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**Can Germany master the integration challenge?**

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*IC Migrations*

Immigration, asylum and integration have always been contentious issues in Germany, even more in the last years with the return of right extremism on the political scene. The late recognition of Germany as an immigration country is responsible for the lack of an immigration narrative in this country that strongly relies on immigration to face future problems in the domains of demography, labour market and pensions. 2016 was a historical year: 722.370 persons in need of protection demanded asylum, among them 37% were Syrians and 18% Afghans. This new migration reinforces the already existing social, cultural and religious diversity of the population of Germany but it is at the same time a challenge. The negative image over the Muslim population among parts of the society (Foroutan 2013) and over migration (which is stronger in the former Eastern part of Germany, SVR 2018) competes with the solidarity towards asylum seekers declared from the summer 2015, leading to a large movement of civic engagement (hosting newcomers, bringing urgent necessities, teaching German, helping by administrations, etc. Keküllüoğlu & Yıldırım 2016).

**Integration as a societal challenge**

Counting foreigners is recognized as showing half of the migration and integration reality. Even when becoming German citizens, migrants and their children face specific problems due to discrimination, social exclusion etc. While foreigners represented 12% of the whole population in Germany in 2017, 24% of the population had a migration background (a statistical administrative category introduced in 2005, see Elrick & Schwartzman 2015), i.e. 19 258 million persons (see Figure 1). Among the population with a migration background, 68% were migrants and 32 % descendants of migrants.

Integration is an individual challenge for migrants and their children but it is also a societal challenge that needs to be taken seriously by governments. Germany recognized the importance of social policy in this domain from the mid-2000. Integration was recognized as a two-sided process in which not only migrants are concerned but also German society as a whole. A strong signal for this recognition of Germany as an immigration country was the change in naturalization policy occurred at the beginning of the year 1999 and, to a lesser extent, in 2014. The German citizenship based mainly on ancestry and blood for being a German citizen was enlarged in 2000 to the *jus soli*, the right of the soil, enabling children of migrants born in Germany of parents with a foreign nationality to become German citizen et reducing the number of years of residence for migrants from 15 to 8 years, leading to a significant

increase in 2000 reaching 187000 naturalizations. But, becoming German is not necessarily the end of the integration process. Doubt is casted regularly on the willingness to integrate of the migrant population, in particular the one (sometimes considered as) Muslim.

In the mid-2000, a vast integration programme was deployed: integration summits were organized by the government leading to set the agenda and to so-called integration plans. At the time of the recruitment of ‘guest-workers’, the latest did not benefit of language courses upon their arrival. Integration was meant to occur primary through working. The question about the German proficiency of migrants (and their descendants) has always been raised to focus on a possible deficit of integration among the migrant population although three quarters of the population with a migration background declare to speak German good over very good (Schacht 2018). The focus on the language acquisition during many years allowed Germany to set up a vast programme of language and of integration courses directed at different publics (youth, women and parents...). In a way, Germany was relatively good prepared to host the newcomers fleeing war and terrorism in recent years. But, the demand is not satisfied: asylum seekers can wait eight months on average until they can begin such a course. Attending language and integration courses also became of condition for getting a permanent status for asylum seekers and later to apply for German citizenship.

The question of the incorporation of asylum seekers and refugees arrived recently is crucial for individuals and for society. Several programmes were set up to avoid making the same mistakes as at the time of the guest-workers migration. Asylum seekers do have the same rights than refugees. But, a new German law allows now asylum seekers with good chances to be recognized as refugees to work. Young men build an important part of the persons in need of protection who arrived recently in Germany (Juran & Broer 2017) and the qualification structure of the whole group is strongly polarized: many of them have a very low educational degree or not degree at all and many of them have a degree similar to high school. Only a minority has a job, the vast majority being inactive or enrolled in integration courses. Those who can and search for jobs, search in domains where German proficiency plays a secondary role: in cleansing, logistics and kitchen help sector. Among refugees arrived from 2013, 17% say they can speak good or very good German. Concerning recently arrived refugees, the several language courses put in place show positive results, in particular when there is no children in the household (Brücker et al. 2019). The presence of children in the household has shown to affect negatively the German proficiency of women and their labour market integration is a real challenge for the near future as they arrived more often with relatively low education or without any working experience compared to men (Fendel 2019).

Integration takes times: the duration of residence is a crucial explaining factor of achievement in several domains. It is also an intergenerational process as migrants mostly bring or build families. Children with a migration background grow up in Germany, go to German schools and very often build their lives far from their parental country of origin. Three quarter of them, born in Germany, are German citizens. Among the migrant population, 40% have the German citizenship (Mikrozensus, own calculations). Those figures testify that migration is now at the foundation of what makes Germany today: a country in which a large number of German citizens have a link to migration, near or far. Two central questions deal with the capacity of the population to live “Together in diversity” and to attenuate the boundaries between “We” and “Them” that determine more and more public opinion.

### **A facilitating structural context?**

With a strong decreasing unemployment rate since 2009 reaching 5,8 % in 2018 and a lack of workers foreseen in some sectors (in the health/care sector as well as, education and social sector, Fuchs et al. 2019), the German context can be considered to be favourable to the incorporation of migrants. But there is still room for improving the situation of many migrant families in Germany. The poverty rate of persons with a migration background is almost three times higher than for natives (29% against 12%, Statistisches Bundesamt 2019). This has implications for children in terms of social, cultural and political participation. One main reason for this economic vulnerability is the occupational structure: the population with a migration background work less frequently full time, is more often unemployed and occupy less frequently jobs as higher professionals or civil servants, this is true in particular for those of Turkish origin. Surely, the 2012 law on the recognition of foreign credentials was helpful for third country nationals. But there is still an overrepresentation of migrants at the lower levels of the occupational hierarchy and a low permeability of the higher social classes. At the end of March 2016, 59 000 unaccompanied minors in need of international protection were counted by the authorities and this group brings also challenges to the German education system. The German dual training system is an advantage as it allows training young newcomers for specific occupations leading easier to regular employment.

The education level of the second generation was long considered as being too low compared to children of natives, their lower social background is an important explaining factor for this difference. Children of migrants have less chances to get a place in the kindergarten and are still underrepresented in the preschool system until 3 years which is determinant for further education. The German dual training system is unique and facilitates the labour market entrance. But children of migrants tend to have more difficulties to find a place of training, see Beicht 2017 and Figure 2. There are still overrepresented in the transition system, a sort of waiting system offering qualifications that do not lead to a recognized training degree.

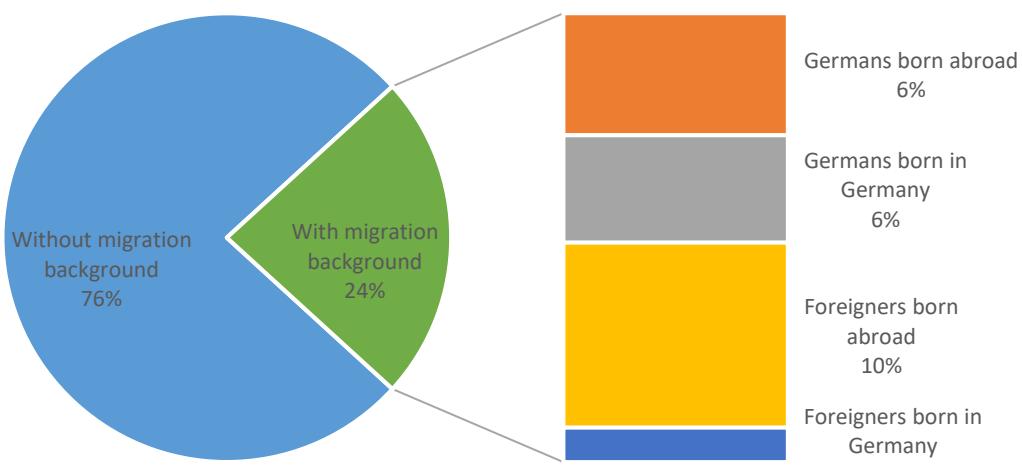
Despite a favourable structural context, the recurrent discourse about the integration unwillingness of migrants brings complexity to the context of reception. The discourse on the existence of parallel societies was virulent in Germany from the mid-1990s. At this time, it was the expression of the fear of a possible ethnic withdrawal, leading to the existence of poor urban areas in which migrant only have contact with their community members, areas considered by some politicians as ghettos. But the question is primary a social question bringing other questions related to migrants' integration in the German society, e.g. having access to education, better jobs and income enabling getting housing outside of such areas. In this debate about parallel societies, research infirmed their existence (Halm & Sauer 2006). More recently, the Sarrazin debate and the PEGIDA movement contributed also to divide opinion, questioning the compatibility of Islam with the values of Germany and affirming the "elimination" of Germany as Christian country. Germany's search for a new way to "make society" is a challenge in a context characterised by the presence of right extremists in the Bundestag and in the government of some federal states.

### **Acceptance and discrimination**

What does it mean to be German today? As in any other states of the European Union the question of being considered as citizen is complicated for those with a migration experience and influenced by history and the political forces in place. Boundaries between Germans with and without a migration background are still persisting even if possessing the German citizenship is a significant predictor of the feeling of belonging to Germany. Reservedly, having experienced discrimination is negatively

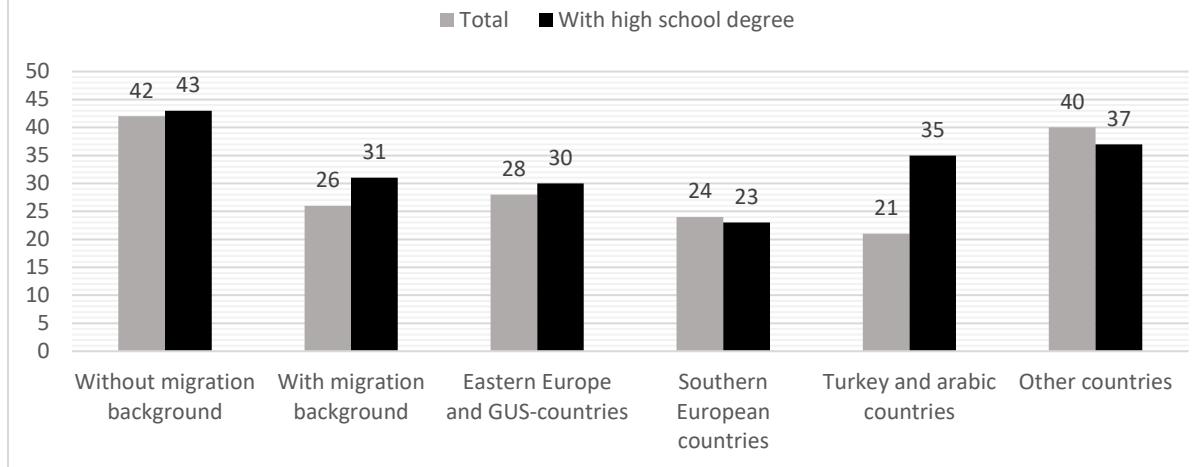
correlated with this feeling of belonging and more generally with life satisfaction (Tucci & Eisnecker 2014). Discrimination on the ground of racial, ethnic or religious boundaries was not an issue during many decades in Germany. Germany was not rapid in implementing the EU directive against discrimination of all kind. The anti-discrimination board was founded only in 2006 and the last ECRI-report stressed the lack of resources to render this board operational over the whole country. Still it is hard to argue that the experience of discrimination is the negative part of the integration experience. Discrimination is not easy to measure, even less to prove. A glance at a large study on all kind of discrimination in Germany indicate that 23% of the persons with migration background experienced ethnic or racial discrimination in the last two years (Beigang et al. 2017, p.101). Individuals experience most of time discrimination because of their religion, mainly understood as Islam. The domain of work and public area and free time are the most quoted domains in which discrimination occurs. Another very recent study shows the strengthening of right extremist opinion in the German population (Krause et al. 2019): The part of those who express themselves negatively towards asylum seekers among respondents rose from 2016 to 2018 from 49.5% to 54% (despite the decrease in asylum migration during this period). The feeling not to be accepted might not be dependent on the length of residence: the share of refugees recently arrived worrying a lot about xenophobia is significantly lower (than for the refugees residing longer in Germany (8% against 37%, Schacht 2018). This indicates that fight against xenophobia might be put at the front of the German policy agenda, using this positive mood of newcomers as a factor that might further their smooth incorporation into German society. The question of social cohesion depends on the opinion towards immigration. Non-migrants who feel threatened by migrants and immigration in Germany tend to avoid significantly to have relationships with migrants (Eisnecker 2019). This shows the importance of the political and medial discourse on migration for the future of the multicultural German society.

**Figure 1 Population with and without migration background  
in Germany 2017, Microcensus**



*Source: German Federal Statistical Office*

Figure 2 Share of entries in vocational training



Source: Beicht 2017

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