



Silvio Berlusconi Boahene, 5, holds a newspaper bearing a picture of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in Modena, Italy, in 2010. Boahene's father, a Ghanaian metalworker, named his son after the prime minister in gratitude for the residency permit he received from Berlusconi's government.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

# European Integration

By *per* Concordiam Staff

Jobs and citizenship are vital to improving opportunities for newcomers

Multitudes relocate to Europe every year to escape political oppression, pursue economic opportunity and flee war zones. But integrating many of these immigrants and refugees into Europe has been difficult, and Europeans express concern that uncontrolled migration could threaten their culture. This mood was reflected in recent speeches by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, all of whom announced the failure of multiculturalism in their countries. Immigration has helped Europe in the past, and experts say it is needed again to supplement the continent's aging workforce. But the European Union is struggling to find the right policy that balances the economic needs of the EU without creating parallel societies of culturally autonomous immigrants.

The EU is developing a common migration policy that strives to provide a foundation for admitting immigrants. Work permits – including “Blue Cards” for vital foreign-born workers – are to be streamlined. Long-term residents of Europe would benefit from more lenient family reunification policies to allow them to take root in their new countries. Increasingly, the EU is stressing the need for language training and the enforcement of anti-discrimination policies. “Successful integration of migrants into the host society is essential to maximize the opportunities afforded by legal migration and to realize the potential that immigration has for EU development,” the European Union’s website announced in reference to the creation of a new immigration policy.

### BENEFITS AND CONCERNS

After World War II, large numbers of workers immigrated to France, Belgium and Germany to respond to the economic boom and a manpower shortage caused by years of war. European governments viewed them as temporary guest workers, as did many of the migrants themselves. In the 1970s, when economic growth slowed, many guest workers lost their jobs. Though unemployed, many migrants did not return to their home countries but stayed in Europe. Western European governments responded by discouraging

recruitment of foreign labor. This policy had unexpected consequences. Fearful that the doors to Europe would close forever, migrants hurriedly brought extended family into Europe, exacerbating the issue of integration.

Family reunification changed the character of European immigration. Single workers didn’t worry as much about schooling, health care and place of worship, but families did. Some immigrants separated into ethnic pockets. For example, the Belgian cities of Ghent and Brussels are home to a large community of Turks from the single city of Emirdağ that, according to the *Middle East Quarterly*, live as they do “back home.” Bangladeshis settled in East London boroughs, and large populations of Pakistanis from Punjab and Kashmir call Bradford and Birmingham home. Countless emigrants from Pakistan, Vietnam and Iraq live in Norway. North Africans and Albanians cluster in Italy. Many of the recent arrivals are choosing to retain the customs of their home countries and not reintegrate. Much of their earnings leave the EU in the form of remittances.

Polish people look at a job message board outside a shop in west London. Following admittance to the European Union in 2004, an estimated 350,000 Polish immigrants have come to Great Britain in one of the largest waves of immigration in 300 years.

GETTY IMAGES



For emigrants from Turkey and North Africa, Europe's convenient proximity makes it an immigration hub for those unwilling to make more distant trips to North America or Australia. An estimated 25,000, mostly Tunisians, have migrated from Africa since the Arab Spring began. Approximately 6.5 percent of the EU population consists of foreigners, Eurostat reported in early 2011. And according to Pew Research, Muslims now constitute about 6 percent of Europe's population, up from 4.1 percent in the 1990s. Though that number is small, Europeans increasingly worry that imported customs are displacing traditional European culture. Germany's Friedrich Ebert Foundation think tank released survey results in October 2010 that found that "more than 30 percent believed Germany was 'overrun by foreigners,'" as reported by the BBC.

### EMPLOYING NEWCOMERS

An additional criticism of immigrants – even those from other states in the EU – is that they drain government resources. A UK labor report showed that British immigrants suffered from higher unemployment rates than those native born and were less likely to participate in government. The report found that "27 percent of people coming from Bulgaria and Romania had 'low education levels,' while as of 2009, more than 15 percent of them were claiming out

of work benefits," *The Telegraph* reported in September 2011. Additionally, emigrants from Bulgaria and Romania have more children, which the British argue strains the educational system.

But Europe will still need millions of immigrants to help grow its increasingly complex economies, and the EU Blue Card is helping bring highly skilled workers into the bloc. "Economic migration, if correctly managed, could help the European Union face its demographic challenges and reach the objectives set in the EU's Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs," according to EurActiv, a website dedicated to EU policy. Introduced in 2009, the Blue Card is a work permit that allows highly skilled non-EU citizens to work and live in most EU countries. To acquire the card, an applicant must hold professional-level qualifications, have an employment contract for at least one year and earn a gross monthly wage of at least 1.5 times the annual average wage in the member state where he is applying.

Cardholders are eligible for permanent residence after five years of legal, continuous residency, and families of card holders are allowed, after 18 months, to move with the card holder to another EU state for employment. EU Blue Card holders have the same social and labor rights as nationals. With the exception of Denmark, the UK and Ireland, all 27 EU member states accept the card.



## PATHS TO CITIZENSHIP

Acquiring citizenship helps immigrants take more of an interest in improving their adopted countries. Many argue that European bureaucracies must simplify what has been an arduous and discouraging process. Some states charge high fees and require applicants to know the language but offer little opportunity for them to learn. A 2011 Migrant Integration Policy Index report produced by the British Council and the Migration Policy Group found that “laws and policies in Europe and North America demonstrate that many countries create as many obstacles as they provide opportunities for full and active citizenship. Only a few confident countries like Portugal and Sweden encourage political participation and access to nationality.”

In Britain, learning the language is the first step to integration. “I believe being able to speak English should be a prerequisite for anyone who wants to settle here,” UK Home Secretary Theresa May said in November 2010. “The new English requirement for spouses will help promote integration, remove cultural barriers and protect public services.”

In 2006, France instituted a similar requirement by which an unemployed person seeking to immigrate must submit a petition for admission conditioned upon knowledge of French. Outside Europe, Canada and Australia also require a language test before admittance. A common language is viewed as vital for participation in school, government and social life.

France has generally taken a hard approach to integration, insisting that immigrants become cultural Frenchmen. In April 2011, it became the first European country to ban Muslim women from wearing a veil to conceal their faces in public. Women wearing a burka or niqab may be fined and asked to enroll in citizenship lessons. A husband caught forcing his wife to cover her face may be fined 25,000 euros (about \$34,700).

## SUCCESS STORIES

A new study gives Sweden the highest marks for immigrant integration policies. The British Council and the Migration Policy Group measure European and North American “employment opportunities, access to education and anti-discrimination legislation,” *The Telegraph* reported in March 2011. Also achieving top rankings were Portugal, Canada, Finland and the Netherlands. “Fairness” was a central concern for the authors of the study. “Sweden’s legislation and policies are based on the idea that if you have legal access to the country, you will be treated the same as everyone else, which is beneficial to immigrants,” Thomas Huddleston, a Migration Policy Group analyst, said. At the bottom of the list were Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia and Latvia. The UK tied for 12th with Germany, and the United States ranked ninth.

The Vietnamese community in Germany serves as a largely successful example of migration. Vietnamese families place great value on their children acquiring university educations and take advantage of the plethora

of opportunities Germany presents them, according to a Deutsche Welle program broadcast online in 2011. The appointment of Philip Rösler as vice chancellor of Germany was a first for the country. A native of Vietnam, Rösler was adopted by a German couple as an infant. Muslims, almost all with immigrant backgrounds, have been elected to parliaments in the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, France and Germany.

Overall, Europe may be showing signs of increasing cultural tolerance toward outsiders. A series of anti-immigrant bills have been squashed across Europe: A French ban on headscarves in day care centers was batted down, the Dutch rejected a bill to ban Islamic animal slaughter and Germany is now allowing Muslim students “equal access to religion courses,” *The New York Times* reported in January 2012.

Integrating immigrants is vital to building strong attachments to the European project. In his speech critical of multiculturalism, British Prime Minister David Cameron stressed that immigrants can simultaneously hold more than one identity, including an affinity for their country of residence. “The key to achieving true cohesion [is] by allowing people to say ‘I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu, I am a Christian, but I am a Londoner, too;’” he said. □



French resident Hind Ahmas shows the fine she paid for wearing an Islamic veil after the practice was banned in April 2011.