

INTEGRATION COMES AGE

BY MARTIN HOFMANN PHOTOS BY REUTERS

New policies promote the inclusion of immigrants

Integration started to attract an increasing amount of attention during the second half of the 1990s, often based on the assumption that in some ways things had taken a turn in the wrong direction. The subsequent debate coined terms like “parallel societies,” “integration deficits” or “failed multiculturalism,” all of them implying that immigration policies had failed in one way or another. This notion appeared somewhat exaggerated when looking at the hard data, and the integration of immigrants seemed to work a lot better than media reports and public debate would have suggested.

Nevertheless, there were some real issues that deserved to be addressed more thoroughly. For too long, immigration policies had more or less focused on the domestic labor market. The intention was to recruit a foreign labor force on a temporary basis, and return the workers to their home countries after completion of their allotted time or in times of recession.

In reality, most of the immigration turned out to be permanent; the initial workers settled in their new countries and were followed by relatives. At the same time, slowing economic growth put immigrants in particularly vulnerable positions with regard to job security and labor market inclusion. These trends prompted decision-makers to act to avoid further excluding immigrants and to address increasing public scepticism toward immigration. As a result, the concept of integration policy was born.

GLOBAL TRENDS

Migration patterns are diverse and international migrants form anything but a homogenous group. Migration trends influence the composition and backgrounds of immigrant populations and impact integration processes as well as their underlying challenges. Although public debate and the media often give a different impression, international migrants represent only a small portion of the world's population and their share is surprisingly stable. In its latest revision, the United Nations Population Division estimated there were 244 million migrants in 2015, equal to 3.3 percent of the world's population. In 2000, this figure stood at 2.9 percent, an increase of only 1.2 percentage points when compared to 1970.

However, migrants favor some destinations over others. It is estimated that two-thirds of all migrants live in the most highly developed countries. If migration trends continue and the world's population increases as expected, the number of migrants will increase to 309 million by 2050. This would cause a considerable — but not dramatic — increase in global migration. However, wealthy countries in the north will probably experience significant increases in immigration.

There are a number of reasons — personal, social or economic — that people



Teklit Michael, 29, an asylum-seeker from Eritrea, works in the kitchen of a restaurant in Tel Aviv, Israel. Employment is critical to the self-esteem of immigrants.

leave their homes. There are four central causes that can determine present and possibly future migrations: 1) flight and displacement; 2) demographic factors; 3) income differentials between origin and destination countries; 4) socio-economic development. The so-called “large and spontaneous” arrivals related to flight and displacement are almost always linked to armed conflict. Estimates in 2016 put the global population of displaced people at more than 67 million, the most since the end of World War II. The majority stay in their





Merhawi Tesfay, an immigrant from Eritrea, works as an electrician and manufacturer at a German plant near Münster. Good jobs are necessary for immigrants to integrate into their new societies.

INTEGRATION TAKES TIME AND INTEGRATION DEPENDS ON THE INDIVIDUAL IMMIGRANT'S SUCCESS IN FULFILLING HIS OR HER ASPIRATIONS.

home country or in neighboring countries. Some manage to reach more distant states that can provide protection.

The second root cause, demography, is related to population trends. Today, the world's population is an estimated 7.3 billion. By 2050, it will be 9.7 billion, with the growth distributed unevenly among the world's regions. Africa's population will more than double from 1.2 billion to 2.5 billion. Asia will grow from 4.4 billion people to 5.3 billion. At the same time, countries in the Northern Hemisphere will experience demographic aging. Migration from young and comparatively poor societies to aging and comparatively rich societies is a pattern that will most likely intensify.

Differentials in wages and income are the third most common drivers of international migration. Although many developing countries can make good progress in terms of catching up economically, significant wage gaps will continue to exist between regions. The fourth root cause, development, runs contrary to widespread beliefs. It is economic and social development — not underdevelopment — that can cause migration. Development brings fundamental changes to a society. The agricultural sector decreases, altering the labor force; child mortality decreases and populations increase; expectations and aspirations rise. Growing numbers of young people leave their homes in search of better lives, whether in their own countries or abroad.

What are the consequences of these trends for integration? First, both emigration in countries of origin and immigration in countries of destination will continue to grow. In addition, there will be more conflict and displacement on a global scale and consequently more spontaneous migrations. Thus, migration flows will shift toward origins more distant from their destinations in geographic, political, social, educational and cultural terms. Societies in destination countries will become more diverse; the percent of immigrants among the overall population will grow, a trend that will be even stronger in



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urban areas. Conflict-induced migration will also mean that the displaced will have a more difficult starting position in terms of participation and integration in the host countries. They cannot prepare for their journey, and the displacement often disrupts academic and professional pursuits that are incomplete when the overwhelmingly young refugees and asylum-seekers reach safe countries. All of this implies that immigrant integration processes will become more challenging than in the past. This challenge refers to immigrants and the hosting societies and must be met with enhanced personal, social and political efforts.

POLICY GOALS

Having a clear definition of what immigrant integration is or should be is a precondition for both promoting it and for addressing any future problems. Unfortunately, neither the academic nor the political debate has resulted in a commonly accepted or legally binding definition. All integration policies, however, pursue one overriding objective. The goal is to ensure that migrants acquire the necessary means to participate in the economic, cultural and social life of the receiving societies, benefit from equal access to rights and opportunities, and be treated the same as the domestic population.

Integration policies are formulated along three dimensions: structural, social and cultural, and political. Structural integration refers to participation in the economy and access to the education and health systems of receiving countries. Social and cultural integration refers to participation in the social life and an orientation of commonly shared values. Political integration refers to participation in the political decision-making process. Notably, the right to full political participation is not perceived as a priority in integration policies. The acquisition of full political rights is seen in the context of the acquisition of citizenship, which many states perceive as a logical endpoint of a successful integration process. As a crosscutting issue, integration policies are closely linked to other policy areas, such as labor markets, education, health or housing. This implies the adaptation of

mainstream institutions with a view to challenges related to immigration and diversity. Targeted measures in the area of integration regularly comprise language, tuition, targeted job training, the introduction to the history, culture and general values of host societies, or specific programs

A Syrian refugee in Athens, Greece, protests delays in the reunification of refugee families. Keeping families together can expedite integration.

addressing the needs of female migrants or young immigrants.

Today, integration is not understood as an obligation exclusively on the part of migrants. It is understood as a mutual and reciprocal process, requiring the involvement of both the migrants and the resident population as a precondition for success. This was not always the case. The debate on integration has a long history in the context of migration, but for a long period it was subsumed under the term “assimilation.” Used for the first time in the 1920s in the United States, assimilation was understood as the gradual and automatic approximation and adaptation to the American way of life. Thus, the task of assimilation and adaptation was entirely the responsibility of the migrants. From the 1960s onward, this concept was increasingly criticized as ethnocentric, patronizing and single-sided. At least in the academic debate, integration is now seen as distinct from assimilation and as an incorporation of immigrants into the host society while maintaining their cultural identities and practices. Moreover, this process is considered a mutual process between immigrants and their host societies rather than the sole responsibility of migrants.

LONG-TERM PROCESS

The German sociologist Hartmut Esser developed one of the most influential integration policy concepts. Esser defines immigrant integration as inclusion in the social system of the host country. The underlying process comprises four phases related to four dimensions of the phenomenon. The first phase, acculturation, refers to the cultural dimension of integration and includes the acquisition of language, knowledge and skills. The second phase, positioning, relates to the structural dimension and comprises the acquisition of rights and participation in the labor and housing market and the educational system. The third phase, interaction, emphasizes the social dimension and refers to contacts and relations beyond ethnic boundaries, friendships, marriage and family.

The final phase, identification, is linked to the emotional dimension and is characterized by positive orientation toward the host society, a sense of identity and solidarity, and an increasing acceptance of its general values and social norms. Two aspects are key in this regard: time and individual success. Integration takes time and integration depends on the individual immigrant’s success in fulfilling his or her aspirations. This also puts in perspective the widely held belief that identification with the host society, its system and values, should come at the beginning. In

reality, it seems to be the other way around: Positive identification stands at the endpoint of a successful integration process rather than at its beginning. The consequences for integration policies are obvious. First, integration requires a lot of stamina, sometimes for years or even generations. Second, the overriding goal of integration policy must be to support all efforts of immigrants to economically participate in a way that allows for the fulfillment of their individual or family aspirations. Only then will they positively identify with the host society's values and endorse the written and unwritten rules which make it work.

MEASURING SUCCESS

The problem with defining integration is revealed when trying to measure its progress in a given society. As a highly complex phenomenon, integration eludes precise measurement. Statistical data can only offer approximations. This is done with indicators that quantify and simplify social phenomena and help to better understand complex realities without precisely measuring them. Regardless of the methodology used, measuring the state of integration in a country will always be a challenge and the results will be biased to a certain degree. However, integration indicators have proved very useful when it comes to identifying certain problems or when immigrant groups are finding it particularly difficult to successfully participate in the economic, social and cultural life of host countries.

All available research suggests that immigration is indeed beneficial for receiving societies in economic and demographic terms. Immigration seems to moderately increase gross domestic product per capita, fills key vacancies at both ends of the qualification and wage spectrums, does not lead to displacement in the labor market, and relieves public finances and welfare systems because of a more favorable age demographic. At the same time, integration works considerably better than often assumed. Most immigrants acknowledge that integration is a precondition for their success or the success of their spouses. They want to integrate and, in most cases, manage to do so. This also involves the gradual approximation of cultural and behavioral patterns and finds its expression in upward mobility between first- and second-generation immigrants, especially in the case of second-generation females.

But, of course, not everything is rosy. Generally speaking, first-generation immigrants face a high risk of working below their qualifications and getting stuck with menial jobs and below-average wages. Immigrants are much more prone to the risk of exploitation and discrimination than any other population. A long-term problem arises when the first generation of immigrants comes from — or is recruited from — lower educational backgrounds. Educational levels are often passed from one generation to the next. Low-qualified second and third generations unable to obtain the credentials for upward mobility might not accept the job conditions at the lower end of the food chain as willingly as previous generations.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

Long-term integration challenges of the second- and third-immigrant generations also create problems that are

closely linked to security. Certain types of crime associated with immigrant groups and recent terrorist attacks have raised questions about migration and security. These concerns, however, are not always substantiated by evidence. Immigrants are no more prone to deviant behavior or crime than other groups. In many crime categories, they are even underrepresented because their fragile legal and social status induces them to play by the rules more so than the majority population. However, there are two notable exceptions that have been observed in many countries. The first exception refers to intraethnic violent crimes, and the second to deviant behavior of second-generation males.

When law enforcement officials and researchers examined why certain migrant groups were overrepresented in certain types of violent crime, they discovered three things. These crimes are normally interethnic, often have a history of escalation and sometimes are embedded in organized crime structures that are deeply rooted in the social culture of the respective origin countries. Most of the related offenses can be characterized as migrant-on-migrant crime. One frequent pattern is that conflicts between members of an ethnic group escalate due to their reluctance to involve the authorities for conflict mediation and resolution. Certain immigrant populations distrust authorities in general, either because of bad experiences in their home country or because of a fragile legal and social status in their host country. Consequently, they might be tempted to take matters into their own hands, which sometimes escalates conflicts rather than settles them. Notwithstanding, migrants are much more likely to become the victims of migration-related crime than to be the offenders. They are more vulnerable than other groups to all forms of exploitation, coercion, intimidation or discrimination. Organized crime groups capitalize on this vulnerability, especially within their own communities.

The second exception refers to the deviant behavior of second-generation male immigrants, a frequently observed phenomenon in many countries. Deviant behavior ranges from noncriminal public rebelliousness to petty crime, from involvement with youth gangs and organized crime groups to various forms of political and religious radicalization. A tiny minority commit politically motivated violence. Thus, the social context must not be neglected. Crime and radicalization do not happen in a vacuum. Offenders often have in common a specific biography and a specific history. They can be angry young men from disadvantaged neighborhoods who lack education and jobs and who have no real prospects for a positive future. They feel excluded and left behind. This will never be the only reason, but it can be one of the many reasons a person might become a criminal, a radical or even a homegrown terrorist. There is no direct connection between failed integration and crime or radicalization, but there are links. In addressing those, integration policy can contribute to softening these links and preventing potential security threats from becoming the actual ones. It must be stressed though that the attitudes and deeds of a few are unrelated to the attitudes and views of the millions of refugees who try to escape war, conflict and violence, and who live peacefully with members of their host societies.

RECENT TRENDS

There are two key factors for successful integration: language acquisition and economic participation. Based on these widely accepted priorities, and to avoid the integration gaps experienced in previous immigration periods, states continuously broaden and fine-tune their integration policies. States have concluded that integration measures are most successful when they begin as early as possible. The aim is to acquaint immigrants with the language, values and culture of the host country immediately after or even prior to their arrival. Thus, countries have continually increased the intensity of their language courses to quickly provide new immigrants with a language level appropriate for participation in the economic, social and cultural life of the host society. The programs have a higher intensity and are organized in countries of origin as well, which enables migrants to achieve a certain language level before entering the host country.

Host countries have long emphasized language acquisition as the main objective of integration measures, and research confirms the significance of language for the successful social, cultural and economic integration of migrants. Consequently, they have increased the requirements for language competency and related training measures. They have promoted early childhood language acquisition, established special day care facilities with a focus on language and integration, and offered language courses for migrants and their families in countries of origin. Host countries have learned that a mismatch in formal and practical qualifications hampers the immigrants' full participation in the labor market. Consequently, they aim to broaden their integration concepts by focusing on language training and on integrating the labor market. Related measures include skills assessments, stepped-up recognition of foreign qualifications and certificates, help with job searches, sponsored internships or other workplace integration measures.

These measures also try to diversify the courses and programs. The idea is to offer tailor-made interventions for target groups and their respective integration needs. Specific approaches are created for young immigrants or for female immigrants, and specific measures are offered based on education level and professional qualifications. The diversification of integration measures goes hand in hand with the customization of integration measures. Related measures emphasize individual support in the framework of general integration programs, such as case-by-case counseling, individual integration plans, guides to accompany immigrants during the integration process, or mentoring programs involving well-integrated representatives from immigrant communities assisting newly arrived migrants.

Individual integration plans also instill a sense of responsibility. States want to reward successful integration but also impose sanctions when unsuccessful. One approach is to emphasize the

role of positive incentives, which reward successful integration efforts. These rewards include fast-track procedures for resident permits, access to citizenship for immigrants who can prove they succeeded in their integration efforts or financial incentives for successfully completing integration courses.

CONCLUSION

Current and future migration trends will most likely result in larger immigrant populations and more societal diversity in host countries. This poses additional challenges to immigrants and receiving societies and calls for enhanced personal, social and political efforts. Thus, successful integration must be understood as a long-term, mutual and reciprocal process, requiring the involvement of both the migrants and the resident population as a precondition for success. Integration policy is not a magic bullet that can meet all challenges all at once.



But when it applies to an intelligent mix of policies addressing the social, economic, political and cultural integration challenges that exist in a society, it can make a difference. It should foster equal opportunities, a fairer distribution of wealth, a sense of joint identity, a feeling of belonging and togetherness, and interaction among the various groups in a society. In doing so, it can make a significant contribution to cohesion and security.

Prejudice, discrimination and exclusion will have the opposite effect. Successful integration policies benefit all parts of the population but pay particular attention to the vulnerable groups, namely those that run the risk of permanently falling behind whether or not they are immigrants. □

A British teacher, center, speaks to refugee children at the volunteer-run Refugee Education Chios school on the island of Chios, Greece. It's important for host countries to educate immigrant children.