



# Lessons From Migrant Integration Into European Societies

European View  
2020, Vol. 19(1) 36–44  
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DOI: 10.1177/1781685820913391  
[journals.sagepub.com/home/euv](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/euv)



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## Abstract

The article examines the immigration and integration policies of France, Sweden, Germany and Denmark. It argues that there is a need for a more unified understanding of the concept of integration throughout the member states. Although European law does not regulate the issue of immigrant integration as it is a competence of the member states, there is a need for a unified understanding of integration. Denmark's integration policy is described as an example of an effective policy that ought to be emulated, in contrast to those of other countries. The article concludes that the problems France, Sweden and Germany face in integrating newcomers are partly due to a lack of consensus about what integration ought to be.

## Keywords

Migration, Integration, France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark

## Introduction

The EU has long been a destination for migration and will most likely remain a favoured destination for many migrants in the future. Migrants come from all over the world. Population growth in Africa, climate change, regional conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, as well as income differentials with countries in our direct neighbourhood are decisive push-factors that will continue to drive people to emigrate to the EU in the coming years.

The sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers coming to us in 2015–16 created significant administrative, border control, reception and financial challenges in several EU countries and for the EU as a whole. The Union has been struggling to cope with this

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large number of third-country nationals and there have been divisions within the EU over how best to integrate the newcomers into our European societies. In addition to this, there are third-country nationals who arrive in the EU for reasons other than asylum, such as work, study or to be reunited with family. Today, more than 22 million people born outside the EU reside in the Union, and many more millions with a migration background<sup>1</sup> live here (European Commission 2019). Therefore, the political framework regarding integration in EU member states deserves a special focus.

In this context, it is important to stress that the integration of third-country nationals remains a competence of the EU member states and that the role of the EU institutions in this field is rather limited. Only since the 2007 Lisbon Treaty has integration been explicitly mentioned as a policy area—the EU institutions cannot set laws in this policy field (art. 4.2b Treaty on the Functioning of the EU). Through the European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals from 2011 (European Commission 2011) and the European Commission's Action Plan, which was put forward in June 2016 (European Commission 2016), the EU has put in place a policy framework and various guidelines to support the member states with the integration of third-country nationals.

Immigration to the EU and the integration of those who have arrived in the past remains a highly complex policy area. The term 'integration' is defined and applied differently throughout the EU member states. This implies that there is no consensus on the definition of 'integration' and it is true that there is no formal definition in international refugee law. Nevertheless, a general definition is needed for the purpose of furthering understanding in this article. The European institutions define integration as a two-way process in which both the host country and the immigrants themselves are responsible: 'This dynamic two-way process on integration means not only expecting third-country nationals to embrace EU fundamental values and learn the host language but also offering them meaningful opportunities to participate in the economy and society of the Member State where they settle' (European Commission 2016, 5). Hence immigrants have an obligation to respect the rule of law, European values, and our social model, tax system and political institutions. Many different actors, including national government, local and regional authorities, employers, civil society and education institutions, play a vital role in the integration of immigrants into their host country.

This article aims to reflect on the two-way process of integration: on the one hand, it is essential to look at the integration—and political—guidelines which have been put in place by certain EU member states in order to include newcomers effectively in our societies. France, Germany, Sweden and Denmark have experienced a significant influx of asylum seekers and refugees in recent years. An analysis of these countries' different approaches and integration mechanisms shows that the Danish model has proven more effective. On the other hand, and considering the two-way process mentioned earlier on, the article examines the willingness of and the efforts made by third-country nationals to integrate into European societies. Our societies are based on the

Judeo-Christian religious tradition, on the rule of law and on fundamental rights, such as freedom of speech, equal rights between women and men, and respect and dialogue between religious communities. The vast majority of immigrants have different cultural and religious identities. Therefore, it is essential to scrutinise who is coming to Europe and to ask ourselves whether we can guarantee the successful co-existence of different cultural and political groups.

## **Integration policy on the ground**

Given the fact that the EU cannot pass laws in the field of integration policy and that legislation varies throughout the EU, it is worth looking at the situations in four EU member states, namely France, Germany, Sweden and Denmark. These four countries and their integration efforts will be examined in an exemplary and comparative manner.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, France, Germany, Austria and Belgium have attracted immigrants from all over Europe and are among the main destination countries when it comes to immigration. Most EU countries do not have the same extent of experience with migrants, which is why they fall into a different category of integration model. The French model of integration does not enjoy a good reputation in the EU, as the emergence of the term ‘banlieu’ shows. This term refers to the suburbs of Paris and other French cities. However, in 2005, violent riots in French cities gave new meaning to this word. The three-week period of unrest resulted in more than 8,000 vehicles being burned by youth of African and French heritage and more than 2,500 individuals being arrested.

Since the 1960s those immigrating to France have predominantly been Muslims, and this community has grown further because of its high birth rate. In the period 2007 to 2012, the proportion of the population that is comprised of descendants of immigrants grew by about 800,000 and now exceeds the proportion made up of immigrants themselves (France, Ministry of Interior 2014). This explains the growing diversity in France. The republican understanding of values obliges the government and policy to promote tolerance and equality, which is directly linked to a categorical fight against discrimination. In the name of the republican principle of neutrality, the country has also opened up freedom of expression for the immigrants’ own cultural and religious identities. As a result, the experience of past years and the development of parallel social structures in the suburbs have called the French model of integration into question. In this context, it should be noted that a precise measurement of French integration policy is not possible as the country’s secular laws forbid the collection of data on religion and ethnicity (Legifrance 2020).

Germany continues to receive the highest number of asylum applications in the EU. The country’s efforts to integrate the estimated two million refugees and asylum seekers that have arrived in the country since 2015 have been very costly. The financial burden on the German state is high, with federal expenditures allotted to asylum seekers standing at €20.8 billion in 2018 alone (Germany, Bundestag 2018). Eighty-four per cent of

new asylum seekers in 2017 were under the age of 35, and 60% were male. Furthermore, the newcomers are very slow to integrate into the labour force since only a small percentage have occupational qualifications or academic degrees. When looking at the migrants arriving from the top eight non-EU countries, nearly 72% of the Syrian immigrants who arrived in Germany in 2015 and 2016 were still unemployed in late 2018. More broadly, across the EU, the statistics from government interior ministries in several member states reveal significant changes in the heterogeneity of refugee groups in terms of countries of origin and educational levels. This diversity poses difficulties for designing effective policies that promote integration.

Returning to the German situation, one-third of the asylum seekers that have arrived in the past few years have been under the age of 18, which means that hundreds of thousands of newcomers have had to be integrated into the German school system. In several parts of Germany, the education system is overstretched and there has been an increase in so-called segregated schools. These are schools where pupils with a migration background make up the majority. According to a study undertaken by the Institute for Quality Development in Education, 53% of secondary schools have already passed the critical 50% mark (Information und Technik, Nordrhein-Westfalen 2019). Such an education environment with overcrowded language and integration courses is often ineffective: if fewer than half of the school pupils are part of the indigenous population, this cannot facilitate the integration process. Immigrants, and especially the children of immigrants, need linguistic role models to be able to learn the host country's language. Because of their limited German-language abilities, school pupils with a migrant background remain underrepresented at university-preparatory schools and upper-secondary vocational schools (OECD 2019b).

In the liberal Swedish system, 73,000 immigrants were granted legal residence in 2010; in 2015 the number increased to over 106,000 (Swedish Migration Agency 2015). About 17% of all Swedish residents were born outside the country. Some EU member states require immigrants to formally endorse certain societal values and this is part of integration treaties or symbolic declarations of nationality. This is not the case in Sweden, and welfare-state benefits are available to all registered residents, regardless of their nationality. Migrants who reside legally in the country for a year or more have the same social rights and entitlements as the indigenous population. However, faced with the slow integration of new refugees into the labour market and the slow absorption of newcomers by the indigenous Swedish society, in autumn 2015 the country introduced measures to curb immigration.

According to statistics from 1 January 2018, Denmark has a total population of 5.8 million, 13.3% of which is made up of immigrants and their descendants (Danmarks Statistik 2019). During the past 20 years, the country has reformed its legislation and integration policy for immigrant foreigners. The government focused on three target groups: asylum seekers and refugees, municipalities and businesses. The issuing of residence permits is subject to strict conditions. The extent to which immigrants and their

children integrate into Danish society is measured and directly linked to the degree of their integration into the labour market, as well as to their ability to access state benefits. The latter was reduced with the aim of creating a stronger incentive to work. The central Danish Immigration Service places asylum seekers in a reception centre while their cases are being dealt with. Afterwards, asylum seekers have to sign a contract that obliges them to fulfil the duties and binding tasks assigned to them in connection with the daily operation of their respective accommodation. Financial contributions and state aid are linked to the fulfilment of the assigned duties (Thomassen 2019). If all conditions are met, they can take up paid work after a six-month stay. Thanks to these initiatives, refugees are more easily able to integrate into the labour market. In Denmark, the proportion of residence permits for family reunification and asylum has decreased, while the proportion of immigrants who come to work and study has increased over the years. Looking at the numbers and the increase in the Danish employment rate for refugees, this approach appears to have been successful.

### **Are immigrants embracing European values?**

Given the legal and administrative costs linked to immigration, the presence of a large number of third-country nationals can place a burden on a country's welfare system. It is legitimate to examine migrants' behaviour in our European societies. Are the refugees and asylum seekers who have arrived in the EU in recent years willing to integrate and to embrace our European values? Three experts have tried to shed light on this sensitive and complex question.

Dutch Professor of Sociology Ruud Koopmans investigated the attitude of European Muslims and Christians towards their respective religions with the help of an empirical approach and a survey conducted in 2008 among people of Turkish origin in six Western European countries: France, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden and Belgium. Since Koopmans's study is based on 'religious fundamentalism', it is important to define this term: 'a movement or attitude stressing strict and literal adherence to a set of basic principles' (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary* 2019). Koopmans's study shows that religious fundamentalism is much more prevalent among European Muslims than among Christian natives. Taking together the foreign-born and native-born immigrant generations, almost 60% agree that Muslims should return to the roots of Islam, 75% think there is only one possible interpretation of the Koran and 65% say that religious rules are more important to them than the laws of their host country (Koopmans 2015, 11–12). Belgium, in particular, has a comparatively high level of fundamentalism in spite of relatively generous policies regarding both Muslim rights and immigrant rights more generally. In addition, socio-economic factors are significant and confirm that fundamentalist attitudes are associated with socio-economic marginalisation: those who are unemployed and have a lower job status with lower levels of education display significantly higher levels of fundamentalism. Koopmans told Danish newspaper *Berlingske*: 'Muslims are much worse at integration than other groups of migrants, and there is no doubt that in most other groups we see great progress from one generation to the next. Although it's not

completely absent in Muslims, the change is much slower' (Heeger 2019). According to the professor, the major problem lies with the interpretation of Islam by both Muslim believers themselves and Muslim countries (Koopmans 2015, 12).

Trevor Phillips, who is the son of immigrants from Guyana and a former British Labour politician and Equality and Human Rights Commission chair, carried out a survey in 2015 among a thousand British Muslims on 'What British Muslims Really Think' and published his essay *Race and Faith: The Deafening Silence*. He argues that some ethnocultural groups are incapable of integrating in Britain and that social attitudes would be very difficult to change. Politicians should not expect Muslims to integrate on their own in the way that earlier immigrants did. Technical progress has substantially reduced the costs of travel and long-distance communication—hence, according to Phillips, living in modern Europe allows diasporas to stay connected with the old country and customs. In this context, it should be noted that, despite these claims, there are several well-known individuals in Britain with a Muslim background, including Sajid Javid, Sadiq Khan and Said Kemal, who have accomplished the integration process successfully and become politicians. Several other exceptions can be named in EU member states.

Paul Collier, economist and author, argues that a shared sense of identity within a society is indispensable. This constitutes the basis of trust, which is a precondition for successful cooperation and co-existence among citizens (Collier 2013, 17–20). The economist highlights the fact that we Europeans live in countries with a functional social model. Migrants, therefore, are essentially leaving behind their poor societies that are economically dysfunctional and entering an unknown social model with its own constraints posed by the European labour markets, tax regulations and health insurance schemes. Thus it becomes clear that migrants face various obstacles on their path towards successful integration in their host country. If a migrant chooses to embrace a different culture and a new social model and learns the language of the host country he or she has chosen to move to, he or she will be absorbed by the indigenous population of that country. In this context, Collier stresses that 'the more interactions that a member of the diaspora has with the indigenous population, the more rapidly she is likely to merge into it. The important implication is that the larger the diaspora is, the slower its rate of absorption will be' (Collier 2013, 42–3).

## Conclusion

Integration does not happen overnight—it is a long process which takes time, effort and financial resources. As Paul Collier (2013, 68) correctly notes: 'So, uncomfortable as it may be, there are large cultural differences that map into important aspects of social behaviour, and migrants bring their culture with them.' Educating and upskilling the immigrants entering the EU will take time. In several EU member states we have seen delayed integration due to too many newcomers needing to be integrated at once since

the number of people who are participating in this process at any given time is increasing. This is, therefore, a self-reinforcing process.

This article highlights a dilemma and its consequences that result from the lack of a unified definition for ‘integration’. The EU member states use varying definitions of this term, which is leading to a variety of laws and differing priorities in this important domain. In addition, the member states’ differing interpretations of ‘integration’ have led to different ways of measuring it throughout the EU. As a consequence, it is a very complex matter to draw a conclusion when analysing the different integration models in France, Germany, Sweden and Denmark. Nonetheless, having analysed the four different approaches, it can be said that the Danish government has put in place effective integration measures based on the aforementioned two-way process. In Denmark, we can see a high degree of social and economic integration of immigrants as Danish measures and policy are directly linked with conditions and obligations that have to be met by the newcomers. The other EU member states should follow a similar approach by not only providing support and social security to third-country nationals but also making it mandatory to attend integration programmes. It is essential that governments increase their demands on third-country nationals in terms of language proficiency, labour-market inclusion and social integration into the respective host society. In the example of France, it is important to address the lack of relevant indicators to measure integration. It should be possible to record the circumstances of immigrants so that integration mechanisms can be adapted accordingly.

The EU needs to formulate a reliable definition of ‘integration’ and this definition needs to be recognised by all EU member states. Subsequently the EU member states should translate this clear and concise definition into their respective national laws. Having implemented this, EU integration policy and its recommendations in this area could be based on lessons learned from member states’ experiences.

Educating and training immigrants is a win–win situation for both the newcomers and European society at large. The EU should seek to address its labour shortages by integrating those who have arrived in Europe during the past few years using the two-way, Danish process described above. The EU and its member states should learn from Denmark as it leads by example with its effective integration model. This country has well understood that integration works best if the principle of ‘give and take’ is put into practice.

## Note

1. Second- and third-generation immigrants.

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