



Migration to the Centre – Introduction by Thomas Huddleston

Thomas Huddleston

Abstract:

Most Central European countries are slowly transforming into a country of permanent and temporary immigration. During recent boom times, immigrants were often as temporary and circular, but many have settled permanently, while others continued to come. Seasonal, temporary, permanent, family, and humanitarian migrations make these countries into a country of immigration, and not only countries of emigration and transit. Nor is it likely that this trend will reverse. The Reflection Group on the Future of the EU (the so-called ‘Wise Men’) echoed European Commission projections that current European social models cannot survive with zero-migration, and probably without higher migration to meet their demographic and economic needs. Demand will certainly be great in Central and Eastern Europe, with its large and dynamic economy and its mobile and shrinking work force. Immigration opportunities may expand quickly through the country’s geographical and cultural proximity to countries along the EU’s Eastern border. Increased regional labour mobility and migration will create deeper transnational ties, more diverse families and communities, greater awareness of discrimination and inequality.

This briefing uses the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) to kick-off broader reflection and debate about the state of immigration policies in Central Europe and their priorities for change over the next few years. Its 148 policy indicators evaluate seven critical areas for participation in society: (1) labour market mobility; (2) family reunion; (3) education; (4) political participation; (5) long-term residence; (6) access to nationality; (7) anti-discrimination. The normative framework benchmarks whether policies in these seven areas grant all legal residents equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. The benchmark of comparable rights, responsibilities, and opportunities was reconfirmed by EU Member State governments in the 2009-2014 Stockholm Programme. While MIPEX measured policies in May 2010, this briefing asks integration stakeholders to discuss how these policies have changed, are implemented in practice, affect the lives of immigrants and people in the communities where they live.

A first reflection: policy (in)coherence

Immigration and integration policies in Central European countries are defined by policy ‘incoherence’, based on a reading of their MIPEX scores. Their policies tend to mix EU minimum standards and national inaction. Cecilia Malmstroem—European Commissioner for Home Affairs—noted the MIPEX finding that Member States generally perform better and similarly in areas where four EU Directives apply: family reunion, long-term residence, and anti-discrimination. These standards, coming from Europe’s experienced immigration countries, secured basic rights against future changes in these countries and extended them to new immigration countries, including in Central Europe. Countries in the region had to quickly rework and, in many cases, totally invent this legislation in order to transpose EU Directives before and after accession. The legislation improved “on the books,” since EU standards contain implicit integration objectives, such as:

- Equal socio-economic rights as the starting point for societal integration
- ‘Rule of law’ and ‘entitlement’ over discretion to provide clear prospective for newcomers
- Duration of residence as main criterion for acquisition of rights
- Legal migration, family reunion, secure residence, equal treatment as promoters of socio-economic cohesion

EU standards are largely behind the few high-scoring policies in the region, such as access to a long-term residence or family reunion permit. However these “areas of strength” may not demonstrate the government’s willingness to act on integration. Since so-called EU12 countries could not participate in negotiations of these pre-accession Directives, many felt little ownership of these new national laws. For low-priority and uncontroversial issues like family reunion and long-term residence, the method for transposition was to “copy-out.” Policymakers take the national translation of the Directive and quickly pass it without changes or links to the broader legislative framework.

Because of these countries’ transposition strategies, little national thinking may have gone into the country’s areas of strength. This inaction may matter little to immigrants themselves, who are still able to use their legal opportunities to work, settle long-term, and participate in society. It is unknown whether the limited planning behind these relatively new laws is reflected in a limited implementation or knowledge by public authorities. Indeed, problems with the rule of law and corruption generally emerge in EU12 countries according to the World Bank’s Good Governance Indicators.

Q: How can organisations working on integration in Central Europe raise the generally low levels of activity and coherence behind their national integration policy?

Q: How can they better monitor and guarantee implementation?

Q: What domestic actors/agendas could also be brought in?

Information about the author:

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