Migration and integration – some EU pointers

Do immigrants integrate? Should immigrants integrate? These questions are of crucial importance to the European Union as it moves towards a common immigration policy. A new report for the European Commission reviews 17 EU-backed research projects in this field.

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These days, you can drive straight across most of Western Europe's national borders. No booms swinging up and down. Nobody to check your passport. Many, though not all, of the European Union (EU) Member States have agreed to abolish frontier controls. To abolish, that is, the controls on their *internal* frontiers. Where the EU meets the wider world, the checks are getting tighter.

The free movement of people was one of the founding principles of what is now the European Union. Internally, it has made big progress towards that goal. But this inward liberalization has brought with it a growing need to coordinate the immigration policies of the Member States.

EU competence in the areas of migration and asylum was established by the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam. By 2004, EU management of migration is likely to have become a reality. Legislation has already been drafted by the European Commission, the EU's powerful civil service. An "open coordination" of Member States' migration and asylum policies was launched in 2002, together with a "virtual European observatory on migration and asylum".

What kind of policies will the EU adopt? Open Door or Fortress Europe? Probably neither. On the one hand, immigration has become a sensitive issue in many EU countries. On the other, the economies of Western Europe face medium-term labour shortages in a number of key sectors. Part of that labour shortfall may be supplied from the Central and Eastern European countries that are now candidates for EU membership, but most will have to be drawn from countries outside the EU.

The employment aspects of immigration are among the Commission's top priorities for discussion and research. Improving skills and qualifications is a particular concern. Integration and social inclusion are other major topics. But so are illegal immigration and the need for effective controls. One hopeful sign is that some emphasis is being placed on dialogue with governments in the immigrants' countries of departure. That dialogue is to include "policies of co-development", which sounds like a recognition that illegal immigration cannot be countered effectively without tackling the poverty that causes it. Whether the lip service turns into debt service will depend on the EU governments.

In any case, the Commission is walking a fine line. To make the right decisions, it needs to draw on detailed research about the integration of existing immigrant populations within the EU. From the 1970s onward, those populations increased rapidly but very unevenly across the EU. For Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) figures on selected Western European countries (not all in the EU), see table 1.

Table 1. Foreign resident population in selected OECD countries (thousands)

Country	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999	Percentage of total population 1999
Austria	283	272	413	724	748	10.0[a]
Belgium	...	845	905	910	900	8.8
Denmark	102	117	161	223	259	4.9
France	3714[b]	...	3597	...	3263	5.6[c]
Germany	4453	4379	5242	7174	7344	8.9
Ireland	...	79	80	94	126[d]	3.3[d]
Italy	299	423	781	991	1520[e]	2.6[e]
Luxembourg	94	98	...	138	159	36.6
Netherlands	521	553	692	757	651	4.1
Norway	83	102	143	161	179	4.0
Portugal	...	...	108	168	191	2.0
Spain	...	242	279	500	801	2.0
Sweden	422	389	484	532	487	5.5
Switzerland	893	940	1100	1331	1400	19.2
United Kingdom	...	1731	1875	2060	2208	3.8

Notes: [a] Figure for 1998; [b] Figure for 1982; [c] Metropolitan France only; [d] Figure for April 2000; [e] Figure for December 2000.

Source: OECD: *Trends in international migration,* Paris, 2001.

Research on Europe's present-day immigrants certainly does exist, and some of it has been conducted under the Commission's Targeted Socio-Economic Research programme (TSER). A new review of 17 TSER projects provides some useful pointers for policy-makers in Europe.[1] And, indeed, beyond Europe. Many of the findings are of wider application.

Part of the review looks at research methodology. This will be of interest to other researchers in the field, as will a detailed list of suggested indicators of integration.

In the present article, we concentrate more on the research findings, and the conclusions that the review draws from them. As in the review, the various topics are grouped under three main themes.

The assumption underlying the research is that integration is a good thing. "In many of the projects under review, there is an implicit understanding that integration is a necessary aspect of social cohesion." In both the review and the research projects, this is nuanced through references to multiculturalism, and there is certainly no implication that immigrants must embrace every aspect of the receiving country's culture. Integration "is a two-way process: it requires adaptation on the part of the newcomer but also by the host society. Successful integration can only take place if the host society provides access to jobs and services, and acceptance of the immigrants in social interaction."

The review itself warns that there is no substitute for reading the original project reports. The same warning should be sounded, but more strongly, in the case of this article. It is a summary of a summary, intended purely as a pointer towards further reading and debate.

Theme 1: Migration in Europe

What is immigration? The review assumes that the conventional sense of the word is "movement from one country to another followed by permanent settlement". But in fact, the patterns of mobility into and within Europe are more complex, and have become even more diverse in recent years. "The TSER programmes contain much evidence on this development. There are more different types of migrants. In Italy, for example, there were 16 different permit categories for foreigners in 1990, but already 21 by 1999. Germany has five standard types of residence permit, varying by type of toleration and length of stay allowed, plus two exceptional categories. Nor are migrant careers necessarily linked to specific types of employment. There is evidence of mobility between countries and location on the one hand, and between different types of work on the other."

What causes migration? The main finding is that "the informal or underground economy is not caused by the presence of (often illegal) immigrants". In fact, it is the other way round: "the informal economy is a major pull factor in migration, in both Southern and Northern Europe. Furthermore, illegal work may be found in any area of economic activity and is not confined to foreigners. High unemployment in Southern Europe is neither evidence of the absence of any pull factor, nor does it indicate that migrants compete with local workers, except those in an already marginal position in the labour market. A comparison of Germany and France suggests that the former's attempts to clamp down on illegal entry are less successful at curbing the informal economy."

Family reunification. When you import labour, you import people. And people tend to have families. Immigrant workers' right to a family life is clear. It is also well anchored in international law, as the Family Reunification Evaluation Project points out. Family reunification is provided for in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in ILO Conventions Nos. 97 and 143, and in two UN Conventions on children's rights. The review finds that immigration due to family reunification is "increasing relative to work-related movement". However, "there remains much variation in how European countries interpret international Conventions on this matter" (see table 2). Interestingly, while family reunification was once the main cause of female immigration into the EU, sisters now seem to be migrating for themselves. More and more women are entering Europe in search of jobs, notably in tourism and domestic work.

Theme 2: Living conditions of the migrants

The main findings are that "immigrants generally experience lower living conditions than local citizens, particularly in employment and housing. Immigrant children tend to perform relatively poorly in school, with greater problems of conduct and higher drop-out rates".

Children, understandably, tend to be better integrated than their parents. "Most still identify with their parents' country of birth. But fears that the children of immigrants are a time bomb waiting to explode, or that they are fired with political and religious radicalism, find no support from the research."

Theme 3: Migration and social cohesion

EU countries have taken varied approaches to integration. Some have been more assimilationist, some more multicultural. In the research, however, there were "on the one hand, signs of convergence and, on the other, little evidence that any one country was more successful at integrating newcomers than others".

Concerning the frequent stigmatization of immigrants, "it is clear that immigrants are not the only groups in society enduring exclusion, nor is their presence the only cause of exclusion. But locally

Figure 2. Beneficiaries of family reunification in the European Union

Country	Spouse	Minor children	Parents	Other relatives
Belgium	yes	under 18 dependent		
Denmark	yes (also de facto partner)	under 18 living with person with parental responsibility	over 60 dependent	for special reasons
France	yes	under 18; under 21 for Member States to the European charter	not considered	—
Germany	yes	under 16 unmarried; under 18 for specific cases	for humanitarian reasons	—
Greece	yes	under 18	dependent	—
Ireland	yes	depending on individual circumstances	depending on the circumstances	depending on the individual circumstances
Italy	yes	under 18 dependent	dependent	non-minor children
Luxembourg	yes	under 18	yes	non-minor children
Netherlands	yes (also de facto partner)	under 18 dependent	if non-reunification causes difficulties	in exceptional circumstances
Portugal	yes	dependent	dependent	may be considered
Spain	yes	under 18	dependent	non-minor children
United Kingdom	yes	under 18, dependent, unmarried	dependent widow mother; widower father	for extraordinary reasons

Source: Family Reunification Evaluation (FARE) Project 2001.

and nationally, immigrants are stigmatized and often construed as criminal or deviant; this is apparent in the markedly higher levels of incarceration of foreigners. The research finds that conditions in the country of origin as well as obstacles to legal immigration may force migrants into illegality. Their findings emphasize that criminalization by the wider society risks producing the very class of criminal foreigners it so fears. In a related finding, government crackdowns on the informal economy in Spain and Italy may cause the public to further disparage those, often immigrants, who work in it."

In the research on education, "strong support is found for multicultural policies, which may improve the attitudes of children as well as their immigrant parents. If children feel accepted at school, their parents will also feel more accepted and more involved in their education." However, "a survey of teacher training programmes across the EU finds wide disparities in the level of provision and finds that national models of integration significantly inform curricula. It is noteworthy that the majority of trainee teachers in all the countries studied had positive attitudes to cultural diversity. There is a need for common acceptable standards for teacher training in multiculturalism across the EU."

Discussion points

In view of the diversity of the research, the review deliberately refrains from drawing any conclusions. It does, however, list eight recurring issues, and suggests that they

could help to identify topics for further investigation and discussion. We quote the points here in full.

Policy. "Several of the studies demonstrate the importance of government policy in shaping the conditions for immigration and integration. They also show that policies in this area have often had unforeseen and even undesirable consequences. An obvious example is the way increased border restriction has created the conditions for a transnational migrant smuggling industry. All EU countries have changed their policies on immigration, integration and citizenship in recent years – often several times. Policy should therefore be seen as a collective learning process."

Public opinion and leadership. "Public opinion appears in many cases to drive official policies. Attitudes have often proved a constraint on policies designed to achieve greater equity, or to remove barriers to participation. Public opinion has to be taken seriously in democracies, but it is important to realize that opinion is itself socially constructed. The media and political leaders play a big part in this. Public opinion has often been influenced by unwillingness to face up to realities and to take unpopular decisions. Far-sighted leadership is vital, and the EU could play a major part in developing the long-term perspectives needed for this."

The actors in immigration and integration. "An important cause of policy modification has often been the neglect of various actors in initial policy formation processes. It is vital to realize that a wide range of societal groups have a stake in immigration and integration, and should be included in policy debates. Integration is not just the result of state policies, but of the attitudes and actions of a wide range of groups and individuals. Above all it is vital to include immigrants and ethnic minorities at all stages, if policies are to succeed."

The informal economy. "A recurring theme in many of the research reports, whatever their central theme, has been the importance of the informal economy in immigration and integration. The informal economy is partly a result of the combination of stricter migration control and deregulation of labour markets. It acts as a magnet for undocumented migrants, but also helps to provide the conditions for economic and social integration. The informal economy is generally seen as undesirable and even pathological. However, it might be better to see it as a dynamic factor in social adaptation and change, and to seek ways of making it function to achieve desirable objectives."

Social exclusion. "This is another theme that runs through most of the reports. Many immigrants and their descendants remain at the margin of society, with serious consequences for social cohesion. One of the most disturbing findings is that social exclusion has, in many places, come to be seen as a 'normal condition' for immigrants and minorities. It important to understand social exclusion as a cumulative process, in which localized processes in various sub-sectors of society (the labour market, social rights, housing, health, education, etc.) interact to cause exclusion from society for minorities defined in terms of origins, race, ethnicity, gender, generation and location."

The ambivalence of welfare services. "Government services play a crucial role in integration. Equal access to education, welfare, health and other services is vital if immigrants are to avoid social exclusion. However, research has indicated that some types of service provision actually add to exclusion, by separating immigrants from the rest of the population. Some special services for minorities may hinder integration in education and the labour market. This is one reason for the scepticism of many people towards multiculturalism, which has led to a move away from such policies in some places. It is important to make it clear that multiculturalism, as an appropriate strategy for ethnically diverse societies, has two dimensions: one is rec-

ognition of the right to be culturally different, while the other is the provision of the conditions for social equality, such as language courses, vocational training and access to mainstream services."

Human rights and the rule of law. "Much of the research indicates that social divisions and inequality are in part due to the lack of rights experienced by many immigrants, especially in the early stages of settlement. In several countries, the law courts have acted as a corrective to discriminatory policies (for instance on family reunion, security of residence, and access to services) put forward by governments and bureaucracies. It is essential for social integration and cohesion that immigrants and minorities should enjoy full human rights and have equal access to the legal system."

Diversity and convergence. "The research reports show the diversity of experience of various groups of migrants, of various immigration countries, and of various sub-groups in each place. Policies need to reflect such diversity. On the other hand, there are also clear trends to convergence in settlement experience, community formation and national laws and policies. This convergence can serve as the basis for collaborative policy making. It points to the value of comparative research and international exchange of experience. The transnational collaborative approach epitomized in the multi-national TSER studies can serve as blueprint for EU-wide cooperation in this field."

Note

[1] Stephen Castles, Alisdair Rogers, Ellie Vasta and Steven Vertovec: *Migration and integration as challenges to European society – assessment of research reports carried out for the European Commission Targeted Socio-Economic Research (TSER) Programme,* Centre for Migration and Policy Research, University of Oxford, England. As we went to press, the review was unpublished. However, it is likely to be available by early 2003 on the TSER web site at http: // www.cordis.lu / tser / home.html