Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration

The SVR's Integration Barometer: Summary

Integration and migration have finally become mainstream political issues. Nevertheless, the perception of a largely 'failed integration' continues to dominate public debate. One reason for this pessimistic view is a reciprocal attribution of blame: While some believe that a substantial part of the immigrant population 'refuses to integrate' or simply is 'incapable of integrating', others assert that the primary cause of 'failed integration' is the native population's supposed anti-integration stance and latent xenophobic attitude. The SVR Integration Barometer, however, reveals that this negative picture as well as the reciprocal attribution of blame bears little resemblance with the everyday experiences of immigrants and natives alike.

a) The native and immigrant populations are, in general, satisfied with the developments in integration policy over the last years, and look towards the future of integration and integration policy with cautious optimism. 50 per cent of all respondents maintain that integration policy has improved the degree of integration in the last years. Nearly as many expect further improvements in the future, while only 10 to 15 per cent of respondents anticipate that future integration policies will deteriorate integration.

b) The native and immigrant populations have a shared pragmatic and hands-on approach to integration, and, on the one hand, refrain from demanding cultural assimilation, and from insisting on exclusive cultural privileges, on the other. In principle, integration means the same for both sides of the immigration society: They associate integration with the impacts on their immediate social environment, and over 90 per cent on both sides call for improved individual and social opportunities by combating unemployment, providing better educational opportunities and language courses, and fighting against discrimination.

c) According to the respondents, the effects of integration cannot be considered in terms of a general success or failure; their interpretation is based instead on personal experiences in their neighbourhood, workplace or school, as well as in their social relationships. The degree of integration in these major spheres of life is assessed differently and, translated in school marks, just earns an overall 'good' (B). In other words, both the native as well as the immigrant population in Germany rate the degree of integration in their neighbourhood, workplace or in their social relationships positively. For the most part, they associate positive experiences with integration and social heterogeneity, and generally consider cultural diversity to be an advantage and reject segregation.

d) The sphere of education, however, poses a special challenge: Although the respondents' personal experiences with heterogeneity in schools have also been mostly positive, persons with and without a migrant background call into question the performance of schools in view of the student body's increasing heterogeneity. In particular persons with a higher level of education from both the native and immigrant population would prefer not sending their own children to ethnically diverse schools.

e) Relative 'integration optimism' also prevails among persons with a migrant background. However, their general knowledge of the integration policy measures introduced in the last years is quite low. Persons without a migrant background are somewhat better informed about integration policy. Symbolic and appellative political initiatives, such as the National Integration Plan (NIP) and the German Islam Conference (DIK), which aim

to reach a broad target audience, are usually not very well known; only between 5 and 12 per cent of respondents on both sides are familiar with them. As expected, the level of awareness of such political initiatives increases with socioeconomic status and level of education; this is, however, not particularly relevant in this case, since the main addressee, namely persons with a migrant background, have a significantly lower socioeconomic status and level of education compared with the native population. Both are markedly more familiar with measures that have an everyday practical impact, such as naturalisation tests (38%) or integration courses (20%).

f)   Trust is a decisive factor for social peace in an immigration society. Contrary to the widespread belief of mutual distrust between the German and the foreign population, the level of trust is satisfactory. Nearly two thirds (62%) of the immigrants surveyed 'fully' or 'more often than not' trust persons who do not have a migrant background. That is, they trust the German population more than the Germans trust each other (54%). Although the average degree of trust differs according to ethnic origin, general and reinforced constellations of distrust between the different groups living in Germany could not be identified. Looming scenarios of intergroup conflict resulting in social catastrophes, therefore, seem out of place.

The SVR Integration Barometer provides an important supplement to studies based on structural integration criteria, which have multiplied in recent years. These studies have, in particular, compared the socioeconomic status of the immigrant and the German population or that of persons with and without a migrant background. Such analyses, for example the compilation and testing of 100 integration indicators carried out on behalf of the Federal Government or the study of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs about the effects of Book II of the Social Code (SGB II) on individuals with a migrant background, significantly contribute to the improvement of available data in the area of migration and integration. These studies, however, are problematic because they usually only unilaterally assess the positioning of the immigrant population, i.e., its level of adaptation in relation to the native population. The dynamics of the integration processes within the immigration society, which consists of both the immigrant as well as the native population, are thereby only inadequately represented.

The SVR Integration Barometer has, for the first time, measured the bilateral and interdependent dynamics of integration processes in the immigration society by analysing self-characterisations and mutual attributions of both the native and immigrant populations. It thus supplements already available studies on objective structural integration criteria (position in the labour market, educational attainment, etc.) with experiences and empirically-based personal assessments, which represent the starting point for future expectations and behavioural tendencies.

The SVR Integration Barometer thus analyses the native and the immigrant population's reception and evaluation of integration policy. Thereby, significant and more accurate insights into integration and integration policy are obtained and an index on the integration climate on both sides of the immigration society can be established.

The SVR's Integration Barometer – Methodological Remarks

The SVR's Integration Barometer for the first time measured the everyday experiences with integration of both sides of the immigration society and evaluated their mutual perceptions of each other. In the Rhine-Ruhr region, Stuttgart and the Rhine-Main region – areas with a long history of immigration – over 5.600 individuals were interviewed by phone in fall 2009. The randomly-selected sample is stratified, the immigrant population is over-represented and thus consists of 80,5 per cent individuals with a migration background and 19,5 per cent individuals without a migration background. An individual who was born abroad or whose father or mother was born abroad was considered as having a migration background. The classification to country of origin was made based on the immigrant's country of birth or that of his or her parent(s). 15,6 per cent of the total sample are ethnic Germans (Spät-/Aussiedler), 17,5 per cent have a Turkish background, 23,8 per cent originate from EU Member States, and 12,5 per cent from Latin American, African or Asian countries. The distribution thus accounts for the diversity of the German immigration society. The telephone numbers used for the interviews were randomly selected. One individual per household aged 16 years or older was surveyed. Additionally, for 18,1 per cent of the numbers onomastic sampling was used to better reach persons with certain migration backgrounds living in rural areas and peripheries. Bilingual interviewers were offered to carry out the interviews in Russian and Turkish.