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Integration Report: Surprisingly Positive Findings (May 20, 2010)

On the basis of a survey of 5,600 immigrants and native-born Germans, an expert committee issued a surprisingly upbeat assessment of efforts to integrate immigrants into German society. The report pointed to growing mutual respect between immigrants and Germans, and called for further measures to improve the education of immigrant children.

Integration Report: Acknowledgment of the Immigration Nation

Integration in everyday life is less complicated than some political debates would have us believe. “Warnings of social catastrophes” are ill founded, says migration researcher Bade during the presentation of the annual report of the Expert Council of German Foundations.

While the same old discussions about Germany as an immigration country, about assimilation, or “multiculturalism” are being carried out in the political discourse, the integration process as a whole has proceeded more smoothly and more successfully than in neighboring European countries.

This is the conclusion of the Expert Council of German Foundations for Integration and Migration, which just presented its first annual report and a so-called integration barometer. Their findings point to a strong underlying mutual trust between the majority society and immigrants.

One of the surprising findings is that some immigrants trust Germans more than members of their own ethnic group, and also more than the Germans trust themselves. “Warnings of social catastrophes in group conflict therefore seem ill founded,” says the chairman of the Expert Council, migration researcher Klaus Jürgen Bade, in Berlin. Only one in twenty immigrants feels uncomfortable in Germany, whereas one in fifteen Germans is dissatisfied. And satisfaction increases even further among second-generation immigrations (also among Turks), who perform much more poorly in school.

More Education, a More Critical Attitude

About 25% of immigrants charge their own group with a lack of interest in integration; 20% see a refusal to integrate among Germans. As their level of education rises, individuals with a

migration background become more critical of their own group for lacking interest in integration but less critical of the majority society, according to the 252-page report.

The German population does not expect immigrants to give up their religious and cultural affinities. The desire for equal treatment is equally strong among both groups (in both cases more than 90%); the same holds when it comes to support for foreign schoolchildren.

Here, the Expert Council rightly recommends that support for [German] language acquisition should not be limited to preschool language classes, but should continue throughout the children's entire academic career – also in middle and high school, and even at university in courses on academic writing. After all, the connection between a command of the German language and educational success is particularly pronounced in Germany. But, as before, 44.8% of foreigners speak only their native language at home. It is all the more unfortunate that only 10% of foreign children (25% of German children) are in preschool, and 83% are in kindergarten. The Expert Council resolutely rejects payments to parents for non-institutional childcare. To save on kindergartens, of all places, is a sign of “suicidal budgeting,” says Bade with reference to the spending cuts proposed by the Minister President of Hesse, [Roland] Koch.

That is why the government's Commissioner for Integration, Minister of State [Maria] Böhmer, called on the *Länder* “to up the intensity and quicken the pace.” In the National Integration Plan, they had promised to bring foreign schoolchildren's performance up to the level of Germans by 2012. But the National Integration Plan is even less well-known among foreigners than the [German] Islam Conference. Sixty percent have never heard of it.

Foreign Students Perform More Poorly

Similar to what was found in international comparative studies (unfortunately, the transition study by the Max Planck Institute for Human Development was not yet included), foreign schoolchildren as a whole perform more poorly: 19.2% of boys leave the *Hauptschule* without a diploma; girls pass the *Abitur* more often (19% compared to 16% of boys). Moroccans are only half as likely as German youths to attain the entrance qualification for a technical college or a university, and Turkish and Italian youths are even less likely to do so. Lebanese, Albanians, and Serbs are also among the problem cases, whereas Russians and Asians are not. In its chapter on education, which was the subject of very controversial discussions, the Expert Council thus called for the school system to become more permeable; at the same time, it has distanced itself, at least half-heartedly, from hasty pleas for longer periods of uniform education.

The so-called integration paradox in education is instructive. Although German parents have had positive experiences with ethnic diversity in educational institutions, their willingness to send their children to schools with high quotients of immigrants declines as their level of education rises. Evidently, they do not trust that schools can deal with diversity in a productive manner.

Plea for a “Proactive” Immigration Policy

In the labor market, there is a “quantitative and a qualitative migration problem.” For that reason, according to the report, Germany must pursue, alongside an education- and skills-offensive on the domestic level, a “proactive” immigration policy, and it must become more attractive to immigrants, especially skilled ones. It is still the case that more skilled foreigners are leaving than particularly skilled ones are arriving. With advanced formal qualifications, foreigners in Germany can find jobs without a problem – it is only Turks that smaller companies still seem reluctant to hire.

It is sobering that 20-30% of youths who return to school [after dropping out] to pursue diplomas in the so-called transition system do not move on to vocational training within three years. Twenty-nine percent of foreign youths don’t even make it into the transition system at all, but rather drop out of the vocational training system completely. According to the Expert Council, the transition system, in its present form, should either be abolished or completely restructured. It recommends low-threshold options for those who leave school without a *Hauptschule* diploma [i.e., without completing ninth grade].

For the integration barometer, the same questions were put to immigrants and Germans – to that end, a representative sample of 5,600 people were interviewed in the traditional immigration regions, the Rhine-Ruhr area, Stuttgart, and the Rhine-Main area, where those surveyed included Turks, ethnic German remigrants [*Aussiedler*], foreigners from non-EU countries, and Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans. As a relatively “new” immigration area, Berlin is unfortunately missing from the survey, but it will be included in the next integration barometer in two years.

In Berlin, specific problems have resulted from the disappearance of industrial jobs, the city’s high dependence on transfer payments, and the high level of immigration by Turks and refugees from Arab states. Moreover, unemployment among immigrants is twice as high in Berlin as in other regions (30%). But, overall, the risk that foreigners will become unemployed is three times higher in the Netherlands than in Germany.

Source: Heike Schmall, “Im Einwanderungsland angekommen” [“Acknowledgment of the Immigration Nation”], FAZ.NET Feuilleton, May 20, 2010.

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