Secondary Publication

Kanas, Agnieszka; Kosyakova, Yuliya

Editorial : Migration and integration ; tackling policy challenges, opportunities and solutions

Date of secondary publication: 08.08.2025

Version of Record (Published Version), Article

Persistent identifier: urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-irb-109600x

Primary publication

Kanas, Agnieszka; Kosyakova, Yuliya (2024): Editorial : Migration and integration : tackling policy challenges, opportunities and solutions, in: Frontiers in Human Dynamics, Lausanne: Frontiers Media, vol. 6, no. 1394331, pp. 1–3, doi: 10.3389/fhumd.2024.1394331

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frontiers | Frontiers in Human Dynamics

TYPE Editorial
PUBLISHED 25 March 2024
DOI 10.3389/fhumd.2024.1394331

Check for updates

OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 01 March 2024
ACCEPTED 06 March 2024
PUBLISHED 25 March 2024

CITATION
Kanas A and Kosyakova Y (2024) Editorial: Migration and integration: tackling policy challenges, opportunities and solutions. *Front. Hum. Dyn.* 6:1394331. doi: 10.3389/fhumd.2024.1394331

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Editorial: Migration and integration: tackling policy challenges, opportunities and solutions

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KEYWORDS

migration policy, integration policy, immigrants, refugees, integration outcomes

Editorial on the Research Topic
Migration and integration: tackling policy challenges, opportunities and solutions

Over recent decades, Europe has witnessed a profound demographic transformation, marked by a significant increase in the foreign-born population. From the late 1990s to 2022, the share of foreign-born individuals in the European Union surged from 3.5 percent to 21 percent, with a substantial portion comprising non-EU nationals (Eurostat, 2022). This demographic shift, propelled by economic migration and humanitarian crises, has fundamentally altered the ethnic and cultural landscape of European societies.

While immigration brings potential economic and cultural benefits, it also presents integration challenges. Immigrants and their descendants often encounter barriers in accessing employment and face discrimination, contributing to higher unemployment rates and lower-quality jobs, particularly in low-skilled sectors (OECD, 2018). Moreover, the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments, reflected in the emergence of populist far-right parties and anti-refugee rhetoric, underscores the complexity of integrating diverse populations into European communities.

Tackling these challenges necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the impact and effectiveness of migration and integration policies at various levels of governance—from supranational to local. Policy measures are instrumental in directing migrant flows, ensuring access to essential services such as healthcare and housing, and facilitating the integration process. Yet, despite the importance of these interventions, a persistent gap often exists between policy intentions and their actual implementation. Limited resources or political will can hinder governments from fully realizing integration measures.

This Research Topic convenes a series of investigations into migration and integration policies, scrutinizing their ramifications on the structural and socio-cultural integration of immigrants. The contributions range from policy analysis, dissecting the content and purpose of national laws and regulations (as evidenced by the works of King as well as by Kleinewiese in this issue), to explorations of policy execution and its impacts at more localized levels (exemplified by the research conducted by Damen et al., as well as Kassam and Becker). For instance, King utilized data from the European Union Labour Force survey to examine the impact of migration and integration policies on immigrant

marginalization within Europe. His research underscores the significant role played by restrictive immigration policies, labor market institutions, and the welfare state on migrants' experience of marginalization. Complementarily, Kleinewiese employed factorial survey experiments to probe the underpinnings of everyday discrimination against immigrants, revealing that the perception of fairness can mitigate ethnic discrimination.

In this context, particular emphasis is placed on understanding the role of migration and integration policies in addressing the needs of marginalized immigrant groups, including women and refugees. Kosyakova and Kogan provide an overview of the research findings in refugees' labor market challenges and discuss the individual and contextual factors shaping refugees' labor market trajectories. Meanwhile, Kassam and Becker's study focuses on recently arrived Syrian refugees in Germany, shedding light on the importance of ethnic social networks and economic factors in shaping their political engagement. Additionally, Damen et al. analyze recent Syrian refugees in the Netherlands, highlighting the critical role of reception policies and regional unemployment rates in facilitating refugee's employment. Furthermore, Zavisca et al.'s research offers valuable insights into the hardships endured by internally displaced persons as a result of the conflict in Ukraine. Their findings emphasize the profound negative effects of housing deprivation, which significantly undermines both the material and experiential wellbeing of internally displaced individuals.

Another important dimension examined in this issue concerns selectivity of immigrant populations and how it interacts with policies in immigrant countries of origin and destination (Tibajev and Nygård and Gundacker et al., 2024 in this issue). Using large scale, representative data among immigrants in Sweden, Tibajev and Nygård investigate the selectivity patterns of female immigrants. Their findings reveal a surprising trend of more favorable selection among female immigrants in terms of employment activity compared to expectations based on their origin-country female employment rates. Similarly, Gundacker et al.'s (2024) study illustrates how external barriers shape the socio-demographic composition of refugees. They show that riskier routes and higher entry barriers are associated with a lower share of female migrants, a lower share traveling with family members, and a higher socio-economic background.

Among individual factors, human capital emerges as an important predictor of immigrants' integration outcomes. Kanas and Fenger, leveraging comparative survey data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, highlight the role of non-cognitive skills in perpetuating labor market disparities between immigrants and native-born workers, advocating for targeted policy interventions to bridge these gaps. Seibel's comparative survey analysis across Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands stresses the importance of immigrants' awareness of their social rights to access crucial resources for their wellbeing, such as healthcare and financial security. However, the strength of this relationship varies across receiving countries and differs according to welfare domains, including healthcare, childcare, unemployment benefits, social assistance, and state pensions. Additionally, Kuhlemann's examination of the time use patterns of recent refugees in Germany provides valuable insights into their daily activities and priorities compared to other immigrant groups and natives. The study suggests a potential overrepresentation of refugees in childcare responsibilities and overall low activity clusters, which may serve as barriers to their employment and social inclusion. Further insights emerge from earlier studies mentioned in this editorial. Tibajev and Nygård highlight the significance of pre-migration work experience for the labor force participation of immigrant women in Sweden. Similarly, Damen et al. emphasize the importance of host-country-specific skills, such as proficiency in the Dutch language and completion of integration courses, for the employment outcomes of refugees in the Netherlands.

In synthesis, this issue underscores the imperative for a comprehensive approach to migration and integration policies, one that accounts for the complex interplay between policy formulation, implementation, and compositional differences in immigrant populations. By delving into these dynamics, this compilation of research deepens our understanding and lays the groundwork for the development of more impactful and inclusive policies that promote the integration and wellbeing of diverse immigrant populations in Europe.

Author contributions

Both authors contributed equally to the Editorial.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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