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# Integration that Values Diversity – Exploring a Model for Current Migration Dynamics



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# Integration that Values Diversity – Exploring a Model for Current Migration Dynamics

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## What is the issue with integration?

Integration is a process that lies at the very heart of the migration experience and is therefore of key interest to migration stakeholders – notably the migrants themselves and their host societies. Lacking a consensual definition,<sup>1</sup> when reduced to its simplest expression, “integration” may be said to refer to the encounter between the migrant and the host society, and to the development of a relationship between them. This raises a number of fundamental policy questions: a) who defines the nature of the relationship between migrants and their host society (the government? the host community? the migrants?); b) what is the nature of that relationship and c) what should its outcome be?

The questions are particularly significant because the nature of the encounter has arguably changed significantly over time. When societies were considered to be homogenous and the percentage of migrants in the population was low, assuming migrants would take on a new “national identity” to become part of the host countries’ social environments seemed plausible. It did not seem unreasonable to assume that they would eventually adopt the lifestyle and values of their host society, the more so because communication with their country of origin was difficult – sometimes impossible. The integration equation is rather more complicated today.

## Recent changes posing challenges to integration policies

First, there are more people on the move. Despite fluctuations and geographic asymmetries of migrant flows, the number of people migrating has nearly tripled in the last 50 years.<sup>2</sup> In tandem, migration patterns have become more complex. Driven by both forced and voluntary circumstances, migrants now come from a much larger number of countries of origin and socio-economic backgrounds, their motivations to move are more complex, and the durations of their journeys less certain. Programmatic categories such as “labour migration” or “family reunion” overlap and interact, and both are affected by patterns of regularity and irregularity. Once they have left, with greater transnational interconnectivity and ease of travel, migrants are also more able to adapt and adjust their migratory objectives - possibly prolonging their stay, bringing their family, returning and/or re-migrating - while at the same time developing both affiliations to multiple “homes” and plural identities. This has resulted in increased heterogeneity within host societies and among immigrant populations themselves, with second and third migrant generations further contributing to the richness of the social tapestry. Such changes call for a reinterpretation of the nature and purpose of migrant integration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

1 Favell, 2001: 116.

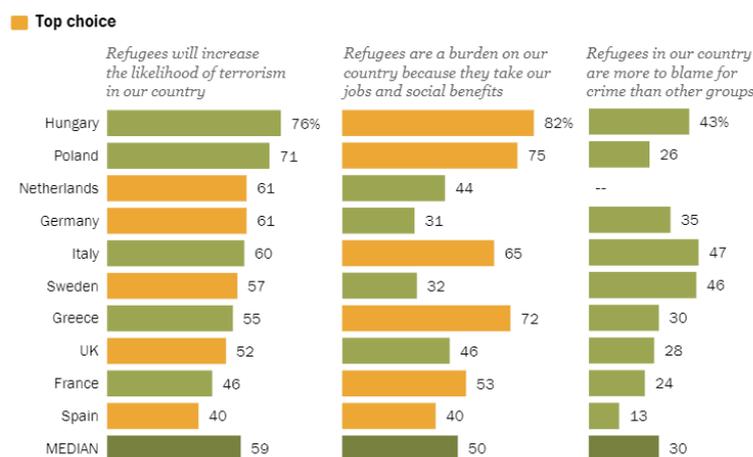
2 McKinsey Global Institute, 2016: 2.

Second, public discourses on both migration and integration have become highly politicized, including in so-called traditional countries of immigration. Increases in immigration in Europe, resulting from the mass arrivals over the last two years,<sup>3</sup> have sparked fears about the “dilution” of national identities and the host countries’ abilities to accommodate diversity, not least because the flows have been largely composed of populations with visibly different cultural and religious practices.<sup>4</sup> Latching on to the irregular patterns of movements, the migrant-related terrorist attacks and employment-related apprehensions in the aftermath of the economic crisis, politicians and media actors have been frequently tempted to view the migration debate through security and economic stability lenses. Consequently, citizens tend to overestimate the number of migrants (and particularly Muslim migrants) present in European countries<sup>5</sup> besides associating migration with terrorism, crime and economic concerns (figure 1), even if opinions vary among respondents (figure 2). Discomfort about social diversity and the damage it might cause to social cohesion is then easily triggered by preoccupations with job displacement, lowering of wages, depletion of the welfare system and the general sluggishness of the global economy. The concerns are widely spread but particularly apparent in industrialized countries.

Third, integration policy debates have been strongly influenced by the evolution of the international human rights framework. The International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are particularly relevant to integration policy because they prohibit practices that discriminate against cultural and religious difference or preclude equal treatment before the law. Global trends towards individualization and interconnectivity have also contributed to the emergence of greater sensitivity towards personal freedom and human dignity. Pro-migrant constituencies have defended the universality of human rights and pressured governments to show greater attention to the rights of migrants when developing policies on integration. This has been recently apparent in [the surges of online activism in support of migrants and refugees](#),<sup>6</sup> [international demonstrations](#), and local instances of mobilization for migrants (e.g. lawyers working pro-bono to counter American [bans on immigration](#) and [support beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals program](#)).

These competing dynamics create a conundrum for integration policy: how to coherently incorporate difference while preserving the distinctiveness of established cultural narratives? How to balance the rights and responsibilities of the host society and those of the migrants?

Figure 1: Europeans’ concerns regarding refugees in 2016



Source: PEW Research Center.

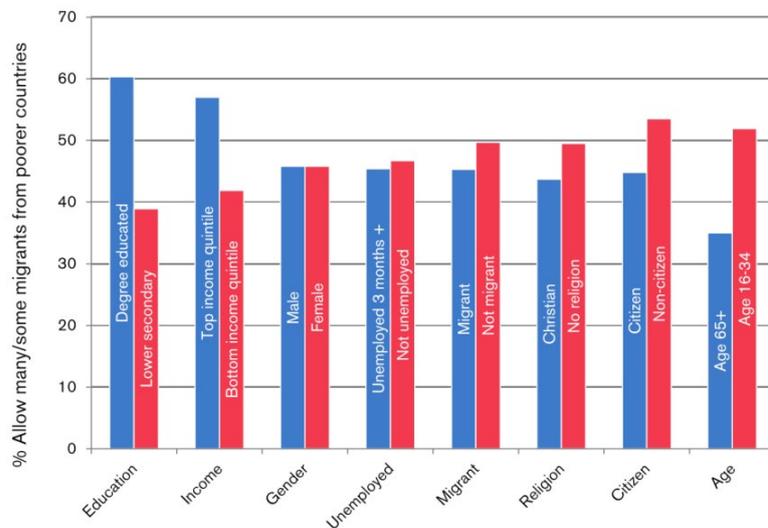
3 OECD, 2017: 7.

4 Banalescu-Bogdan and Benton, 2017.

5 See, for instance, Ziebarth, Wunderlich and Raisher, 2014: 16, and Ipsos Mori, 2014.

6 See also Hall, 2017.

Figure 2: Socio-demographic differences in willingness to allow many or some migrants from poorer countries outside Europe.



Source: Topline results from Round 7 of the European Social Survey 2014.

## Failing to accommodate diversity

Over time, integration policy models have tried to answer the questions mentioned above. In broad terms, the models can be aligned along an uneven chronological continuum bookended by assimilationist and pluralist policy approaches. While they have tried to respond to changing migration dynamics, they have arguably all had difficulty coming to terms with the challenges of diversity and are therefore inadequately suited to manage current realities.

Assimilation policies were developed as far back as the 1920s and 1930s, when migrant relocation had an overwhelmingly permanent resonance.<sup>7</sup> They placed the onus of change squarely on the migrant. Despite well intentioned goals to decrease possibilities of discrimination and to promote equality by drastically reducing the salience of ethnic difference, assimilation pre-supposed the shedding of past lifestyles, languages and values as a condition of membership.<sup>8</sup> As largely practiced in the so-called traditional countries of migration after the Second World War, it required full adaptation to social, cultural and linguistic environments. Assimilation in its extreme form prescribed the abandonment of pre-existing cultural values, and the acquisition of a new cultural identity. This approach sits uneasily with current social diversity in most countries and goes against the inclination of migrant communities to maintain communication and cultural linkages with their countries of origin.

At the other end of the spectrum is multiculturalism, a model that, in its most generous acceptance, welcomes the preservation, expression and sometimes even the celebration of cultural diversity. This approach, largely practiced in the 1980s and the early 2000s, encourages migrants to become full members of society while retaining their cultural identities. They combine the recognition of varied backgrounds, traditions and ways of seeing the world with certain universalist values, such as the rule of law or gender equality, that override cultural differences and guarantee the same rights for all. The integration relationship is then best captured in the image of a mosaic enabling minority ethnic groupings to live side by side with the majority constituency. However, efforts for migrants' inclusion may trigger disquiet among the host society if the perception arises that minority groups have taken advantage of the system to acquire undue political influence or an

<sup>7</sup> Castles and Miller, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Hersi, 2014: 592.

unfair share of public resources. Like the assimilationist approach, multiculturalism also presumes that the majority culture remains largely intact, engaging little with the diversity around it.<sup>9</sup> Emphasis on respecting and tolerating difference without reaching across it has been criticized as favouring a dynamic of seclusion that does not foster cohesion.<sup>10</sup> Critics accuse proponents of multiculturalism of focusing on showcasing superficial but palatable markers of diversity like food, attire or music, and of avoiding dealing with cultural practices that clash with liberal values, such as arranged marriages. Understood in this way, multiculturalism also falls short of coming to terms with current realities of migration. Increasingly plural societies require deeper understandings of the dynamics of diversity. Moreover, negotiations of tensions stemming from cultural divergences must be able to go far beyond the notion of tolerance.<sup>11</sup>

In between these two models are a number of variants that have been clustered under the umbrella term “integration”.<sup>12</sup> The approach gained traction in the 1970s and was meant to convey the expectation of a two-way adaptation process. In short, migrants and members of the host society share responsibilities to not only observe each other’s rights and obligations but also to adapt to each other, jointly finding a way to reconcile their differences. In that sense, integration can be understood to be successful when migrants and other members of society enjoy the same opportunities for social and economic expression and have a common sense of recognition, participation and legitimacy. Some multicultural arrangements have incorporated this model into their co-existence frameworks, such as Korea, Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden or Australia.<sup>13</sup> Yet, efforts to operationalize mutual adaptation have never quite resolved the vexing question of the onus of change. Does it lie equally with the host society and its migrants or primarily with one of the two parties?

Contemporary integration policy borrows elements from each of the above orientations. However, responding to recently growing concerns with how “too much diversity” can threaten to undercut national cultures and make people “feel like strangers in our own country”, a number of governments have fostered, albeit to varying degrees, civic integration approaches.<sup>14</sup> Favoured, for example, by Denmark, Germany, the UK and the Netherlands, such approaches have established language and integration courses, tests and contracts as the obligatory pathway to membership in the national polity. More than supporting migrants during the arrival stage, such requirements are taken as proof of both migrants’ willingness and ability to become part of the host society.<sup>15</sup> Notably, failing to meet the requirements may have punitive consequences, such as the loss of extensions to residence permits or welfare benefits. Courses and tests then constitute a form of compulsory cultural apprenticeship, which, if successfully completed, provides the government with the assurance that the neophyte has met the established and often demanding non-negotiable conditions of membership. Ultimately, these regulations, along with recent restrictions unevenly targeting migrants’ religious practices,<sup>16</sup> signal a clear shift towards the placement of the onus of change on the migrant and a return to assimilation-based approaches. They also construe the integration relationship in superficial terms when reducing it largely to an administrative act and privileging the learning of expected responses over the development of an organic relationship based on shared experiences. In increasingly diverse societies, the imposition of such requirements risks sending a message to migrants that they are not welcome and thus

9 Li, 2003.

10 For a discussion on competing interpretations of multiculturalism and on the shortcomings and potential of this approach see Kymlicka, 2002.

11 For a nuanced discussion of tolerance approaches see Triandafyllidou, 2012.

12 It is important to differentiate between the use of this term as a “mutual adaption” policy model and its more generic meaning as a descriptor of the encounter between migrants and their host society.

13 Respectively, Yoon, 2014; Li, 2003; Spencer, 2011; Penninx 2010; Westin, 2016.

14 For an analysis of varying degrees of both change in policies and of restrictiveness of policies see Goodman, 2010.

15 Penninx, 2010: 26.

16 For a discussion of recent changes in legislation restricting Muslim attire and the implications of establishing Christian symbols as neutral elements of the national cultures that migrants need to adjust to, see Banulescu-Bogdan and Benton, 2017.

fuel social tensions, especially when selectively not applied to all migrants in the same way.<sup>17</sup> Requirements may even hamper integration when fees of courses and tests are prohibitive and language requirements too high.<sup>18</sup> Also, while such policies intend to ensure migrants' commitment to the host society, it is not at all clear whether migrants who demonstrate knowledge of language and of purported national values are in fact willing and able to adhere to them.

## A model that values diversity

Despite their shortcomings, these approaches usefully signal important developments. For instance, when [the Dutch integration test sparked controversy about how migrants' knowledge of the national culture was being assessed](#), it hinted at a larger emerging debate related to how national collectivities redefine themselves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As migrants are expected to "integrate", the question inevitably arises of what exactly should they be integrating into? Although societies engage daily in the negotiation of values and mores underscoring national distinctiveness,<sup>19</sup> the challenge of immigrant integration has been turning the identification of such defining characteristics into an intentional collective exercise. This exercise must come to terms with today's intensified global mobility, interconnectivity and international interdependence as well as with the ensuing larger presence of migrants and second and third generations in countries' populations.

To assist such emerging public debates and foster social cohesion, we suggest exploring an approach that responds to contemporary realities of international mobility and promotes integration *in the midst of diversity* rather than integration that is intended to overcome diversity. This approach strives to take the multiculturalist model one step further while taking the concerns underpinning civic integration approaches seriously. To do so, it asks whether it would be possible to envisage integration as a twofold process consisting of a) the construction of a common destiny based on common core values; and b) the acknowledgement and nurture of a national narrative. In other words, this approach conceives of integration as a process whereby culturally diverse societies seek "ways in which the joint requirement of global equality of opportunity and collective self-determination can be coherently upheld".<sup>20</sup>

The assumption under a) would be that it might be possible for any society, even one characterized by a high degree of diversity, to identify a set of core values. These could evolve over time, but above all, they would provide a strong sense of unity, a coherence of vision and purpose. The further assumption is that these deep fundamental values would leave room for the expression of differences in lifestyle, behaviour and cultural practice. We would suggest that at least some of these values could be drawn from the Human Rights framework and its universalist principles, such as the rule of law, the practice of democracy, freedom of expression, gender equality and protection of the rights and freedoms of others. Underscoring our shared humanity, these can be the underlying deep ties binding members of society across and beyond multiple expressions of difference that may be visible "at the surface". In other words, adherence to common values based, essentially, on universal human rights would not in any way preclude the nurturing of cultural distinctiveness.

The assumption under b) is that, complementing bedrock values, there are national narratives offering an additional and important collective asset. While national identity construction is slippery ground, fraught with the pitfalls of identity politics,<sup>21</sup> we suggest that it is possible, essential even, to chart a course that helps the migrant to find entry points into the national narrative. Such a course would refer both to a valued "having

17 Not all nationalities are required to take courses and tests before arrival in the Netherlands, for instance (see Goodman, 2010). Significantly, this accentuates the gap created by policies designed to explicitly attract highly-qualified workers and affluent migrants by facilitating their access to residency and citizenship (for examples of such policies see OECD, 2017: 43-47).

18 [www.mipex.eu/permanent-residence](http://www.mipex.eu/permanent-residence).

19 Billig, 1995.

20 Kollar, 2016: 727.

21 Munz, 2017.

been” and an equally important “will be” component. However, it would depart from current civic integration preoccupations with the *necessity* for the migrant to join a purportedly established fixed way of living. This model supports the importance of migrants’ commitment to the host society and the need for them to learn and understand both its past itinerary and its perspective for the future. It emphasizes, therefore, that, like identities, societies are hardly fixed and homogenous, but are rather constantly undergoing a process of change that repositions a nation’s sense of where it comes from and whither it is bound. Notably, promoting the sense that national identities are dynamic and negotiated does not mean losing sight of historical factors forging distinctive modes of social, political and economic organization. It does, however, re-direct the gaze from focusing on origins, and seeking guidelines in the past, to facing current realities and preparing the future ahead. Additionally, it recognizes how immigration has been, and can positively continue to, contribute to re-shaping culturally specific frames of reference.

In practice, while the model acknowledges that integration necessarily involves adaptation, it shifts the focus away from the allocation of responsibility for change, the prescription for change and the verification of change. If the core of any integration policy depends on how the receiving society defines itself and whether it is able and willing to change,<sup>22</sup> this approach posits integration is more a matter of *becoming* rather than *being* (with a much lesser focus on having been) and a result of the process of creating and maintaining an *identification* with the society rather than on acquiring a new *identity*. Such an approach acknowledges that migrants often cultivate multiple affiliations to their various homes, which are very much compatible to their allegiance to the host country (and even beneficial to the latter).<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, instead of wondering how migrants may fit into society, this model focuses on how society evolves with them.

Challenges include finding ways to welcome, acknowledge, respect, accept and embrace the various faces of diversity in a coherent way. Furthermore, contextually specific resistances to integration will call for different ways to negotiate the limits of acceptable difference. Encouraging a sense of ownership in the process of identifying common values that grant migrants a place in a common “we” may be an important incentive for both migrants and non-migrants to nourish a commitment to the country and to each other. Similarly, objectively creating conditions for social equality and participation in society can importantly complement symbolic exercises. Without losing sight of specificities shaping migrants’ incorporation (e.g. temporary work, asylum seeking, family reunion, second and third generations) measures could privilege needs over groups, thereby targeting also the host population. The appendix lists ideas that seek to permit variable applications of this model according to different national realities.

Ultimately, contemporary migration dynamics call for a deliberate re-conceptualization of tomorrow’s societies. Granted, the ways to engage with diversity will be a matter of choice and framing of the public debate. Yet, despite anti-diversity voices, “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (i.e. a genuine openness to internalize others’ values and cultural practices into one’s way of making sense of the world and of one’s place in it) is already practiced across the world.<sup>24</sup> Deliberately promoting nationally specific ways to embrace diversity that build on universalist bedrock values may perhaps better enable governments to maximize the benefits of migration, host societies to realize social cohesion and migrants to construct belonging.

22 Penninx, 2010:26.

23 See, for instance, Marini, 2014.

24 Werbner, 2006.

## Appendix: Ideas to implement the model

The suggested policies below are not new and were compiled in view of a) realizing the potential of migration and minimize possible problems and b) create incentives for both migrants and the host society to invest in a deliberately diverse common future. They are organized under three main goals and leave room for flexibility in implementation.

### 1. Facilitated access to residency and citizenship

- **Enable legal residency:** Create a Universal Register and identification system granting access to some basic rights enabling settlement, with attention to protecting personal information.
- **Reduce requirements for integration:** Focus language and integration courses on practical and non-punitive assistance to incorporation.
- **Allow dual nationality:** Including for foreign-born and second generation youth who spend formative years and are socialized in the country.

### 2. Fewer barriers to participation in public life

- **Address structural needs of the whole society:** Focus on concrete support in the workplace and at school, which structure most migrants' everyday lives and obstacles, by targeting needs instead of migrant groups. This may promote a sense of equal standing among non-migrants and migrants alike while particularly benefitting the latter.
- **Promote symbolic inclusion:** Include the importance of migration and contributions of migrants in national curricula (including national history).
- **Ease access to participation in established political and civic structures:** Enable migrants' participation in organisms representing sectoral interests with permanent residency (political parties, trade unions, work councils, chambers of commerce, school boards and civic organizations) as well as public positions (e.g. teaching).

### 3. Promote ownership of the integration process

- **Integrate migrants, the host society and, particularly, the second and third generations, in the design of integration and implementation policies** (e.g. integration courses, tests and contracts).
- **Counter cultural distance and potential discrimination with education for and mediation of diversity:** Support and explore projects, programs and mechanisms focused on learning to live with diversity, exploring shared values and national narratives, and promoting intercultural dialogue for both migrants and host societies (e.g. cultural mediation centres, town hall meetings, online platforms, round-table discussions, consultations with associative networks).

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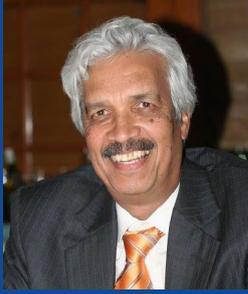
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