

Shaping our immigration society together

Report of the Federal Government Expert Commission on the framework for sustainable integration

Key messages

Extract from the report of the Expert Commission. The full report and more information can be found online www.fachkommission-integrationsfahigkeit.de

1. Germany is a diverse country of immigration.

Germany has developed into by far the most important destination for migration in Europe; it is at the 2nd position worldwide, after the USA. Thus, it is a de facto country of immigration. Migration is an integral part of the German society. Migration influences the society – the past, present and future.

The expert commission is therefore convinced that it is necessary to develop an open conception of self as “Being German” with criteria of belonging, which accommodate the diversity of Germany, the immigration country. This creates a new “We” and with it, the basis for a good coexistence. In spite of this, there shall also always be various ideas and controversial debates on how the migration and integration policy should be organised. Such debates are legitimate. Different ideas in relation to the immigration and integration policy should naturally be accepted in democratic societies, as long as they are on the foundation of the German Constitution and respect the dignity of others. Ultimately, the decision about the conditions for entry and residence should be political.

2. Migration offers opportunities if the integration is successful.

The proportion of immigrants and their descendants in the German population shall continue to rise in the next decade. The opportunities are linked to it: Successful integration in the education market and labour market can yield considerable

economic gains and even fiscal incomes for the welfare state, especially in light of the demographic change. Open societies can also benefit from increasing Cultural and social diversity. As the past experiences with migration and integration show, these opportunities, however, also go hand in hand with risks: a rift in the opportunities in education market, labour market and opportunities for livelihood, above average unemployment for immigrants and their descendants, which especially concerns women, social, political and cultural conflicts, exclusion and discrimination, to name just a few problems. Migration might push the gap between the city and country even more, which would anyway be intensified by the demographic change. Of course, none of these processes is natural and cannot be shaped. The expert commission recommends an active migration and integration policy, which recognises the opportunities and tries to exploit them in the interest of the entire population. The report gives concrete suggestions to this end.

3. Conflicting goals between the asylum and integration policy must be recognised and reduced as much as possible.

The asylum policy and integration of beneficiaries of protection in Germany primarily pursue humanitarian goals, which are anchored in the international law, European law and the fundamental right for asylum of the German Constitution. The expert commission is aware of these obligations. Admittedly, many sections of the asylum and refugee policy have turned out to be non-functional in the past years. It is an undisputed fact that reforms in the asylum system are necessary at the global, European and national level. It is not for the expert commission to develop suggestions for such reforms, definitely the commission's task to develop suggestions for the integration of well over 1.8 million people seeking protection living in Germany, and at any rate, for the large majority of those, who have a legally recognised right to protection.

At the same time, the integration of beneficiaries of protection again raises the questions of migration management. If this management is successful, it increases the scope for action for an asylum and refugee policy aligned to humanitarian principles. Conversely, the duration of asylum procedures, access to integration courses and language programmes or conditions of dwelling influence the chances of integration. Conflicting goals arise here as well, especially while handing people in the asylum procedures and with tolerated persons, who do not leave the country voluntarily and are also not deported. An active integration policy and better participation opportunities can increase the migration incentive for persons without a legitimate right to protection.

Among all the different opinions, the expert commission in principle agrees that a functional asylum system must differentiate between persons with and without a need for protection and consequently, repatriations are also necessary when asylum applications are rejected. This does not rule out promoting the chances to stay beyond the education tolerance and occupation tolerance for well-integrated protection seekers. In principle, the expert commission recommends the continuation and further development of the largely successful efforts for integration of beneficiaries of protection.

4. Integration is a continuous task that affects everyone.

According to the understanding represented here, integration should be separated from migration and understood more comprehensively than hitherto understood. It is a process that affects the society as a whole and therefore needs the efforts of everyone. At the same time, integration is a constant task. It can be successful only if participation is also linked with the obligation to support the solidarity group actively. In the process, everyone must be able to have confidence that the state is maximising the opportunities of migration and minimising the risks through a relevant policy. Integration as a continuous task also means finding answers necessary in the short term, but above all, creating institutional structures in the longer term, which are coordinated among each other and with the tasks ahead in mind.

Successful integration is in turn a prerequisite for cohesion in society. In a modern, plural society, it is based in equality and belonging, obligation to comply with the law, civil etiquette and an increasingly changing self-image. It needs not just taking the opportunities, but also the active participation in various possibilities and tasks. The state cannot decree cohesion; it needs more than just formally following the Acts. This also includes a constructive argument over conflicts arising in coexistence, an exchange of ideas on different situations and the search for compromises.

5. Integration means participation, representation, and recognition.

Immigration increases the diversity. In the meanwhile, over a quarter of the population in Germany itself has immigrated or comes from immigrants. Assuring equal participation according to the comprehensive understanding of immigration, which the expert commission advocates, means working towards ensuring that members of all social groups are adequately represented at all hierarchy levels of politics, administration, economy, science, culture, media and civil society according

to their qualifications and capabilities. In this sense, an opening of state institutions oriented towards social diversity must be pushed because the activity of the state has a signalling effect for the entire society. This applies to immigrants and their descendants just as for other generally disadvantaged social groups. Because the activity of the state has a signalling effect for the entire society, this applies to immigrants and their descendants just as for other generally disadvantaged social groups.

6. Active prevention of discrimination and a respectful interaction with each other are prerequisites for participation and commiseration.

An integrated society is a society that does not discriminate and allows equal participation for all communities. There is still a long way to reach this goal. Discrimination can happen not just intentionally, but also unintentionally, especially structurally and institutionally. Thus, it is an interdisciplinary topic, which also affects other groups apart from the immigrants and their descendants. Practical devaluation, exclusion and discrimination adversely affect the identity and the feeling of belonging of the affected person and hence cohesion of the entire society in the medium and long term. Exclusion and discrimination also generate economic expenses. Relevant experiences in contact with public authorities or government activities shake the confidence in the state. Discrimination must therefore be fought sustainably; among other things, the legal and practical protection against discrimination must be improved and it is necessary to raise social awareness against discrimination.

7. Common terms must be scrutinised.

It is important to pay attention to sensitive use of language in public discussion, not in the least to counteract a polarisation and politicisation. Generally used terms and legal differentiations do not always match; apart from that, the context in which they are each used has to be considered. Therefore, the active organisation of an immigration country also includes the analysis of terms and concepts and their use, because that also always sends (implicit) messages. Knowing this, the commission suggests the definition of the concept of “Migration background” to be made clearer and simultaneously narrower than before, within the framework of official statistics. In addition, it is suggested to no longer talk of “Persons with a migration background”, but of “Immigrants and their (direct) descendants”. The expert commission agrees that this term also poses problems. An ideal solution in terms of a universally usable term, which fulfils the scientific as well as colloquial and political expectations is however not possible in the opinion of the members.

8. Equal opportunity in education is indispensable.

Education is paramount for integration. Children and the youth, with or without a history of migration, can be raised in the best way if the educational institutions recognise and take into account their social situations and their language, cultural and religious diversity. Considering the different learning requirements, a differentiated encouragement, and support in the day care centres and schools is necessary to reduce discrimination associated with family background, especially the social inequality, and with different linguistic learning requirements. The school must provide high quality teaching and learning opportunities oriented towards individual potential and development status and ensure minimum standards so that all the students can achieve a competence level, which enables them to have a successful educational biography and social participation. The state is therefore obliged to guarantee an equal opportunity for education in Germany. To this end, the quality of educational opportunities must be enhanced and ensured, especially even in the area of language learning and language development. In addition, education courses should be kept open for a longer time.

9. The skills of immigrants should be better used and their competencies should be strengthened.

There have been considerable advances in the integration policy as well as the results of integration in the past two decades. Still, an increasing polarisation at the upper and lower end of the qualification spectrum is apparent. Immigrants can often not use their knowledge and skill obtained abroad. Thus, generally speaking, there is still a distinct gap regarding the opportunities in education and labour market, which especially affects the protection seekers. Therefore, it is a function of the integration policy, above all the education and labour market policy, to promote the transfer of qualifications obtained abroad and to strengthen the competencies of the immigrants. All the persons living in Germany must be able to acquire the basic skills required for an active participation and commiseration in the society and labour market.

Language development plays an important role in this because good knowledge of the German language is a key for active participation in all areas of the society. However, the same amount of encouragement to acquire a school graduation, educational qualification, and university degree in Germany is also necessary.

10. A foresighted immigrant policy can improve the integration in the labour market.

In view of the demographic change and the lowering migration from other EU member states, Germany, in making its immigration policy, faces the challenge that the labour markets must be opened far more for persons from third countries if the potential workforce should even just be stabilised. The legislature has tried to take this into account with the new Immigration Act for skilled workers. The expert commission strongly and particularly welcomes the elimination of priority check and advocates lowering the thresholds for economic migration even more. In addition, the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad and the certification of qualifications acquired through vocational experience should be made easy. The integration opportunities for immigrant workers are also considerably improved by a need-based control of labour migration.

11. Integration requires a sustainable urban development policy and social housing policy.

Housing is a human right and a cornerstone of social participation in Germany. Firstly, the housing situation must be adequate and stable. Secondly, the question of where and how a person lives influences the opportunities of participation – the extent and type of social and neighbourly contacts, the social recognition, wellbeing and health, the reachability and access to infrastructure, educational institutions and work places. This is particularly true for immigrants, for whom structural barriers make access to the housing market more difficult.

The necessary legal and financial means must be provided to the municipalities especially in metropolitan areas, to create housing space and manage residential structures. A far-sighted integration policy strengthens quarters, which provides special integration services and appreciates its services for the urban society. The commission recommends an active housing and land policy, which aims at providing more housing space, but simultaneously prioritises the affordability of and access to housing space. Such a policy mobilises and boosts resources by consolidating sustainable urban development, housing, and integration.

12. Equal health-related opportunities are a prerequisite for successful integration.

Successful integration requires equal health-related opportunities. Health of the immigrants and their direct descendants is determined by the same social and

economic factors as for the native population; but on an average, they are worse off in this case. In particular, educational disadvantages, low incomes as well as an adverse working and housing situation affect the health, just like social exclusion and racism. An improvement in the socio-economic situation and fighting of the exclusion and racism therefore provide a major contribution in improving the health of immigrants and their descendants.

In order to ensure an equal and non-discriminatory access to healthcare and medical therapy, linguistic and cultural barriers in health services must be removed and a treatment sensitive to the diversity must be established and developed. Presently, there are restrictions in entitlement to health services for individual migrant groups. From the perspective of health, the restrictions in health services applicable for individual groups of persons should be lifted and these groups should be granted services equivalent to those granted to welfare benefit recipients. The policy additionally includes further perspectives in the decision, which are evaluated differently by the members of the expert commission. Seasonal workers and protection seekers must be accommodated such that they can comply with the specifications of safety regulations for Corona. This requires an accommodation, where it is possible to maintain distance and follow the hygiene specifications.

13. Racism, hate crime, and terrorism endanger the essence of society.

Racism, hate crime and terrorism contradict the values which form the foundation of Germany's basic free democratic order; this can presently be seen especially in right-wing extremism and right-wing terrorism. They endanger the essence of society in this way. It cannot meet the society with individual, time-restricted projects. Rather, fighting these phenomena is a permanent task of the security authorities and all people in Germany. This also includes a greater civic engagement against racist and anti-Semitic expressions and actions in everyday life as well as a basic consensus on the rejection of violence and belittling of people. The different forms of extremism must not be played off against here other here; but, they must all be reactively fought and preventive measures must be taken to avoid them. An effective approach against extremism requires that all the social groups recognise and respect the state monopoly on the use of force.

14. Integration is an investment in the future.

Integration is a cross-sectional task concerning all the political areas and levels. It must be implemented on site and there are costs associated with it. However, these costs are also an investment in the future of the society. Potential resource conflicts in

the community should be considered here. They exist independent of the migration, but can be enhanced or even weakened by the migration. However, resource conflicts must not be addressed by their origin, but by the need for action and require a willingness to compromise in the political process.

The municipalities need an ability to act to implement the mandatory and permanent tasks of the integration policy within the meaning of a strengthening of the social cohesion. The federal government and the states must support the municipalities more and above all, constantly, in the said implementation. This must happen within the framework of an organised financial constitution, which lays an incentive for an efficient usage of limited resources. It is also necessary to enhance the efficiency and success monitoring of the providers and users of these means. In this context, the integration measures at all levels must be evaluated to a greater extent and on a scientifically grounded basis. When all this is achieved, migration and integration can be beneficial for everyone.