

## **The Social Integration of Immigrants in the European Union**

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### *Europe and Immigration*

During most of the past two centuries Europe was characterised by emigration, rather than by immigration. Until the 1960s, millions of people left the Old Continent in search of a better future in what we now call the 'classical' immigration countries of the 'New World' (USA, Canada, Australia, some South American countries) and in the former colonies of a number of West European nations. This pattern changed completely in the second half of the twentieth century. Large scale emigration to the 'New World' virtually came to a halt. The standard of living in much of Europe had become equivalent to that in the former countries of destination, so the need to migrate for economic reasons disappeared. Sooner or later, all European colonies became independent states, which provoked to a reverse flow of people from these territories to the former mother country (e.g. Indians in the UK, Algerians in France, Angolans in Portugal and Indonesians in the Netherlands). In most cases these flows from former colonies did not suffice to satisfy growing demands in the European labour markets that resulted from continuing economic growth combined with declining birth rates. Therefore, many European countries began to look for alternative sources of migrant labour, mainly with low skills.

It is this flow of labour migrants in particular that, several decades later, has given rise to some serious social problems in many European countries, unforeseen at the time. Initially, most migrant workers were recruited in Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and former Yugoslavia) to work in the more industrialized states of North Western Europe (Germany, France, the Benelux countries and Switzerland). This particular flow, however, came to a halt in the late 1960s. Most workers returned home, thus enabling a further economic development of their countries, most of which have now become well respected EU Member States with flourishing economies. When Southern Europe could no longer satisfy the needs of the ever expanding West European economies, recruitment efforts were directed at other countries around the Mediterranean Sea with larger surpluses of workers and with less promising economic prospects. Among the larger European countries, Germany turned especially to Turkey and France to the three Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), with which she had old political and cultural ties. The UK satisfied its needs almost exclusively with workers from its former colonies overseas (South Asia and the Caribbean).

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Dr. Han Entzinger is Professor of Migration and Integration Studies and Head of the Department of Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Large scale recruitment of unskilled labour came to a halt around 1973, the year of the first oil crisis. Contrary, however, to what had happened in the case of the workers from Southern Europe, Turkish and North African workers did not return in very large numbers. Instead, they stayed on, and after a few years they acquired the right to family reunion. Consequently, their numbers rose rapidly and the presence of non-European families, often with many children, began to become a familiar phenomenon in many European countries, particularly in the larger cities. Follow-up migration from Turkey and North Africa has been continuing until the present, but meanwhile migrants have also been arriving from many other areas in the world.

In the mid 1980s the phenomenon of people seeking asylum in Western Europe began to gain momentum. Their numbers rose quickly and in the top year 1993 alone more than 700,000 asylum seekers came to Europe; many of them went to Germany. In the majority of cases, their claims for political asylum were rejected, but many of the people concerned managed to stay on anyway and it proved to be difficult to force them to return. In recent years, the number of asylum seekers has gone down in all of Europe, mainly as an effect of joint political efforts at the EU level. The collapse of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall in 1989/1990, as well as the war in former Yugoslavia set in motion a significant East-West flow in Europe, particularly towards Germany and Austria, two countries close to the former socialist countries. Meanwhile, Southern Europe had also begun to receive labour migrants from elsewhere, many of them illegally, even though these countries needed those people to keep their growing economies running. Increasingly, the new Member States in Central and Eastern Europe are also turning into immigration countries. Some of these states are in the paradoxical situation that they are sending some of their people to Western Europe, while, at the same time, they are receiving growing numbers of workers from Ukraine, Russia and other states that used to be part of the Soviet Union. In recent years, the number of migrants from China has also gone up almost everywhere in Europe.

### *Current concerns*

The latest development in the European Union, particularly in the fifteen so-called 'old' Member States is a growing concern over a lack of highly skilled people. This is an effect of a stagnant and ageing population and a continuing, often growing, demand for labour. Most West European countries are now trying to become more attractive to highly skilled migrants from developing countries. The problem is that their numbers are relatively limited and there is a tough competition for them. However, if left a choice, most highly educated people from non-Western countries prefer to go to the United States or Canada, where the social climate is perceived as more welcoming to immigrants. Contrary to what one might have expected there has been relatively little migration within the European Union ever since the free circulation of manpower has been introduced for EU citizens. Although EU-citizens are free to settle in other EU-countries (provided they can earn their own income) not more than two per cent of all EU citizens actually work in a Member State which is not their own, often on a daily commuter basis. For example, one third of all workers in Luxembourg come from neighbouring regions in Belgium, Germany and France. Apparently, the differences in wage levels are insufficient to

encourage large numbers of workers to move to another Member State, which often involves familiarizing oneself with a different language and with different educational, social security and pension systems, etc. Employers sometimes tend to prefer non-EU workers over workers from the EU, since their employment conditions can be kept less favourable than those of EU-workers. Most 'old' Member States even have put up temporary barriers to prevent cheaper workers from the 'new' Member States from entering their labour markets.

As a consequence of all migratory movements described in the previous paragraphs, the number of immigrants in the European Union now lies at around six per cent. However, there are considerable differences between individual countries. The peak country, again, is Luxembourg where about one third of the population is foreign. In most of the older immigration countries in North Western Europe the immigrant share in the population stands at about ten per cent, but if one includes the second generation many countries approach twenty percent. This implies that one in every five persons in countries such as France, Germany or the UK is an immigrant or has at least one immigrant parent. This situation is not very different from the United States, which is much more ready than any of its European counterparts to define itself as an immigration country. In Southern Europe, where immigration is more recent, the immigrant share never reaches more than five per cent, except in Greece, which has many workers from nearby Albania. In the new Member States of Central and Eastern Europe the immigrant share is still much lower, but it is likely to go up as these countries will further develop economically. Most Central and Eastern European countries also have extremely low birth rates, which may encourage further immigration in the future.

One of the basic laws of immigration claims that any migratory movement always leads to a certain degree of permanent settlement; this has also been the case in the countries of Europe. Being an immigration country, however, does not necessarily imply that newcomers are accepted as full members of the receiving societies on conditions that are the same as those for the established population. In fact, many older immigration countries in Europe have admitted only reluctantly that they have become immigrant societies. For many years, most of these countries claimed that the majority of their immigrants would return home eventually. Among the major immigration countries, Germany was the last to acknowledge formally that it had become an immigration country. It did so formally only in the year 2000, when the first migrant workers had been living there for over forty years. The more recent immigration countries of Southern and Central Europe still do not consider their immigration as permanent, although here too the immigrants' length of residence tends to go up, which makes their return less likely.

#### *Steps towards immigrant integration*

A major problem in Europe is that the social and economic situation of most migrants is much less favourable than for the population as a whole. Although most migrants initially came to work, many lost their jobs after the major restructuring of European economies that took place in the 1980s. During those days many unskilled and low skilled jobs were relocated to low wage countries or were computerised. This led to high unemployment

levels among the first immigrant generation. Meanwhile, many of their children encountered serious difficulties at school. The European educational systems did not know very well how to deal with non-native pupils. In a cultural environment that was totally alien to them many parents were unable to provide proper coaching to their children. In most countries the poorest neighbourhoods turned into areas of strong immigrant concentrations, sometimes neglected by the authorities and characterised by levels of delinquency above average. Although certain migrants have been displaying a remarkable level of upward social mobility, many of them became marginalised in their new environment. Many members of the native population refused to accept them or even openly discriminated against them. This threatens the principle of equality that is so characteristic for liberal democracies in Europe. Therefore, the public felt a growing pressure to intervene in this process. How should they do this?

Recognising that immigrants are there to stay seems a fundamental condition for a further reflection on their integration in the new society. If the view prevails that migration is only transient, there is little need to bother about creating opportunities for a fuller participation of migrants in their new environment. Again, the older immigration countries in the North West of Europe are now well aware of the permanent presence of most of their immigrants, which means that an important condition for the development of an integration policy has been fulfilled. Yet, there is also a considerable opposition in most of these countries against immigration, which means that the public authorities have to manoeuvre very carefully in articulating their policy goals. As immigration in Southern Europe is more recent, fewer initiatives to promote immigrant integration have been taken so far in this part of the Union. However, at the local level, where social tensions are felt more directly, the work of non-governmental organizations is often supported with public money.

Once the need for an active support of integration has been recognised, another question arises, which is related to the nature and the objectives of the efforts to promote immigrant integration. Should the general, already existing policy measures simply be applied also to immigrants, or should a special policy for immigrants be developed, given the specific nature of the issue and the migrants' specific characteristics? The choice for any of these two is strongly ideological. In North Western Europe we may distinguish two major approaches that differ fundamentally from one another. France is the classical example of a country that has opted for the application of general policy measures to everyone, non-immigrants and immigrants alike. In the French perception, the concept of equality, to which the French strongly adhere, does not allow for any form of differentiation. Everyone living on French soil should be treated the same by the French authorities; culture is seen as a private affair and the concept of ethnicity does not fit into the French vocabulary. Traditionally, the British approach stands in sharp contrast to this. It accounts much more explicitly than the French one for new forms of cultural diversity that have developed as a result of immigration and it tends to confirm migrants in their 'otherness'. In France, the national school system has always played a major role in promoting the newcomers' assimilation to French values and traditions. In Britain, the school system is less centralised than in France. In that country much more emphasis has been laid on recognising difference between ethnic and cultural communities that have

developed as a result of immigration and on promoting education in the languages of these communities. In France, tensions between immigrants and the established populations are never defined in terms of community relations, let alone in 'racial' terms, but they are usually referred to as 'urban problems'. In Britain, by contrast, combating racial and ethnic discrimination and promoting inter-ethnic dialogue have long been landmarks of an active integration policy.

The other immigration countries in the North Western part of Europe usually take an intermediate position between French assimilationism and British multiculturalism. Traditionally, the Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium, have leant over towards the British. Their strong welfare states enabled the public authorities to intervene more actively in the lives of their citizens than has been the case in other European countries. This made it easier to create separate facilities for immigrants, although in some cases, particularly in Denmark and the Netherlands, such special provisions have now become heavily disputed. The German speaking countries (Germany, Austria and non-EU Switzerland) tend to be more similar to France in their approach, although, as we have seen, these countries first denied the permanent nature of the migrants' presence.

### *Social integration and integration policies in Europe*

I will now turn to a more detailed analysis of major elements of integration policy in the countries of the European Union. While *immigration* has increasingly become a domain in which the European Union as such is actively involved, *integration* has remained the major responsibility of the individual Member States. This is why significant differences exist and continue to exist in their approaches. There are three major domains in which integration policies take place:

- (1) The domain of legal and political rights;
- (2) The domain of social and economic participation.
- (3) The cultural domain.

I shall deal with each of these domains separately.

### *Legal and political rights*

At the moment of their arrival most migrants in Europe are not citizens of the country where they settle. Non-EU citizens are allowed to stay on a temporary permit. However, as time goes by, the temporary permit is usually changed into a permanent one. This means more security for the migrants concerned: they cannot be sent home so easily and they are entitled to a normal family life and to most of the social security and social policy provisions of the country of residence, without however becoming full citizens of that country. In recent years, the European Commission has actively promoted this development: the granting of residential security and of civic and social rights to foreign citizens is seen as a basic condition for their fuller integration. However, in several European countries, this approach is met with a growing opposition.

This is certainly the case for the granting of political rights, where there has been more reluctance traditionally. Only a handful of European countries (the Nordic countries and the Netherlands) have granted to immigrants the right to vote and to be elected, though only in local elections. In these countries this has encouraged immigrant participation in political decision making and it did not lead to the emergence of immigrant political parties, as some people feared. Most of the established political parties are only too keen to attract the immigrant vote. In most European countries, however, granting voting rights to immigrants still is a bridge too far. They believe that immigrants should opt for naturalisation and become full citizens of the country where they live. Naturalisation policies differ considerably from one country to another. Countries such as France, the UK, Belgium and Sweden are quite liberal, whilst some of the smaller states (e.g. Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands and Denmark) tend to be very strict. Countries also differ in the extent to which they allow dual citizenship. Many migrants wish to keep their old passport after they have become naturalised, but most European countries do not like that. They believe that a person can only be loyal to one state at the time, whereas in reality many immigrants have a dual loyalty. In the literature this phenomenon is known as transnationalism and it is rapidly developing, also because of improved worldwide communication and transport facilities.

Another important area in the legal domain is the combating of discrimination. In all European countries people of immigrant descent tend to be discriminated against. This restricts their opportunities for a full social and economic participation and it makes migrants feel that they are not accepted. Therefore all European countries now have legislation against discrimination on ethnic, racial or religious grounds. However, this type of legislation is not always easy to enforce. Discrimination is often difficult to recognise and to prove in concrete cases. Employers, for example, have learned not to admit that they discriminate against migrant workers; they often use other arguments instead to keep them out.

A new and more recent trend in the domain of legal and political, or, if you wish, of civic integration is the introduction of mandatory integration courses for newly arriving migrants in a number of European countries. There is a growing feeling in many countries that immigrants do not sufficiently adapt to their new environment, partly because they do not bother to learn the language or because they are never given an opportunity to do so. In the long run, this constitutes a challenge to social cohesion, particularly in situations where more than one third of the local population is of immigrant descent, as is the case nowadays in quite a few major cities in Europe, such as London, Birmingham, Rotterdam, Brussels, Paris or Frankfurt. This is why, about ten years ago, the Netherlands was the first to introduce the concept of integration courses for newcomers. In these courses, usually 500 to 600 hours long, migrants learn the basic principles of the local language and also some social and civic skills as well as some of the history and the geography of their new country. In most countries in Western and Northern Europe these courses are paid for by the government; at the end the migrant takes an exam, which may be a first step towards permanent residence and naturalisation. In some countries these courses are accompanied by specific measures to smoothen the newcomers' insertion into the labour market or into the school system. If this is

insufficiently successful the migrants' reliance on social security will become too high and this may trigger anti-immigrant feelings among segments of the native population.

### *Social and economic integration*

This brings us to the second domain of integration, that of social and economic participation. All over Europe it is seen as highly desirable that migrants participate fully in the economy. Although originally most migrants came to Europe to work, their participation in the labour force is well below average now, except for the highly skilled. Many older migrants have skills that are too low and that therefore are no longer in demand. They are the real victims of the restructuring of European industries that took place in the 1980s and their limited linguistic and other skills make it almost impossible for them to adapt to the new labour market conditions. The paradox here is that Europe, in view of its ageing population, needs more manpower, even at lower skill levels. However, many employers rather turn to fresh migrants, sometimes even illegal migrants, who are often cheaper and more flexible than established migrants, especially than those of the second generation.

Therefore, all older immigration countries in Europe have developed special programmes to promote equal opportunities for schooling and labour market access for children of migrants, the so-called second generation. In many cases their school careers are not so positive: they are overrepresented in lower school types, there is a considerable drop-out from schools and they find it difficult to find appropriate apprenticeships. Many youngsters of immigrant descent still have problems with the local language. Their parents are unable to give them adequate support and advice and with growing tensions between Islam and the West some are prone to radical ideas. Fortunately, this is not the case for every young person with an immigrant background. The numbers of immigrant students at European universities are growing, though still below those for the population as a whole. Some communities are doing extremely well, such as people of Indian descent in the UK. Many of them have become well respected business people and, on average, their children perform better at school than native British children. More generally speaking, in those situations where entrepreneurship is relatively easily accessible for immigrants, they tend to be more successful, probably because they encounter less discrimination than in other areas of employment.

It is not always easy to develop policy measures to promote equal opportunities for a fuller social and economic participation of immigrants. A small number of European countries have experimented with policies of affirmative action borrowed from the United States and Canada. Such policies, of which the setting of quotas for people with an immigrant background is the most extreme form, do not go down well in Europe, where positive discrimination is also considered to be discrimination. Increasingly, therefore, companies and other employers have taken an interest in what is called diversity management. Diversity management implies the recognition of differences in cultural background in the labour force. It aims at developing instruments to account for this and even to take advantage of it. In an increasingly globalising world diversity should be seen as an asset, rather than as a risk.

Since specific measures that aim at promoting immigrant participation often encounter a considerable opposition, most European countries prefer to apply their general social policy instruments to immigrants and non-immigrants alike. Here again, however, significant differences appear from one country to another, often depending on the focus of their policy making. In countries with a large public housing sector, for example, it is easier to create decent housing for immigrants than in countries where most of the housing market is in private hands. This is also the case for provisions such as education and health care. As a general rule, public provisions tend to be more readily accessible to immigrants than private provisions, particularly if these provisions are able to cope with the specific needs of migrant populations. It goes almost without saying that in the South European countries, where a large share of all immigrants are illegal and where public provisions tend to be more limited, the pressure on these provisions is even stronger than in the North of Europe.

Another significant feature in this context is the need to develop integration policies at the local level wherever this is possible. Local policies are able to account more effectively for local situations and therefore tend to be more successful. A general policy framework may be developed nationally, but concrete measures should be taken locally. In Europe there is growing awareness of this and numerous networks of cities have developed in recent years, aiming at the exchange of experiences and best practices. As a general rule, an active involvement of the immigrant communities themselves seems to be a basic condition for effective policy making.

### *Cultural integration*

This brings me to the third and final domain of policy making – the cultural domain - which is probably the most difficult one and certainly the domain that arouses most public interest in Europe. As I said before, European countries differ strongly in the way they handle diversity, with France and the United Kingdom as the two prototypical examples of assimilationism and multiculturalism respectively. However, all countries are increasingly worried about immigration as a threat to social cohesion. Xenophobia and racism are on the rise in Europe. Especially since 9/11 Muslims tend to have become the main targets of these. Although only one third of all migrants in Europe are Muslims, they constitute a highly visible group of people and they are believed to be less ready to integrate than any other migrant community.

Most European countries, particularly those in the North West of the continent, have a long tradition of accommodating cultural and religious diversity. This has been facilitated by the separation of church and state, as the outcome of a process that has dominated Europe's history for the last five centuries, ever since Protestantism emerged as a major challenge to Roman Catholicism. Islam has not gone through a similar development and Muslims are usually not familiar with the concept of the separation of religion and state. There are also other differences between the dominant Islamic values and practices and those in Europe, for example concerning the position of men and women in society, the separation between public and private life, and the freedom of expression. Now that



sizeable Muslim communities have settled in Europe, these differences have become highly visible and also hotly debated. In this context I may remind you of the 'headscarf affairs' in France, where Muslim girls are not allowed to wear headscarves in public schools, since these are seen as expressions of a religion, which is forbidden in the French public school system (but not in several other European countries). We also had the Salman Rushdie affair, back in the late 1980s already: the former Muslim author of Indian descent insulting the prophet Mohammed, thus revealing the tension between freedom of religion and freedom of expression. This dilemma is similar to the recent Danish cartoons affair, and it also played a role in the murder of the Dutch film director Theo van Gogh by a Muslim fundamentalist in 2004.

These events and many others have attracted so much public attention that it is almost forgotten that most migrants, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, adapt themselves remarkably well to life in a European context. They may need some time, but over a number of years or decades most newcomers and their offspring tend to become part of the established population, as has been the case throughout the long history of immigration in Europe and other areas of immigration. Even most Muslims adapt quite well to their new environment. In a survey which I carried out in 2000 among youngsters of Turkish and Moroccan descent in Rotterdam we found that most of these young people were developing a more liberal, individualised form of religion than that of their parents. Most of them also fully endorsed the basic democratic values of which Europe prides itself so often.

We may conclude that integration also takes place in the cultural domain, even though this is not always readily acknowledged by the general public and by governments. We may also conclude that integration is a matter of time, but, unfortunately, the time horizon of many politicians is relatively short. Often it does not reach beyond the next elections. This is one reason why developing a successful integration policy is so difficult and why politicians rather prefer to ignore the issue. Recent outbursts in a number of European countries, however, such as the riots in the French *banlieues*, the Madrid and London bombings and several other incidents, have forced the authorities to speak up. In some cases they have done so in a rather strong, assimilative language. This may satisfy their domestic electorate, but it has also created further tensions among immigrant communities. Such tensions may easily provoke alienation among them and lead to further violence.

A much better alternative, therefore, would be to keep up a continuous dialogue with the immigrants and their leaders, as many national and local governments in Europe are actually doing. This requires an open attitude from the side of the receiving population and their authorities. Integration can only be successful if the receiving population is willing to grant a fair place to newcomers. The receiving society should acknowledge that immigration leads to lasting changes that affect everyone. Keeping up a continuous dialogue with migrants is a good way to know what they really wish to achieve and it also gives them a feeling that they themselves as well as their concerns are taken seriously. A continuous dialogue makes it easier to achieve the two major objectives that any integration policy should try to realise:

(1) the promotion of shared values and good social relationships between different groups in the population, and

(2) the promotion of social inclusion of marginal communities and individuals.

It shall be clear from this that integration not only requires mutual respect in the field of culture and religion, but also a sound legal position and sufficient opportunities for social and economic participation.

I hope that some of the lessons that Europe has learned in this respect can be helpful for Japan.