



## **TRANSATLANTIC COUNCIL STATEMENT: DELIVERING CITIZENSHIP**

**April 2008**

The Transatlantic Council on Migration is a unique deliberative body that examines vital policy issues and informs migration policy-making processes across the Atlantic community.

The Council takes a non-partisan, evidence-based, pragmatic approach that is ardently independent.

It has a dual mission:

- To help inform, and thus influence, the transatlantic immigration and integration agendas by proactively identifying, analyzing and drawing out the policy insights of critical issues and bringing them to public attention.
- To serve as an idea factory and resource for governments as they grapple with the challenges and opportunities associated with international migration.

Council members and Council guests combine exceptional political, policy, and public influence with profound interest, experience and expertise in issues relating to migration. Each year, the Council holds two meetings to examine a key aspect of international migration. The meetings are supported by commissioned research and policy analysis, supplemented by expert presentations.

The Council releases a statement twice a year on a migration topic. Each statement is the result of a series of judgments made by the Council, informed both by the commissioned research and the Council's discussions. The purpose of each Transatlantic Council Statement is to present a series of evidence-based options to a senior political and policy audience.

The Council Statement is the sole responsibility of the Migration Policy Institute and its policy partners [the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the European Policy Centre (in cooperation with the King Baudouin Foundation)]. It reflects the discussions of the Council but the final responsibility for content rests with the authors.

This is the Council's first Statement.

## Defining Citizenship and Its Purpose

Citizenship — once a narrow, largely placid legal backwater — has become a dynamic policy vehicle for promoting the political incorporation of immigrants and, by extension, their more complete integration. Greater attention to the issue in recent years has led to the proliferation of tests and other requirements associated with citizenship.

Countries in North America and Europe are redesigning, modifying and evaluating citizenship policy and practice. The Council noted that governments conceive of citizenship differently and they should not conflate ends with means. Clarifying definitions, broad goals and desired outcomes is critical when designing and implementing effective citizenship policies that meet the needs of society as a whole.

The Council's view coalesced around the proposition that we cannot all agree on the boundaries of citizenship, but we can confirm its center. The “core” definition of citizenship is equal membership in self-governing political community, comprising four layers:

1. Formal legal status that links individuals to a state or polity.
2. A set of legal rights and duties. Rights include civil liberties and the right of representation, as well as social rights to education, health care and poverty protection. Duties include an understanding of the constitution, jury service obligations and loyalty to the state (most obviously sought in times of international conflict).
3. A set of responsibilities and practices that support a rules-based democratic self-government.
4. A collective identity that can be shared across distinctions of income, class, race, gender, religion, ethnic origin or lifestyle.

The above definition highlights the need to place citizenship policy and practice into a broader context: citizenship policies are not interchangeable with immigrant integration policies. While citizenship offers fundamental protections that are not available through integration, there are elements of integration policy — such as access to education and employment — that are arguably more important for success in society.

## Principles

The Council's overall judgment concerning citizenship policy is that it should emphasize inclusion and contribute to societal cohesion. Accordingly, a key goal for policymakers in delivering citizenship policies is to make citizenship meaningful and inclusive. To achieve this goal requires adopting policies that reflect the different migration contexts of countries yet are nonetheless decidedly inclusive.

The Council contends that:

- Citizenship is a crucial right and should be regarded as such by governments and citizens alike. However, while it should be clearly accessible to immigrants and thus serve as an incentive for greater integration, citizenship should not be thought of as the principal tool for immigrant integration or, for that matter, as the end point of the integration process.
- Governments must understand the value of citizenship and communicate this awareness to new immigrants and the native population alike. Among other things,

citizenship bestows: security (such as protection from a variety of governmental actions, including deportation); unfettered access to labor markets; access to public services (including social rights to education, health care and all the benefits that society offers); and rights for families. Citizenship also facilitates travel, a benefit of high and increasing consequence.

- While governments should try to make the citizenship process meaningful, they also need to recognize that this can have counterproductive effects if the hurdles to acquiring citizenship are set too high. There is a public interest in naturalization processes that are fair and transparent.
- New immigrants should be seen as potential new citizens early on in the migration process or at least be placed on the first rungs of a ladder that leads to integration and full citizenship. While some immigrants might not ultimately complete the citizenship process, assuming that they might do so is the best starting point for constructing policy.

This perspective invites policymakers to consider citizenship in inclusive terms and begin integration efforts early. Legitimate policy and legal barriers to citizenship (for example in the case of temporary workers or university students who do not have a right to permanent residence) must be understood in this context.

## **Actions**

There is no single path to citizenship, even within a single country. Yet there are a number of common issues that can be addressed by all governments, regardless of historical and political contexts. The Council notes that there are several forks in the road where guidance is useful, for example regarding questions of: local voting during the pre-citizenship stage; whether to introduce civics tests or test for language skills; and finally, whether to permit the acquisition of dual citizenship.

The Council acknowledges these are contentious issues and recognizes the high-wire act policymakers must walk on citizenship policy.

The Council advises that:

- Citizenship policy should be meaningful and practical, and should encourage all new immigrants to seek naturalization as soon as their status allows. As such, governments should ensure that all barriers relating to costs are kept as low as possible.
- Local voting rights encourage immigrants to participate in local politics and offer them a safety valve; and at the same time offer a mechanism to signal acceptance of immigrants to society in general. Such rights also encourage political parties to think at the earliest possible time about the changing composition of their electoral base—and to become more inclusive where it matters most, namely at the grassroots level. On the other hand, local voting rights do not radically improve voting turnout among non-citizens and have only minor effects on the later acquisition of

citizenship.

- Language tests can be a positive part of the integration and citizenship process. Thus, linking language learning to citizenship can be a useful impetus for migrants to become involved in other parts of society. Learning the host language helps immigrants reduce their economic and social isolation, and is an essential tool for their success in the job market. However, a balance should be struck between offering immigrants adequate and meaningful opportunities for learning the host language and setting requirements that deter them from learning it—thereby undermining the overall policy’s goals by increasing the likelihood of social, cultural and economic marginalization. If the ability to speak the host language is made a condition of citizenship, governments must provide sufficient opportunities and resources for learning it.
- Civics tests can add value to the citizenship process and provide immigrants with important practical information. However, they should not be punitive measures, neither by intention nor by the effects they produce. Civics tests should (a) emphasize practical information, (b) be carried out as objectively as possible, (c) be constantly evaluated and adjusted to deliver better outcomes; and (d) use the metric of a high pass rate to gauge success. Over-complication and an over-reliance on cultural norms and customs should be avoided. Citizenship ceremonies can contribute to a sense of belonging and pride among newcomers. They offer “common ground” with established citizens, which can bridge divides and encourage interaction among different groups. Citizenship ceremonies should also involve the host community to the highest degree possible. Holding ceremonies in local community settings and events, and ensuring the participation of prominent political leaders, are two ways of doing this.
- Dual citizenship is an increasing reality in our global, mobile world and should not be discouraged. Governments should view dual citizenship also through the lens of the rights and duties of their own expatriates and concentrate on settling contentious matters — such as voting rights and disagreements over jurisdiction — through bilateral and international cooperation.

Policymakers are increasingly looking to citizenship as a dynamic policy vehicle to promote immigrant integration, but questions remain as to whether governments themselves are flexible enough in how they deliver citizenship policies and whether their policies enhance cohesion and advance other societal goals. Yet the importance of finding the right policies and implementing them in a fair and transparent manner is self-evident. The well-being and vibrancy of societies is maximized when all participants, whether native-born or newcomers, feel a sense of belonging. Delivering citizenship in ways that advance these goals is a challenge that must be met if immigrant-receiving countries are to succeed socially and economically.