 18 and 25 years.

Funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (PID2022-1405400A-I00), #FriendsMatter advances scientific knowledge in areas such as gender studies, social integration, and the overcoming of stereotypes, addressing key issues like racism, health, and well-being. The research aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 5, and 10, which promote health, gender equality, and the reduction of inequalities.

## Friendship and Social Integration

A core aspect of the project analyzes what types of social interactions shape the friendships of young women from immigrant backgrounds and ethnic minorities in early

adulthood, and how—if at all—these friendships equip them with skills and strategies to better navigate social integration processes. Previous research suggests that friendship networks, both in physical and virtual spaces, are essential for fostering social cohesion and solidarity, helping to overcome cultural barriers and stereotypes. Studying friendships is not only important at an individual level but also within a broader social structure. Friendships create spaces of trust and meaning, essential for deep interpersonal connections.

In this context, the project explores key questions such as the impact of social environments (social networks, leisure spaces, etc.) on the construction of these friendships and how these networks influence the educational and career paths of the young women involved. Special attention is given to how factors like discrimination, cultural identity, and intergenerational solidarity affect their social integration and emotional well-being.

### **An Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Approach**

The project spans three years, with a research team of ten investigators from various Spanish universities. The studies implement innovative techniques such as in-depth interviews, social network interaction analysis, and focus groups, allowing for a comprehensive and multidisciplinary understanding of the influence of friendship on social integration.

### **Expected Impact and Contributions**

**#FriendsMatter** provides scientific evidence that informs policymakers about more effective intercultural inclusion strategies, emphasizing the importance of friendship in overcoming prejudice and racism. The project also aims to improve the emotional well-being and mental health of these young women, highlighting the key role of interpersonal

relationships in the integration process.

[Image from [Surface](#) in [Unsplash](#)]