COMPAS Breakfast Briefing Summary

How to strike a balance between mainstream and targeted efforts for immigrant integration in Europe?

As immigrant integration policies across mainland Europe are changing, this briefing explores if the UK approach is becoming predominant and what we have to learn from the European debate.

Why does it matter to talk about integration now?

While immigration numbers and fear of social benefit tourism have been high on the political agenda in several European countries, various studies and datasets have demonstrated the increasing diversity already present in many European countries. Roughly between 10 and 15 percent of the population is foreign-born in countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Austria, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Belgium[1]. However, the population with an immigrant background tends to be much larger, particularly in densely populated urban areas where numbers can vary between a quarter to half of the population as is the case in the cities of Amsterdam, Berlin or Brussels.

Table 1: Selection of European Countries, foreign-born population, 2013

Country	Total population	Foreign-born	Foreign-born in %
Belgium	11,161,642	1,747,641	16%
Denmark	5,602,628	548,411	10%
Germany	82,020,578	10,201, 192	12%
Estonia	1,320,174	198,411	15%
Ireland	4,591,087	736,375	16%
Greece	11,062,508	1,235,426	11%
Spain	46,727,890	6,174,740	13%
France	65,578,819	7,537,795	11%
Italy	59,685,227	5,695,883	10%
Latvia	2,023,825	279,227	14%
Netherlands	16,779,575	1,927,728	11%
Austria	8,451,149	1,362,185	16%
Portugal	10,487,289	881,440	8%
Slovenia	2,058,821	232,703	11%
Sweden	9,555,893	1,472,353	15%
United Kingdom	63,896,077	7,828,376	12%
Norway	5,049,223	662,526	13%
Switzerland	8,039,060	2,102,964	26%

Source: Eurostat 2013, Population data by sex, age and broad group of country of birth

At the same time, this growing population is also becoming increasingly heterogeneous in and of itself, with respect to age, gender, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic background and level of schooling. In this sense, (super)diversity is better understood as a diversity of needs rather than origin.

Until recently, most West-European countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany have had traditional tailored immigrant integration policies in place to address the needs of existing immigrant populations, and the new arrivals. This is now changing. Instead of perpetuating siloed "integration" policies - managed by particular units and departments of a single ministry - they are adapting and reforming generic or mainstream policies to better serve the entire superdiverse population. This is a familiar idea for the UK, which has had few distinct or targeted policies for the integration of immigrants to date. Instead, the United Kingdom has always applied remedial add-on policies or additional mainstreamed strategies to address the needs of the most vulnerable – which could include, but would not be limited to, people of immigrant or ethnic minority background.

Why the shift in approach?

In recent years, practitioners and policymakers have started to rethink the design and scope of immigrant integration policy across government. Targeted reception policies for newcomers remain necessary, but the process of long-term integration and participation requires a different approach. As a result, both at local and central level, governments, such as Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, are increasingly mainstreaming immigrant integration

priorities across government departments and levels. There are several drivers for this.

First, redress: ensuring that the whole population, including those with immigrant background, are served by mainstream public services, particularly when targeted integration policies have fallen short. Rather than offering immigrant children additional classes or services, public authorities are now asking whether education systems should be adapted. In Denmark, the development of 'all-day' schools, to offer greater support for children (including immigrant children) that are falling behind, exemplifies this approach.

Second, equity: immigrant groups may have specific needs in common with a broader section of the population, that can be better served by identifying the need rather than immigrant background. In France, policymakers are not allowed to target on the basis of ethnicity, and therefore use different indicators such as poverty within specific neighbourhoods, which are, in turn, part of a wider social cohesion framework. This may not be a perfect solution. Though immigrant populations are disproportionately represented in many of these neighbourhoods, many immigrants may fall through the net, if they live outside priority areas, or do not meet specific criteria related to poverty.

Finally, in a political and economic climate of overall austerity, policymakers are reluctant to prioritise immigrant groups, for fear that they will be perceived as treating them preferentially. The motivation for MPI's study on mainstreaming policy is rooted in the policy shift that took place in the Netherlands in 2011. The government made an explicit declaration that policies should no longer target immigrants as a group, and slashed the budget available for immigrant-specific programming. As a result, Dutch policy-makers have been searching for ways to ensure that mainstream policies can still reach immigrant populations.

How are countries doing it?

In the UK there is no broad-based integration policy for people with immigrant background; instead, competence over this policy area is diffused across government departments and levels by default. In other countries, the decision to diffuse responsibility has been a deliberate, and recent choice. In Germany, for example, the development of a National Action Plan on Integration in 2011, and the appointment of a Federal Commissioner for Migration, Integration and Refugees, has meant that every German State now has a responsible regional minister or commissioner for integration as well, contributing to enhanced coordination in this field. Also in 2011, the Danish Ministry for Refugees, Immigrants and Integration was abolished, and the responsibilities for integration divided amongst a number of ministries, including Justice, Social Affairs, Education and Employment.

Instead of creating separate remedial policies, sometimes it is more effective to 'update' existing mainstream policies, or to add targeted approaches within generic systems. Just as the UK has focused on mainstreaming equality and non-discrimination, Germany has created mandatory language tests for all pupils entering primary school everywhere in order to timely detect any type of language needs, including those related to non-native speaker backgrounds.

What's next?

The adoption of a whole-of-government approach for immigrant integration policy is necessary and, in some countries, overdue, but there are also pitfalls in adopting a mainstreaming strategy. The objective is to ensure equal access to generic services for everyone, and to improve overall participation outcomes. For this, tailored approaches will still be necessary in some situations, and final accountability and policy evaluation remain crucial. As continental European countries adopt a more mainstreamed approach towards immigrant integration, what can they learn from the UK experience? And what can the UK potentially learn from this policy shift in turn?

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The Future of Immigrant Integration in Europe: Mainstreaming Approaches for Inclusion *can be downloaded at http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/future-immigrant-integration-europe-mainstreaming-approaches-inclusion*

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[1]Eurostat 2013