

Workshop 3 – Integration: Being Home Abroad

In an increasingly globalised world, the notion of a socially, ethnically or culturally homogeneous nation-state is no longer enforceable. Diversity is nowadays a common feature of most modern societies. Whereas on the one hand socio-cultural pluralism resulting from migration is clearly recognised as an added value to receiving societies, on the other hand it poses a certain number of challenges, especially in terms of social cohesion. Migrants are still viewed with suspicion as they are believed to be competing with other citizens for scarce resources (e.g. the access to employment, public goods and other services).

Different models of integration

Over the years, most developed countries facing migration have set up their own admission and integration policies. The differences between these main orientations are conditioned by each country's history, its political system, its institutional traditions and, obviously, its immigration history. Although policies tend to converge due to Europeanization, globalization, and interstate cooperation, two integration models can still be distinguished: the republican (or universalist) model and the multicultural model. The republican approach, as applied in France, is based on the idea of a political nation not determined by ethnic or religious criteria and on a civic culture grounded in universal rights shared by all individuals and groups living on the territory, including migrants. As a consequence, ethnic and cultural diversity is not promoted in the public sphere, since it is deemed to undermine social cohesion, and immigrants are expected to assimilate. On the opposite end, the multicultural approach, as it exists in Canada, Great Britain or the Netherlands, is based on the recognition of cultural diversity (including immigrants') in the public sphere and on the idea that the state has a responsibility to manage this cultural and identificational diversity for the good of society at large. In-between these two opposite models, many countries in fact developed a variety of mixed policies that include elements of both models.

A reciprocal process implying rights and duties

In most European countries, integration is based on the notion of reciprocity, involving receiving societies, immigrants and state institutions. It implies rights and duties from all involved actors. Transparency of state institutions and rule of law are fundamental elements of a successful integration policy. Whereas an open-minded and tolerant receiving society is a key element for successful integration, it is also important that immigrants respect the values and the culture of the society they are living in, and that they abide by the rules and laws of that country. To be sure, the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) stresses that states have a responsibility to ensure that migrants are familiar with the laws and customs of the country they are living in.

Integration programmes are only one component of a comprehensive integration policy, which has a much larger scope. It covers not only fair access to institutions, employment,

education or participation in civic life, but also migration and admission policy itself. For instance, family reunion is not only an element of migration policy, but also a vital aspect of a migrant's integration. Thus, integration should be perceived as a multi-faceted process affected by cross-sectoral public action.

Discrimination and equal opportunities

Increasing ethnic, cultural and social diversity resulting from migration highlights the need to keep one's eyes open for possible occurrences of exclusionary processes within the society at large. It is important that governments promote the principle of non-discrimination and apply diversity policies to state structures. Private sector companies, especially the large ones, also play a decisive role in this respect. Nevertheless, it appears that in most countries migrants still suffer from discrimination in sectors such as housing or access to the labour market. Governments can take important measures to reduce discrimination, by ensuring that state representatives, especially the police, civil servants, or immigration officers, receive appropriate training that enables them to act in a non-discriminatory manner.

The issue of integration in Switzerland

Until the 1980s, the large majority of immigrants in Switzerland were not expected to stay in the country for a long time, but were hired for a certain period of time in order to fulfil the economic needs of specific economic sectors. Hence, they were perceived merely as workforce and not as people that had to be integrated. The situation changed when an increasing number of migrants expressed the desire to bring along their families and decided to stay in the country. As a consequence it became obvious that the labour market could not be the only instrument of integration and that the state had to change its perspective on the issue and play a more active role in the process.

Federal authorities have an important function in terms of coordination and facilitation of integration policies, but the key actors in the process are cantons and communes. Since the large majority of migrants are living in urban contexts, cities are also decisive in the process of supporting integration and promoting equal opportunities. In a country characterised by its traditional linguistic and cultural diversity, migration can be viewed both as an opportunity within or a challenge to the political system and its traditions.

In the past few years Switzerland has decided to impose more restrictive entry rules for non-EU citizens regulated by its economic needs for a highly qualified workforce while putting more attention on the integration process of new immigrants. Innovative and pragmatic measures have been taken, but improvements are still needed. The 2006 Federal Office for Migration report stresses that specific improvements are especially required in the fields of education, access to the labour market and language acquisition.

The tendency towards more restrictive admission policies is not characteristic only of Switzerland, but it is a global trend among European countries, whose integration policies tend to become more convergent. The debate on integration agreements between the government and the migrant is a good example as it exists now in most European countries, including Switzerland.

Integration agreements and migrants associations

The idea of such an instrument is to encourage migrants to integrate more actively into the society they live in through a legally binding contract. It mainly consists of the possibility

or obligation to take part in language and civics courses. Whereas such agreements may offer interesting prospects, several questions arise nevertheless. First, such courses are expensive and financing has to be provided. Second, the criteria that will help sort out objectively and without discrimination the target groups of such agreements have to be defined carefully. Third, one may wonder if and under which conditions these agreements should be made compulsory and which sanctions have to be imposed.

Integration agreements illustrate the tendency of many governments to take measures that are visible to the public. However, successful integration can never be achieved through such actions alone. It is a long-term process that goes beyond the scope of mere information, language courses and loyalty towards the receiving society. One vital aspect concerns social and – to some extent – political participation. Inclusion or consultation of migrant associations and individuals in decision-making may improve acceptance of public action and contribute to their empowerment.

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