



The Role of Public Services in Promoting Migrant Integration in Europe

Dr Katerina Marina Kyrieri, Lecturer, EIPA Maastricht 2007-present

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Introduction

Immigration presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the EU. It has an impact on the economy and society, and against the background of ageing European societies and of growing market needs, its demand in the EU is set to increase. Even if immigration is needed to offset the demographic decline in the short-term, it also brings with it new demands on policy such as integration. The article firstly presents the challenges that public administration faces in planning and implementing strategies for migrant integration and secondly provides some policy recommendations.

The EU framework on integration: setting the background

The integration of third-country nationals (TCNs) has been subject to complex policy processes since immigration was transferred to Community competence in 1999¹. The intergovernmental logic of Member States has led towards the development of the EU framework on integration by using a set of non-legislative modes of policy making and soft-law governance techniques, based on knowledge sharing, policy coordination and the exchange of information².

In the Tampere Programme (1999), four policy objectives were highlighted as having a central role in the treatment of migrant integration³:

1. The principle of fair treatment of TCNs who reside legally in the EU.
2. The provision of legal TCNs with rights and obligations comparable to EU citizens.
3. The granting of a set of uniform rights which are 'as near as possible' to those enjoyed by EU citizens.
4. The need for approximation of national legislations on the conditions for admission and residence.

Following these aims, the Commission presented in 2003 a Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment, where integration was to 'be understood as a two-way process'⁴. This implies that on the one hand, the hosting society should 'ensure that the formal rights of immigrants are in place'⁵ while, on the other hand, immigrants should 'respect the fundamental norms, values of the receiving country and participate actively in the integration process, without having to relinquish their identity'⁶.

The EU framework on integration is composed of a considerable number of substantive and institutional mechanisms, including a set of eleven Common Basic Principles (CBPs) for migrant integration.

Better integration through access to public services: the implementation of CBP 6

According to No 6 of the CBPs 'access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to public and private goods and services... in a non-discriminatory way is a critical foundation for better integration'⁷. Yet, the main weaknesses of public administrations are due to the 'institutional inability' of the States to effectively ensure the rights of migrants⁸. This inability is based on the stance of politicians and the cost entailed in complying with the idea of allowing immigrants to stay permanently⁹.

Regarding the dysfunctions of public administration, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) consider as the most important ones the potential suspicion towards foreigners, the lack of education, interest, and availability of personnel as well as the lack of clarity of the institutional framework¹⁰. The absence of educated personnel and ignorance of the possibilities and guarantees that the laws provide to migrants can lead to migrants' rights violations¹¹. Also, the lack of information with regard to rights becomes aggravated by the vagueness and complexity in the adopted legal acts. Legal gaps are not filled in within a spirit of leniency or with the criterion in favour of the contracting party, but instead with clauses of exclusion¹².



Governance issues

Local and regional authorities are in the front line with regard to the implementation of immigration and integration policies and are the first ones to react to the economic and social impact of migratory flows in their areas. In addition, they can play a major role in preventing and detecting xenophobic and racist attitudes as well as in educating people in democratic principles. Nevertheless, they are confronted with a number of governance challenges deriving mainly from the number of stakeholders active in the field of supporting the local integration of immigrants, and the number of instruments used. These challenges can be summarised as follows:

1. Policy fragmentation

Communication is often hampered by the relevant fragmentation of this policy area, heavy workloads and limited resources. At the national level, responsibility for the integration of immigrants often falls across a number of different government departments, each of which is involved in different but relevant funding programmes¹³. In the Netherlands, for example, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) within the Ministry of Justice is responsible for legal admission, issuance of visas and residence permits for all kinds of migrants¹⁴, while the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment is in charge of labour migration as it administers employment law, enforces employment rights and upholds the 'Act on Employment of Aliens' (WAV) among other legislation¹⁵. Local authorities also hardly assume control when subcontracted service providers, social partners and other stakeholders determine the direction of local economic policy.

2. The breach between labour market supply and demand

Regional authorities have to look at immigration as a way of contributing to wider economic development targets¹⁶. The local opportunity structure is often ignored when developing local initiatives and thus immigrants risk being prepared for non-existent jobs¹⁷. The Lombardia region constitutes an example of good practice, as it has promoted training programmes in countries of origin, aimed at providing specific skills for meeting regional needs¹⁸. Moreover, the CVs of the participants were catalogued on special online databases thus allowing employers in Lombardia to examine and to call the candidates needed¹⁹.

3. Equality and diversity in jobs and services

The CLIP Study of 2008 'Equality and diversity in jobs and services: City policies for migrants in Europe' points out that very few migrants are employed in public administration²⁰. While in some countries, collecting data on non-nationals or ethnic minorities is required, in others it is deemed discriminatory²¹. Yet, a lack of data makes it impossible for cities to gauge the barriers that migrants face in accessing municipal jobs and services²².

4. Better coordination and partnerships

Local areas need to go further towards mainstreaming, thus targeting all local residents in their strategies to promote integration²³. According to the European handbook for integration, cooperating with migrant organisations can prove beneficial as these 'can draw attention to problems such as health care, housing or education, and make suggestions for improvements to the relevant ministries'²⁴.

5. The inter-relationship between intensity, effectiveness of interventions and targeting

One method for influencing the intensity and effectiveness of interventions without necessarily increasing the length of the interventions is to ensure that actions are accurately targeted to migrants' needs²⁵. For instance, when targeting immigrants with the highest employability (that is, people with work permits and professional skills/qualifications) the emphasis should be on immediately finding a job or appropriate occupational training²⁶. On the contrary, for those with lower employability such as women, children and middle-aged people, some focus should be on social and personal development training, language and literacy classes²⁷.

6. Creating a supportive policy environment both at national and local level

Local actors lack the opportunity to have a significant impact on supporting integration when the overall intake of immigrants who come to a country does not have the appropriate profile and skills to meet labour market demand²⁸. Such a situation proves that even though immigration policy is decided more at the national level than at the municipal level, when integration fails, it is often the cities and municipalities that have to deal with the consequences²⁹.

Policy recommendations

The issue of diversity should become a national priority. Diversity is essential for the hosting societies as it affects their social cohesion. A basic requirement of an equitable society is to assure that everyone has equal access to services, both private and public. Tailoring services to the special needs of different groups is a collaborative effort

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requiring the development of intercultural competence in public and private service³⁰. Therefore, efforts to lower or eliminate any access barriers can have a positive effect on immigrant participation if they are accompanied by an overall change of organisational culture³¹. In this way, measures to adapt to diversity do not remain isolated efforts, but become a part of the goals and identity of the service as a whole³². To this end, the recruitment of employees with an immigrant background, even in high-ranking positions, where there is no actual contact with the public, is of great importance³³. At the same time, organisations and services active in policy-making or planning rather than direct service delivery also need to take diversity into account³⁴. Public and private services could, moreover, maintain databases of suitable qualified persons with diverse backgrounds who could serve on both decision-making and advisory bodies³⁵.

Recruitment and training are complementary strategies in equipping staff with intercultural competence³⁶. Thus, public and private services should utilise existing staff skills in a more effective way. For instance, they could recognise or even remunerate the linguistic skills, cultural knowledge and community contacts of their staff, while the study of languages and the training on intercultural issues at all levels should be encouraged³⁷. But even with targeted recruitment and training, it is impossible for mainstream service providers to cover the whole spectrum of linguistic, cultural and religious diversity through their own personnel. Consequently, it is also necessary to guarantee access to trained interpreters or specialised advisors on, for example, cultural and religious matters³⁸.

Access to employment and career development in local public administration should depend on the swift, appropriate and fair recognition of migrants' qualifications and professional experience. Only appropriate national procedures can lead to a significant use of skills and human capital³⁹. Consequently, national governments could usefully revise their current arrangements for recognising qualifications to ensure that these do not unnecessarily block the full integration of migrants in the labour market, especially in municipal employment⁴⁰.

Better cooperation and coordination with migrant organisations is necessary and carries many benefits. First of all, Migrant Self Organisations (MSOs) are familiar with migrants' problems due to their direct contact with them. The European handbook for integration confirms that MSOs 'can draw attention to problems such as health care, housing or education, and make suggestions for improvements to the relevant ministries'⁴¹. Moreover, they also know how one can address and reach migrants⁴² and have a great impact on migrants' opinion.

Conclusion

The integration of migrants is mainly a question of the management of change. This has a number of implications for an effective governance response. Immigrants need clear roadmaps to guide them between the various services which will support their transition into a new life⁴³. There is a need for well-coordinated and accessible local services which will meet their various needs by *mainstreaming migrant-friendly approaches*. Immigrants do not have the opportunity to become professionals of immigration⁴⁴. However, national, local administration and policy-makers do have the opportunity to build their professionalism by developing a 'reception competence'⁴⁵.

Notes

¹ Carrera Nuñez S., (2008), *In search of the Perfect Citizen? The intersection Between Integration, Immigration and Nationality in the EU*, Wolf legal Publishers, Nijmegen, p.39.

² *idem*.

³ *ibid*, p. 30.

⁴ European Commission, (2003), *Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment*, (COM(2003)336), p. 44.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 17.

⁶ *ibid*, p. 18.

⁷ European Commission, (2005), *Communication on a Common Agenda for Integration Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union*, (COM(2005)0389 FINAL), p. 8.

⁸ Varouxi C., *Δημόσια Διοίκηση και Δικαιώματα των Μεταναστών*, από το Μεταναστευτική Πολιτική και Δημόσια Διοίκηση, Εθνικό Κέντρο Κοινωνικών Ερευνών, Ινστιτούτο Πολιτικής Κοινωνιολογίας, p. 29.

⁹ *idem*.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 27.

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 30.

¹² *idem*.

¹³ Froy, F., (2006), *From Immigration to Integration: Comparing Local Practices*, in OECD, *From Immigration to Integration: Local Solutions to a Global Challenge*, OECD Publishing, p. 66.

¹⁴ Platonova A. and Urso G. (ed.), (2010), *Migration, Employment and Labour Market Integration Policies in the European Union, Part 2: Labour Market Integration Policies in European Union (2000-2009)*, IOM, Brussels, p. 173.

¹⁵ *idem*.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 69.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 68.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 69.

¹⁹ *idem*.

- ²⁰ Spencer S., (2008), *Equality and diversity in jobs and Services: City Policies for migrants in Europe*, Eurofound Report, Council of Europe, p.16. According to the study, only 1.9% of non-EU nationals in the EU15 work in the public administration and defence.
- ²¹ *ibid*, p. 126.
- ²² *idem*.
- ²³ Froy, (2006), p. 69.
- ²⁴ DG Justice, Freedom and Society (2007), *Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners*, p. 19.
- ²⁵ Froy, (2006), p. 79.
- ²⁶ *idem*.
- ²⁷ *idem*.
- ²⁸ *ibid*, p. 83.
- ²⁹ CLIP, (2008), *Equality and diversity in jobs and Services: City Policies for migrants in European Cities: Good Practice Guide. Resume*, Council of Europe, p. 1. Retrieved from www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0871.htm.
- ³⁰ Niessen J. and Kate M.A., (2007), *From Principles to Practice: The Common Basic Principles on Integration and the Handbook Conclusions*, p. 15. Retrieved from http://epim.info/docs/documents/MPG%20Principles_to_Practice_CBP_Handbook3.pdf.
- ³¹ Niessen J. and Schibel Y., (2004), *Handbook on Integration for Policymakers and practitioners*, European Commission (Directorate General for Justice, Freedom and Security), p. 35. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/doc_centre/immigration/docs/handbook_en.pdf.
- ³² *idem*.
- ³³ *idem*.
- ³⁴ *idem*.
- ³⁵ *idem*.
- ³⁶ *ibid*, p. 36.
- ³⁷ *ibid*, pp. 35-36.
- ³⁸ *ibid*, p. 36.
- ³⁹ Spencer, (2008), p. 124.
- ⁴⁰ *ibid*, pp. 124-125.
- ⁴¹ DG Justice, Freedom & Security (2007), p. 19.
- ⁴² Curvello, L., C. (2006), *Integration durch Migrantenorganisationen*. In Documentation of E&C forum on Integration junger Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund – Sozialer Zusammenhalt durch interkulturelle Strategien und integrierte Ansätze in benachteiligten Stadtteilen, p. 35.
- ⁴³ Froy, (2006), p. 95.
- ⁴⁴ *idem*.
- ⁴⁵ *idem*.