



Paper tigers or milestones?

A comparison of the integration acts of the *Bundesländer*

Summary

Between 2010 and 2016, four of Germany's 16 states, or *Bundesländer*, adopted so-called integration acts concerning immigrants, migrants and refugees. The acts of Berlin, North-Rhine Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg are oriented towards participation. They regulate the framework conditions for integration policy at the *Länder* level by laying down the principles for such a policy and by consolidating appropriate institutions as well as cooperation and coordination structures. The Bavarian integration act, by contrast, follows an integrative understanding that aims more at assimilation. It contains provisions for the individual integration of migrants and addresses cultural and regulatory issues.

A comparison of these four existing acts shows that Germany's state integration acts contribute to a coherent, targeted and appropriate integration policy through the strengthening of coordination and cooperation structures. However, the effect of these acts depends on their design. For example, many of them are not sufficiently concrete to have immediate and directly measurable effects. In some cases, instruments are also missing to monitor and control their implementation. Moreover, in order for integration legislation to work, the principles laid down therein must be shared by as many of the stakeholders as possible, sustainable structures must be created, and procedures must be regularly practiced. Only in this way can an actual awareness arise that integration is a cross-sectoral task that is of concern to all policy areas.

At a symbolic level, integration acts serve a number of purposes: They articulate a certain understanding of integration. They increase the political value of the topic and help to mobilise stakeholders for this cross-cutting task. As pieces of legislation, they provide an objective basis from which to conduct debates. They may advance integration through general measures and instruments or by placing concrete demands or obligations on people with an immigration background. Finally, they serve to convey to the population that politics is taking on the societal challenge of immigrant integration.



However, an integration act should not impose demands unilaterally on immigrants, worse yet with sanctions, while omitting to place demands on society as a whole. If it were to do that, it would risk – even if unintentionally – perpetuating existing exclusion and impeding rather than encouraging equal participation.

Germany's state-level integration acts are able to create the required framework for supporting an appropriate and successful integration policy. To this end, they must (1) establish integration policy as a cross-cutting task of high political importance and (2) create effective structures for accomplishing this task. In addition, they must (3) improve proper governance in the field of integration by introducing monitoring instruments, promoting cooperation between stakeholders and involving key stakeholders. Last but not least, they must (4) espouse and promote an overall understanding of integration that is oriented toward participation. In particular, integration needs to be understood comprehensively and with a view to the long term. The concept must neither be restricted to specific groups nor place demands unilaterally on immigrants only. Finally, integration acts (5) should be designed such that they are widely accepted in society as a whole and above and beyond party lines, seeing that they can only have an effect when politically backed.

The integration policy must then be implemented in the various sectors, such as education and labour market policy. In this effort, the value of integration acts, as instruments, should not be overestimated: A participation-oriented integration act can indeed improve the framework conditions for a proper and coherent integration policy. Nonetheless, it cannot change the integration conditions on the ground from one day to the next. Nor can it force integration. If anything, an integration act can provide a useful basis for integration policy – provided the objectives and principles laid down therein are effectively put into practice.