

## Extraordinary Meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration Integration at the Local Level – Diversity, Social Cohesion & the Descendants of Immigrants

Berlin, Germany  
June 17-18, 2009

# Council Conclusions

## Introduction

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At the invitation of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), and in close collaboration with the Bertelsmann Stiftung, MPI convened the first *extraordinary* meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration in Berlin on June 17-18, 2009. The expert dialogue focused on local integration efforts and outcomes in North America and Europe, examining what works (and what does not) with respect to integration. The meeting provided an opportunity to bring the Council's comparative international perspective on migration into the German integration debate. The goal was to identify policy options that advance the integration of immigrants and their descendants in ways that also increase social cohesion in our societies.

The discussion began with an overview of the social mobility of first- and second-generation immigrants in Europe and North America, offering recommendations on how local and national policies can improve the educational and labor market outcomes of immigrant-origin youth. The roundtable then examined educational policies in greater detail, identifying innovative practices that have created paths for children to succeed in completing school and entering the labor market. Finally, participants from Germany and the United States analyzed examples of local integration initiatives whose successes hold lessons for the future.

## Panel I: Social Mobility

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Immigrants and their children face significant social mobility challenges in North America and Europe. While it is difficult to generalize the experiences of the second generation across different countries, we can isolate several common themes.

First-generation immigrants do much better in their country of destination than they would have done at home (measured by increased wages and access to greater opportunities), but they generally experience *downward mobility* in the country to which they move. There are four main factors that contribute to this:

1. *Language barriers.* Fluency in the host-country language is essential, as no ethnic enclave can mimic the opportunities available in wider society. Beyond this, it is also critical to have a colloquial understanding of the language in order to communicate in a job setting.
2. *Differences in educational attainment and lack of credential recognition.* Many immigrants arrive with either low education levels, or with education and experience that is not relevant to the host-country labor market. Also, local employers may not recognize foreign credentials.
3. *Lack of dense social networks.* Many immigrants lack sufficient knowledge of the local labor market, and have not yet built social networks capable of providing access to this information.
4. *Discrimination.* Discrimination against ethnic minorities or those with an immigrant background can play a role.

Although many first-generation immigrants arrive with high levels of education, they tend to be over-concentrated in low-skill and low-wage jobs. This underutilization of talent is often termed “brain waste.” Countries with points systems spend enormous amounts of governmental capital selecting the right migrants, an investment that is wasted when migrants end up underemployed. In contrast, countries with employer-led, labor-market driven programs (like the US and Sweden) are better able to overcome this problem.

Some immigrants do “catch up” and overcome their initial disadvantage vis à vis the native population, and some do not. The most important predictor is country of origin. Asian immigrants tend to out-perform all other groups, while Turks and North Africans generally lag behind natives (in most cases systematically). Researchers disagree on how long it takes these groups to “catch up.”

The fate of second-generation youth is closely tied to the situation of their parents. Typically, the second generation fares better than natives, but not always. Research shows that children are more likely to have low educational attainment and/or low wages if their parents also lagged behind. In addition to parental education levels, other predictors of poor outcomes in the second generation are language barriers, reduced resources for education, and residential segregation. But the second generation can outperform the native population in key areas such as educational attainment. In Canada, immigrant parents with less than a university education are *more* likely than natives to have highly educated children; in other words, disadvantaged second-generation youth “catch up” faster than their native counterparts.

**“When immigrants succeed, we all succeed. The *country* succeeds. When immigrants do not succeed, we all pay a price.”**

There are five policy areas to focus on when considering how to address these challenges:

1. *Labor migration selection policies.* Labor migrants who are selected based on criteria that account for the migrant’s potential for integration tend to do better than other immigrant groups on average.

2. *The terms of immigration.* Having a path to permanent status or citizenship motivates immigrants (and society) to make investments in their human capital.
3. *Equity and excellence in education.* Undertaking education reform is essential to the success of integration. The education system must provide all students with equal opportunities and a high quality of education.
4. *Investments in the first generation.* This is critical because resources invested in the first generation not only benefit those immigrants, but also translate into positive effects for the second generation.
5. *Anti-discrimination Legislation.* Although many countries have passed laws to combat discrimination, the problem is persistent and will endure unless laws are constantly updated, enforced, and their implementation is adequately funded.

A presentation on intergenerational social mobility in Canada revealed an interesting success story: disadvantage is not transmitted across generations in Canada, meaning that parents who have low education and low income do not automatically pass on both to their children. This contrasts with some countries, like the United Kingdom, where wealth is “sticky” and 50 percent of high-income earners come from high-income households. One explanation for Canada’s success in disassociating social and ethnic background from life chances is the existence of a clear path to citizenship for new immigrants. In fact, there is a *presumption* that immigrants to Canada will become citizens (and 85 percent of them do).

**“Good old-fashioned *class* is a very clear indicator for which groups manage integration better.”**

Socioeconomic status is often the best predictor of social mobility, as the “underclass” in *both* the native and immigrant populations faces social exclusion. However, ethnicity and nationality matter as well, as discrimination is still a persistent problem in both Europe and the United States, especially for visible (and audible) minorities like Roma and North Africans in Europe. One participant pointed out that focusing on immigrant selection can be very useful for individual advancement, but is limited for achieving *collective progress*. Another view was that the way to systematically address social exclusion is with stronger institutionalization — an acknowledgement that integration is a serious challenge and requires serious policy solutions — and a focus on early interventions for women and children, especially in preschool education. Recent successes in the US can be attributed to 40 years of affirmative action policies, as well as a favorable view of minorities in the media.

**“It is extremely important to *sell* immigration; not as a challenge, but as an opportunity.”**

While there was consensus on the fact that integration will only work if real resources are invested in it, two questions arose: can we afford it? And who should pay? The cost arises immediately, often to local government, whereas the return on the investment can be as long as a generation away, and benefits are usually seen on the federal level. The incentive for the local politician to tackle these issues — especially in a time of economic crisis — must be made more tangible. We must consider the mechanisms for change on the local level, not just the macro, long-term picture.

**“It’s very costly to do immigration well, but it’s more costly  
*not* to do it. We can’t lose sight of the cost to  
society of *not* doing it.”**

## **Panel II: Education, Diversity, and the Second Generation**

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Comparing educational systems across different nations is challenging, as systems that seem parallel from bird’s eye view can look quite different at ground level. However, when we look at how to ensure better outcomes for second-generation youth in schools, we can see several common challenges and strategies linking Europe and North America.

First, there is a demographic imperative on both continents: in the United States, one in four children is a second-generation immigrant, and one in ten students speaks English as a second language (ESL). The numbers in Germany are comparable. A second and related point is the rapid pace of change: societies have been altered almost overnight by a drastic increase in immigrants from increasingly diverse backgrounds (for instance, the US’s English-language learner population doubled between 1996 and 2007, and Norway has gone from having a handful of immigrants to being nearly as immigrant-dense as Canada). Finally, today’s global economic crisis imperils already strained educational systems and services that serve immigrant youth across the transatlantic space. A common goal is to identify policy levers that can deliver innovative instructional programs despite funding pressures.

**“We should not look only at preschool or primary school; we  
need to look at the whole pipeline of education —  
all the way to higher education.”**

The first presentation argued that policymakers need to step back and look at the entire spectrum of education, not just one segment of the pipeline. A comprehensive analysis of the educational outcomes of Turkish second-generation immigrants in Europe illustrated the complexity of this task, as the different national school systems differ widely on critical elements such as starting age and age of specialization (“selection”). For instance, in France children begin school as early as age two or three, at which point they begin learning the official language. In contrast, many children of immigrants in German-speaking countries do not attend kindergarten, which means that by the time they begin primary school they are already fluent in their parents’ native language but not in the host-country language. Some German-speaking countries still have part-time schooling in primary school, and begin the first selection into specialized tracks as early as age ten. The result is that these children have fewer hours of contact with their native peers, which leads to poorer integration. This result is tempered by several European countries’ emphasis on quality apprenticeship programs.

The outcomes are clear. The greater the number of years children spend in school before selection, the better their chances of continuing to a pre-academic track (which provides a direct path to higher education). The same correlation is found between mixed schools and pre-academic tracks, showing that segregated schools hold immigrant children back.

**“Instead of trying to dissect failures, we need to look**

## at those who have succeeded and determine what made them successful.”

These initial conclusions point to six policy prescriptions to ensure better outcomes for the second generation in Europe:

1. *Early start.* Starting school at an early age reduces the gap between children with migrant backgrounds and children of natives.
2. *Mixed schools.* Segregated schools limit the probability that a child of immigrants will continue to secondary education.
3. *Late selection.* Children of immigrants do better when they are allowed to specialize *later*; the more years between starting school and “selection” (choosing a specialized track) the better.
4. *Alternative or indirect routes to higher education.* Talented students should not be held back simply because children do not follow the traditional route to higher education; more time in secondary school, mentoring, and “bridging programs” can support children who may otherwise drop out.
5. *Focus on retention programs.* All efforts should be made to ensure that children do not drop out before obtaining their diploma — we shouldn’t lose kids at the finish line when they have made it through the whole education pipeline.
6. *Continuity and support in school.* Keeping children in the same school (and even in the same track) until they get the first diploma greatly reduces drop-out rates.

Are these lessons also applicable across the Atlantic?

In the United States, services for English as a second language (ESL) students are rooted in the civil rights movement, which has had both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, framing this as an equality issue has provided new opportunities — and access to services — to many children who otherwise may have been excluded. On the other hand, this issue has become very politicized. Policies governing how kids are taught became flashpoints for controversy instead of debates on education quality (for instance, some states passed laws against bilingual education based on political pressures, not based on any empirical evidence that it did harm). The 2001 No Child Left Behind Law changed this paradigm by tying federal funding to standardized test scores. Suddenly, teachers were held accountable for the performance of English language learners (ELLs), who had to reach the same standards as their native peers (for instance learning academic English instead of being allowed to just get by with “everyday English”). Although controversial, this provided one way of overcoming the low expectations teachers tended to have for second-generation youth.

While the US and Europe face extremely different political landscapes, two common challenges were raised:

1. *Teacher quality.* Providing quality instruction is critical to ensuring that any vulnerable population “catches up,” but the explosion of the non-native-student population has outpaced teachers’ abilities to gain necessary new skills. Also, schools lack bilingual teachers who can provide cultural, as well as linguistic, bridges.

2. *Parental involvement.* Some of the most successful programs have focused on educating *parents* about their children's rights in school and making information readily available to immigrant parents who may lack networks. This helps them to be more engaged and learn what they should expect of teachers.

An example from Sweden concluded that teacher quality is the single most important factor in school performance. Poor outcomes for students could be linked to residential segregation; children did poorly if they didn't live in areas that could attract good teachers. An innovative integration program in North-Rhine Westphalia echoed these concerns. Its success was premised on building up a cadre of quality teachers (especially those of immigrant background who could serve as role models); emphasizing language acquisition; and educating parents. Also, the initiative was able to set the tone in the community that education plays an essential role in integration, and that youth with immigrant backgrounds are not only ones who benefit.

### **“People are taking a big risk if they do not support reforms”**

Participants agreed that in order for integration programs to work, natives must feel invested in them and believe that they benefit *all* of society, not just immigrants. This can be accomplished if governments send a clear message that integration is a priority and highlight that issues that are critical for migrants are often a subset of larger necessary reforms for all disadvantaged youth in society. For example, early selection is especially detrimental to migrant groups, but also negatively affects natives who are unskilled and have low educational backgrounds. In fact, one participant made the point that the focus is too often *just* on immigrants, when the spotlight should be on the disadvantaged in general.

### **Panel III: Integration Awards**

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The final discussion centered around what we can learn from innovative *local* integration initiatives in Germany and the United States, as integration cannot be accomplished solely at the legislative level. Winners of the 2009 MPI *E Pluribus Unum* US immigrant integration prize program and the 2005 BMI-Bertelsmann National Competition presented their projects.

#### ***AVANCE – El Paso (Texas, United States)***

This early childhood program aims to improve the outcomes of children of immigrants by serving the family as a whole, beginning before children start their formal schooling. The philosophy is that “early” means the first three years of life, when patterns are being set that will affect lifelong learning. As a child is also most dependent on his parents at this age, the parents become the most important teachers.

Although they come from predominantly low-income, English language learner (ELL) families, children who completed the nine-month Avance program with their parents outscored their native peers in the state of Texas. This shows that you can reverse the effects of disadvantage if you start early. Although the cost of about \$2,500 per family may seem steep in the current economic climate, the costs of failure are much greater if a child fails out of school. The executive director put things into perspective by saying that it costs three times as much if a child has to repeat a grade, and it costs six times as much for the state to pay for one prison inmate.

**“Poverty does not have to lead to school failure.”**

***Department for Integration Policy, Stuttgart (Germany)***

The goal of the city of Stuttgart’s integration program is to ensure that migrants have the same opportunities as natives in terms of education, employment, access to services, and social/political opportunities. One priority is to capitalize upon cultural diversity and increase the number of leaders with a migrant background, so that the elected officials reflect the people they serve.

The principal strategy is to cultivate public support by emphasizing that integration is a two-way process — migrants must make an effort, but the host society must take responsibility as well. In this vein, Stuttgart promotes projects carried out jointly by migrants and natives in schools and other public venues. The city also aims to change the parameters of the debate by communicating openly about the *benefits* it receives from immigration (as opposed to discussing the issue solely in terms of burdens on the city). The logo, “All residents are Stuttgartners” embodies their campaign to improve communication and disseminate opportunities.

***Local Integration Policy in Solingen (Germany)***

The local government in Solingen was spurred to increase its integration efforts in the wake of a xenophobic attack on a Turkish family in 1993. The resulting initiatives aimed to promote equitable social participation for *all* residents in two principal ways: first, by encouraging immigrant-origin populations to get involved in public life (achieved by employing officials who speak the target group’s native language); and second, developing integration policies that target *native German* youth and aim to prevent xenophobia. These values were reflected in the 2005 “Solingen Integration Exchange” motto: “Shared Designs, Decisions and Responsibilities.”

With its local integration policies, the city has achieved a high degree of civic engagement from its immigrant-origin populations. A wide range of courses meets the large demand for German language instruction. The “interracial climate” of the city has improved significantly since the local government made integration a top policy priority.

***Internationals Network for Public Schools (New York, United States)***

Instead of trying to bring effective practices to scale by attempting to “replicate” a successful program in a different area (which is often ineffective as each situation is different), the Internationals Network tries to reproduce the *underpinnings* of success by training practitioners.

This program is built around three basic principles. First, language is emphasized in two fundamental ways: every single teacher is expected to be a teacher of both language and content, and a curriculum built around small-group projects forces students to practice their language skills all the time. Second, all students learn in the same classroom, and there is no selection into different tracks. Third, children are kept for longer than four years if necessary; there is no expectation that kids will get past all their exams “on time.” The principles emphasized here echo the conclusions from the discussion on Turkish youth in Europe, showing that there are transatlantic applications.

**“Parents are their child’s first and most important teachers.”**



These innovative initiatives demonstrate alternative ways of achieving reform. It is important to have successes at the local level which allow you to segue into national policy, rather than tackling ideological debates first. If you start small and create “proof-points” in a couple of places, you have the opportunity to move policy eventually.

One common thread tying together all four programs is the underlying philosophy of celebrating diversity; they don’t look at these students as the most challenged or the most disadvantaged, but instead perceive them to be those who have the most to offer. Diversity is essential in all institutions in order to ensure that smart decisions are being made.

## **Conclusion**

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Despite the vast differences in immigration history, policy, and politics across the Atlantic, there are several common building blocks for crafting successful integration strategies for second-generation youth. These include: ensuring both equity and excellence in school systems by improving teacher quality, engaging parents, and emphasizing fluency in the host-country language; shaping labor migration policies to select immigrants with an eye toward integration; and enacting and diligently enforcing anti-discrimination legislation.

Achieving these goals requires a combined effort from local, federal, and national governments to devise and implement policies that are both ambitious and supported by the public. We can draw several preliminary conclusions in this regard:

- *Integration must start with language instruction at a very early age.* The most effective way to reduce the gap between second-generation youth and their native peers is to increase the contact between the two groups, which helps immigrant children build networks, learn the host-country language, and advance to higher education. This can be accomplished by starting school at an early age, having “mixed” (non-segregated) schools, and delaying “tracking” (maximizing the years between starting school and choosing a specialized track).
- *School systems should be as flexible as possible.* Talented students should not be held back simply because they do not follow the traditional timetable and route to higher education; more time in secondary school, mentoring, and “bridging programs” can support children who may otherwise drop out. All efforts should be made to ensure that children do not drop out before obtaining their diploma —schools should not “lose” kids at the finish line.
- *Both immigrants and natives must be invested in reforms.* Integration initiatives are only successful if members across society feel that they will benefit from the investment; this is especially true during a time of economic crisis when budgets are tight. A successful political strategy for safeguarding the needed investments becomes easier if it can show a track record of success (for instance by pointing to local success stories) and showing that the price of failure *for the society as a whole* is greater than the initial financial investment.

National and local governments both play important but distinct roles in immigrant integration in both North America and Europe. The division of labor depends very much on a country’s political structure.

National/federal governments may serve the following functions:



- Providing ideas and funding to local communities.
- Monitoring the implementation of projects and setting standards (where possible) for how the money is spent.
- Conducting comprehensive evaluations to test whether an initiative is really working. Even in cases of success, unless we understand *why* something is working—and why it is working in a specific context—we will not be able to replicate the success.
- Identifying bad practices (“naming and shaming”).
- Creating repositories (“clearing houses”) of knowledge (analysis of good practices, dissemination of good experiences, investment in virtuous cycles that can be emulated).

The national government must also “set the tone” for the debate. In Germany, despite a firm ideological and financial commitment to integration on the local level, substantial progress could not be made as long as the national government was promoting the view of immigrants as “guests” who would eventually leave. Once the government adjusted its tone and expectations, there was a fundamental change in how the public perceived immigration. Similarly, the “tone” of the US debate also influences policy. Communities and businesses are more willing to invest in integration initiatives when the image of America as a “great integration machine” that seamlessly absorbs new people—and thus builds a new society—is emphasized.