



Immigration Policy at a Crossroads?

Developed economies around the world are becoming increasingly worried about migration issues. On the one hand, questions of homeland security and immigrant integration, often accompanied by new ethnic rivalries that give rise to violence and terrorism, are major causes for concern. On the other hand, policymakers are contemplating ways to promote economically motivated immigration. Despite a number of contradictory issues, this field offers tremendous scope for an improved immigration policy.

Still ahead of the crowd in this respect are the traditional immigration countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, whose points systems have served well to achieve a proper balance of qualified, economically "fitting" labor immigrants. Even without any sophisticated system of selection, the United States has miraculously managed to attract the world's best and brightest as well as the much needed low-skilled workers. Now the U.S. public debate is centering on whether to establish a guest worker system for the purpose of curbing illegal immigration, mostly from Mexico. In Europe, the United Kingdom has assumed a pioneering role by courageously implementing a points system to better select immigrants. Meanwhile, France and Germany, still pondering reforms of their immigration policies, are caught between a pessimistic stance towards integration, a stronger focus on language skills, and measures to attract foreign high-skilled workers.

Dynamic economies cannot evade the need for an economically motivated immigration policy. In the labor market, migrants are still in short supply, and their educational integration has been less than satisfactory even in the second and third generations. The overabundance of native low-skilled labor, coinciding with a lack of highly qualified personnel, forces all developed countries to compete internationally for an active redesign of immigration policy. The awareness of important economic realities must be increased particularly in countries, such as Germany, where immigration and integration policies have so far been confined mainly to patchwork regulations.

Economically driven immigrants gain more permanent and successful access to the labor market than other groups, and they tend to leave the country sooner if they fail. Moreover, qualified immigrants create jobs for low-skilled native workers, thus helping to reduce unemployment. Openness towards the ethnicity of the host country is a prerequisite to successful economic participation. But maintaining one's own ethnicity while at the same time integrating into the society of the host country is economically more favorable than mere assimilation. It is their ethnic capital that makes migrants all the more valuable to the receiving country. Older immigrants, muslims, and those who have been decisively shaped by the education system of their home country tend to have difficulties with both integration and assimilation.

An economically motivated immigration policy based on the principle of selection can substantially improve the economic prospects of migrants and thereby also contribute to their acceptance in society. Integration policy must be an integral part of any economically founded immigration policy. It should identify problem groups and provide them with guidance and assistance. In this regard, language requirements and citizenship tests are useful tools. Fostering language acquisition remains important throughout the second immigrant generation. This is one of the reasons why high-skilled immigrants and foreign university graduates should be allowed to remain in the country without facing any restrictions once they have found employment. The German Federal Minister of the Interior must be applauded for announcing a reassessment of the German immigration law and a careful reduction of restrictions for high-skilled labor. But the political agenda in Germany should also encompass a points system combined with flexible immigration quotas – or else Germany will lose further ground to other nations.

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