



European Ideas Network

Integration and inclusion:
Have integration policies failed?
What role for the EU?

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The case of immigration policies

1. The Determinants

Instead of trying to analyze policies of inclusion and integration from a general perspective, I believe it might be more helpful to address them having into account a specific group: the immigrants in the European Union.

The phenomenon of immigration is not a new issue in Europe although it has evolved differently depending on the Member-State considered.

Some Member-States, such as Ireland, Spain and Portugal have had a long history of emigration. Others, like France, have for long been the host countries. Some countries that were colonial metropolis in the past have nowadays privileged relations with their previous overseas territories as it is the case of Portugal with Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea and S. Tome and Principe.

In the first place, these different experiences about immigration have consequences particularly regarding the views that have to be taken into account when trying to devise a common immigration policy.

Secondly, we must accept the fact that immigration in Europe is just one of the ways through which we can evaluate the success of the European Social Model.

Earning a wage that allows a comfortable life for a household together with the possibility of living in peace, prosperity, freedom, respect for the rule of law and human rights and protected when adverse life events occur such as unemployment, sickness, dependent ageing or death is the dream of millions of families around the world.

And Europe has allowed, so far, the fulfilment of that dream. The import of skilled foreign workers to our economy has been taken place long before the idea of a European common immigration policy.

In the nineteen sixties (1960s) a huge flow of emigration from Portugal towards France was registered with very negative consequences for Portugal where many regions became uninhabited and deserted.

Because immigration is a selective phenomenon, and because the first ones to leave are the most capable, the origin countries lose a substantial part of very dynamic human resources which are irreplaceable in the process of wealth creation.

From this point of view, an analysis of the immigration phenomenon of that time allow us to conclude that the ones that have benefited the most were the host countries at the expense of the origin ones.

Conclusions about the success or failure of immigration policies also depend largely on the economic cycle.

During economic booms and full employment, the most important factors for the assessment of immigration policies are, among others, vocational training, knowledge of foreign language, integration policies for migrant families and even education on different religious practices.

In times of high unemployment and poor expectations on economic growth the issues that arise as the most decisive for the evaluation of those policies are security, crime, immigration control and expenditure in welfare.

We should also consider another factor related with the cultural characteristics of migrants. It is recognized that some peoples, such as the Portuguese, have shown strong integration capacity when compared with others.

This is also reflected on the way that migrant people use the space in the host countries.

When the adaptation of migrants is high, they easily blend with the autochthon people in common residential areas. When this is not the case, growing ghettos become visible which make full integration more difficult.

The points I mentioned just highlight a fundamental aspect, which is the following: the phenomenon of immigration is a multifaceted reality that incorporate issues that range from the cultural characteristics of the origin regions to the economic cycle of the host country. This reality does not help us much in trying to conceive a European common immigration policy.

2. The road travelled so far

These obstacles have become clear since the Amsterdam Treaty, in which the Union decided to proceed with a European immigration policy.

It was also hard to arrive to the compromise achieved in the Tampere summit in 1999 in which the three pillars for that policy were defined: the first concerns the fair treatment of immigrants, the second is about the management of migratory flows and the third deals with cooperation issues with the host countries.

From those three components of a European immigration policy, I would say that the one related with the management of migratory flows is the one that has evolved the most.

The tightening of external borders control, a common visa policy and a progressive refinement of the techniques for flows management, as well as the repression of the traffic of human beings, shows that cooperation between Member-States has to be considered as positive.

On the downside I have to mention the other two pillars of the EU immigration policy.

With regard to integration, the right to family reunification has been eventually adopted by a directive.

However, that directive is minimal which can also be said about the long-term residence permit that does not establish true equal treatment concerning social rights or mobility within the Union.

The report approved in April 2009 by the European Parliament on the subject is very clear when it "deeply regrets the fact that Member-States have not demonstrated sufficient solidarity about the growing challenge of immigration, calls for urgent review of the framework program solidarity and management of migratory flows -and of its four financial instruments in order to reflect the new realities resulting from increased migrant pressure and to meet urgent needs, such as massive migration flows".

Too little has been made regarding relations with the countries of origin.

The same report of the European Parliament "regrets that cooperation with third countries has not achieved satisfactory results" and adds, "believes that immigration into the EU is not a solution to meet the challenges facing developing countries and an immigration policy must be accompanied by an effective development policy in origin countries."

3. The Future

The diversity of cultures and management practices among Member-States can only partly justify this somewhat unbalanced development of the three pillars of the European immigration policy, but it does not explain everything.

For me it is clear that a European immigration policy cannot rely only on fighting illegal immigration.

The idea that it is sufficient to protect borders and prevent people from entering is a misconception.

We just need to remember history and see what happened during the great invasions to confirm that.

It is fundamental to understand that the need and despair will always lead to the influx of people and this will have greater impact if it is not part of an organised process.

Experience shows that the fight against the underground economy is crucial but not enough.

Therefore the EU needs to identify solutions for the entry of new immigrants that are necessary for the Union because of our demographic weakness.

This is reinforced by the fact that the entry of new migrants can be a source of economic survival for Europe. The European Commission says the EU will need 60 million migrant workers by 2050.

This forecast should lead us to an immediately opening up of legal migration channels.

The bottom line is whether the EU can go further in defining an immigration policy.

Some people think we cannot harmonise much more than what we have done. But this position is based on the differences in the labour market and demographic situation of the Member-States.

However, the truth is that we are still seeing high migration pressure and the enlargement of the Union has contributed to the development of organizations that encourage illegal migration and have links with organized crime.

My assessment of the European immigration policy cannot be very positive.

While acknowledging that some measures have been adopted, these mainly concern ad hoc initiatives to regulate immigration and, despite many good intentions, a somewhat irrational attitude of “save yourself if you can” still prevails.