



PRESS RELEASE

A lot done, a lot more to do: Mainstreaming social participation, promoting skilled worker immigration and refugee integration

The 2019 Annual Report of the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration takes stock of developments in relation to integration and migration over the past few years. Actions taken in these fields focused on asylum and refugee policy. The guiding principle was to strike a balance between controlling and effectively managing migration on the one hand and swiftly and successfully integrating refugees entitled to stay in Germany on the other. A lot has been done when it comes to integrating refugees, but a great deal still remains to be done in this area. Germany should now focus more on other entry channels and swiftly enact the Skilled Worker Immigration Act.

Berlin, 7 May 2019. In its 2019 Annual Report the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration (SVR) for the second time looks back on and takes stock of empirical and political developments in regard to migration and integration. Unlike in 2014, though, in this reporting period developments in relation to migration gained great momentum, not least on account of the large refugee inflow in 2015 and 2016. As well as refugee policy, the Annual Report also examines other forms of migration which are very relevant in purely numerical terms and the integration of the migrant population. The share of EU citizens in total migration to Germany is often under-estimated, for instance, although it has always been significantly above 50 per cent (except in 2015 and 2016).

Asylum and refugee policy: Great legislative momentum in Germany, too little progress at EU level

The Federal Government has initiated various migration and integration policy measures in recent years which above all concern refugee policy: integration courses have been opened up to asylum seekers, the prospects for residence for those whose deportation has been temporarily suspended improved, the list of safe countries of origin was updated in 2014 and 2015, obstacles to deportation removed and greater weight attached to differentiating according to prospects for residence, to name but a few. The search for a common denominator amongst the many policy developments reveals that the characteristic feature of refugee policy over the reporting period has been the struggle to strike a balance between controlling immigration and promoting integration. This is evidenced in a tightening of regulations on the one hand and a relaxing of conditions on the other. One obvious example



of this balancing act is the regulation applicable to labour migrants from the Western Balkans, known as the “Western Balkans Regulation”. The regulation opened up the labour market to third-country nationals from specific countries regardless of their level of qualification and went along with the inclusion of additional Western Balkan states in the list of safe countries of origin.

This is also the backdrop to the greater differentiation now being made between refugees according to their prospects for residence, a classification which is linked to specific rights in each case. Those seeking protection from safe countries of origin, for example, are not given access to the labour market and cannot take part in integration courses. The SVR is of the opinion that differentiating asylum seekers according to their prospects for residence can help to improve migration management, but the approach is problematic when it comes to integration if those with unclear prospects end up staying in Germany in the longer term because valuable time they could be spending taking integration courses is lost.

Whilst Germany initiated many legal reforms at the national level within a short space of time, attempts to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) are making very little or very sluggish progress. According to Prof. Dr. Daniel Thym, a member of the Expert Council, “smart migration policy is more than just unilateral national measures. To be able to eliminate existing deficits, cooperation needs to be improved at the EU and the international level, especially in regard to the sharing of responsibility for the reception of asylum seekers.” The SVR regrets that no progress is currently being made on the Europeanisation of asylum policy and calls for a Europe of shared responsibility. The reform of the Dublin Regulation is at a standstill and application of the rules under the CEAS is still not harmonised.

“In addition, EU migration policy consists of more than legally binding rules which are applicable across the whole of Europe and cross-border cooperation to protect its external borders,” says Prof. Dr. Petra Bendel, Deputy Chairperson of the SVR. “Cooperation with important third countries must take account of these countries’ different interests and prevailing conditions, and the circular or regional dynamics of migration in those countries. The EU must seek a form of cooperation which strikes a balance between the diverse interests of the EU member states on the one hand and of the non-EU countries of origin, transit countries and receiving countries on the other, and which effectively protects those seeking protection as well as migrants. To that end, protective structures also need to be improved in the countries of origin and transit countries.”

Not underestimating EU immigration, swiftly enacting and consistently implementing the Skilled Worker Immigration Act

More than 750,000 migrants came to Germany from other EU member states in 2017. “We must turn our attention once more to EU-internal mobility. A considerable share of EU immigrants come here to work. EU-internal mobility thus meets some of our increasing need



for skilled labour, as well as for seasonal and low-qualified workers. Overall, free movement benefits our labour market, though poverty migration from the EU is a huge socio-political challenge for some communities," says Prof. Dr. Thomas Bauer, Chairperson of the SVR. These groups, like low-skilled migrants in the low-paid sector, need effective access to integration courses and to other training measures in order to gain a foothold on the labour market.

"Germany will, in the future, be even more reliant on migration from third countries," says Prof. Dr. Bauer, a labour market expert. "That is why it needs to position itself as an immigration country by introducing clearly defined rules. At the national level, the German government recently pushed ahead with diverse legislative measures which may have a legal as well as a symbolic effect: under the planned Skilled Worker Immigration Act [*Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz, FEG*], for example, the fact that foreign nationals living in Germany are permitted to pursue gainful employment is regarded as the norm after the relation between the rule and the exception was reversed, that is a prohibition with reservation of permission has become permission with reservation of prohibition. The new Act provides for significantly expanded opportunities for those with vocational qualifications, too, given that Germany has for a long time been applying a liberal access regime to the highly qualified. The Skilled Worker Immigration Act should be swiftly enacted and consistently implemented."

The planned Act no longer gives preferential treatment to the academically trained over the vocationally trained. Those who can prove they have a job offer are to be given facilitated entry. In addition, people with vocational qualifications are also to be able to come to Germany to look for work here. Further, it is to be easier for third-country nationals who have already gained qualifications abroad but which do not meet German standards to come to Germany for retraining or upskilling purposes. The strategy of training future foreign skilled workers in Germany is also to be applied to other groups of migrants. German universities are already amongst the most popular higher education institutions worldwide, and many international students stay after they graduate. When they are on the job market there is no need to recognise foreign certificates, most speak good German and they are already familiar with the most important aspects of German cultural life. In future, facilitated entry is likewise to be granted to third-country nationals looking for a training position. "In view of demographic change and the very evident need we have for skilled workers, we very much welcome the extended opportunities for the vocationally trained and those who wish to undergo vocational training. Nevertheless, the Skilled Worker Immigration Act retains the principle that proof must be furnished of the equivalence of foreign vocational training, as is the case with academic qualifications. The SVR recognised this as a key obstacle and, back in 2018, proposed that the criterion of equivalence be applied more flexibly. It thus remains to be seen whether the new Act will in fact lead to a significant increase in migration in this area," says Prof. Dr. Bauer.

Implementing enacted legislation is just as important an aspect as legislating itself. The 2019 Annual Report emphasises that the planned additions to legal entry points will not, of



themselves, be enough to effectively overcome the ever-growing shortage of skilled workers. The authorities, for example foreign representations and foreigners' authorities, must at the same time expand their infrastructure, otherwise the new legal framework will come to nothing.

A lot done in terms of refugee integration, though a lot still needs to be done on integration policy, especially in regard to education

The fact that so many refugees came to Germany within a short space of time represented a stress test for public authorities and institutions – not only in regard to initial reception, accommodation and asylum decisions, but also as regards the educational system and the labour market. In the meantime it is right to say that the public institutions met the challenge, with a considerable amount of support from welfare organisations and volunteers. The challenge which the educational system specifically faced was integrating refugee children into school life without any lead time. According to Prof. Dr. Claudia Diehl, a member of the Expert Council, "the organisational achievement and great dedication which made this possible across the whole of Germany deserve the greatest of respect. In 2016, 95 per cent of refugee children between the ages of six and 12 who arrived from 2013 until 2016 were already attending school. The fact that some key education metrics have remained unchanged or even improved is another measure of success. The share of first-generation immigrant adolescents attending an integrated comprehensive school (*Gesamtschule*) has further increased, for instance."

"Even so, there are other developments which give cause for concern," says Prof. Dr. Diehl, qualifying her initial praise. "The share of adolescent immigrants without any school leaving qualifications has more than doubled, for instance. The share of children with a migration background in early childhood day care has dropped slightly. Significantly fewer children with a migration background are in day care than children without a migration background." The SVR above all recommends further expanding early childhood day care and specifically drawing migrant families' attention to the fact that it is available in order to be able to compensate for initial disadvantages. Access to education should be made more flexible for older adolescent migrants so that they too can gain school leaving qualifications. Educational achievement is still too strongly dependant on social background, regardless of whether a person has or does not have a migration background. That is an area in which Germany, a country of immigration, still has some catching up to do.

Labour market integration has been more successful overall than most people expected. Around one third of adult refugees who came to Germany from the main countries of origin in the period since 2015 had found a job by the autumn of 2018. Nonetheless, the underlying conditions which facilitated this development were particularly favourable, not least due to Germany's booming economy. It cannot be assumed, however, that the current economic and labour market situation will continue. "The SVR therefore recommends systematically recording and evaluating available labour market integration measures. A diverse range of



measures are now in place, causing friction losses and the need for a considerable amount of coordination. The same goes for procedures for assessing and recognising professional skills,” says Prof. Dr. Bauer. Following an evaluation, only tried and tested, efficient programmes could then be made available, in particular if the economy and the labour market were to lose momentum. In addition, the German vocational training system could be made more modular and skills assessment procedures centralised and speeded up. Labour market integration of women migrants, especially women refugees, should be improved by giving them access to part-time measures and better day care.

In the medium term, existing structures, for instance employment agencies and job centres, as well as professional chambers and educational institutions and charities, should be developed further so that people can be given individualised support regardless of their origin. Opening up the existing systems is more convincing a step to take than offering individual groups their own tailor-made measures.

Negative trend: More xenophobic crime and more crimes committed by migrants

The 2019 Annual Report establishes that there is a two-fold negative trend when it comes to crime: First, the level of recorded xenophobic hate crime more than doubled between 2014 and 2015, the period when most refugees arrived in Germany. These figures included attacks against asylum reception centres. When significantly fewer people sought protection in Germany in the course of 2017, the level of xenophobic violence also dropped. Numbers are still significantly higher than in the period before 2015, though. Second, the number of crimes committed by foreigners, including refugees, rose considerably between 2014 and 2016, and not only in terms of petty offences. Foreigners are thus not only more frequently the victims of crime, they are also more frequently the perpetrators of crime. This even holds true when one considers, for example, that the proportion of foreign nationals in the total population has increased and that certain offences, like those against the right of residence, can only be committed by non-Germans. Sociodemographic factors, in particular age and gender, can help explain the majority of the increase in recorded crimes: most offences are – always and across all groups of origin – committed by young males, and refugees are significantly over-represented in this group. However, even these factors cannot fully explain why the share of non-Germans amongst all suspects is significantly higher than their share in the total population. Happily, the upwards trend evidenced in 2017 in regard to offences committed by non-Germans has been halted, and numbers dropped again; the number of German suspects also fell. The trend in 2018 was likewise downwards.

When it comes to reducing the level of crime against and by foreign nationals, the SVR advocates taking the following measures: First, research shows that xenophobic crimes are no longer only being committed by young males. Preventive strategies should, therefore, not only focus on this demographic. Second, swifter asylum procedures can serve crime prevention purposes. They create clarity more quickly about whether someone is allowed to remain or



has to return to their home country, and they limit stultifying waiting times and the associated uncertainty and frustration, which might promote criminality.

Social integration: Better than its reputation, more stable attitudes than the discourse suggests

German language skills are an important building block when it comes to the social participation of people with a migration background. The majority of people with a migration background themselves state that they speak good or very good German. According to the IAB-BAMF-SOEP Survey of Refugees, language skills significantly improved in the period between 2016 and 2017 for refugees arriving in Germany since 2013. In 2016, only around 15 per cent of those surveyed said they spoke good or very good German; by mid-2017 that figure had risen to 31 per cent. Further, most migrants in Germany say they are in frequent contact with people without a migration background and feel they belong to Germany. Language skills and a sense of belonging increase the longer migrants are in Germany, and they are considerably more pronounced in the second than in the first generation. Only a minority feel they are discriminated on account of origin. Critical areas are the housing and the labour market, where discrimination prevention is a particularly important aspect.

Not only migrants themselves and governmental structures are key when it comes to successful integration. The willingness of the host population to receive those migrants is another decisive factor. Prof. Dr. Hans Vorländer, a member of the Expert Council, stresses that “over the past 20 years the German population has tended to become more open in its attitude to migration. The data contradict the contention that the mood has changed significantly since 2015 and that it is at an all-time low. Attitudes are considerably more sluggish than media outrage sometimes leads us to expect. However, that does not mean that the population is not critical of some aspects of immigration. For example, people are in favour of receiving more refugees, but at the same time the majority of the population want to limit their number.”

Expectations in regard to cultural adaptation: Heated debate, pragmatic policies

The focus of the political and media debate has noticeably shifted again to the issue of a German “dominant culture” (*Leitkultur*) and the associated expectations in regard to cultural adaptation amongst the migrant population. At times calls were heard in the public debate for migrants to do more than simply abide by constitutional principles. This is nothing new in the German integration discourse, nor is it necessarily problematic, since debates around social interaction are a fixed element of pluralistic societies. However, the SVR calls to mind that liberal democracies cannot make cultural adaptation a requirement over and above requiring citizens to abide by the law – a policy which is also not consistent with the SVR’s understanding of what integration entails. What is problematic is that such debates can provide a platform



for populist and racist arguments and provocation, which then tend to promote exclusion rather than integration.

In terms of concrete integration policy, i.e. when it comes to designing integration and orientation courses, a more pragmatic distinction is drawn between non-negotiable values (as laid down in the Basic Law and the legal system) and informal behavioural norms and everyday rituals. Deputy Chairperson of the SVR Prof. Dr Hacı Halil Uslucan says that “it is to be welcomed that this distinction is drawn and at the same time information is provided about both aspects. However, the extent to which values and norms can actually be taught by public authorities is a contentious issue. Values, no matter what type, are not factual knowledge which can be taught in class. Instead, they develop through active participation, through dialogue and conflict. That can sometimes be hard work, but it is part of what it means to live in a pluralistic society.”

To read the SVR’s Annual Report 2019 entitled “Eventful times. A look back at integration and migration policy of recent years”, follow this [LINK](#).

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About the Expert Council

The Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration is based on an initiative of the Stiftung Mercator and the VolkswagenStiftung and consists of seven member foundations. In addition to the Stiftung Mercator and the VolkswagenStiftung, these are: Bertelsmann Stiftung, Freudenberg Stiftung, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Stifterverband and Vodafone Stiftung Deutschland. The Expert Council is an independent and interdisciplinary committee of experts which takes a stand on issues relevant to integration and migration policy and offers practically oriented policy consultation. The results of its work are published in an annual report.

The SVR includes nine researchers from different disciplines and research institutes: Prof. Dr. Thomas K. Bauer (Chairperson), Prof. Dr. Petra Bendel (Deputy Chairperson), Prof. Dr. Hacı Halil Uslucan (Deputy Chairperson), Prof. Dr. Claudia Diehl, Prof. Dr. Viola B. Georgi, Prof. Dr. Christian Joppke, Prof. Dr. Sieglinde Rosenberger, Prof. Dr. Daniel Thym and Prof. Dr. Hans Vorländer.

For more information, go to: www.svr-migration.de/en/