Although in recent decades 'integration' has been a permanent subject of public debate, there is a great lack of clarity about the precise meaning of the term. Integration is a typical example of what philosophers and sociologists have called an 'essentially contested concept'. Moreover, a comparison of the definitions of social cohesion and integration reveals that many elaborations of the two concepts overlap, sometimes to the extent that the terms would appear to be synonymous. It could give rise to confusion that some researchers write about social cohesion, and others about integration, when they mean pretty much the same thing. This does not benefit cumulative advances in knowledge. We therefore argue that conceptual clarity is needed and present an over-all framework which we think is useful for research concerning the way members of majority and minority groups live together in a multicultural society. Two dimensions of integration – structural integration and social-cultural integration – provide the foundation of our conceptual framework. These dimensions consist of respectively five subdimensions (education, labour market position, income, housing, and political rights) and four subdimensions (social capital, language proficiency/usage, values, and identity). We think it would be helpful for research to consider the subdimensions of structural and social-cultural integration as factors that can facilitate or impede social cohesion. It is less useful to consider these subdimensions as themselves aspects of social cohesion, as the literature so often does, because the concepts of social cohesion and of integration then become inextricably entangled. Drawing on elements of existing definitions and on the findings of our own research it seems sensible to measure social cohesion in multicultural societies on the basis of the mutual perceptions of immigrant and native groups, the degree to which discriminatory behaviours occur, the degree to which members of immigrant and native communities repose trust in one another and in social (including governmental) agencies, the degree to which different ethnic-cultural groups feel safe (in one another's neighbourhood), and the degree to which they actively care for one another's well-being (solidarity).