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Social Inclusion of Foreigners in Poland

Abstract

Poland has a relatively short history of immigration compared to other member states of the European Union. However, in recent decades, the number of foreigners in Poland has increased significantly. Intercultural relations may take the form of hostility, conflict, antagonism, segregation, separation, neutral co-presence, partial social adaptation, avoidance, withdrawal, alienation, marginalisation, integration, assimilation or acculturation. This paper is dedicated to an integration model. The author describes the phenomenon of migration and social inclusion of foreigners in Poland. The author also distinguishes factors and entities, which are important for the process of social inclusion. At the end of the paper the author highlights the different needs of Polish society. They cover, dialogue with foreigners, the creation, and an increase in social awareness, of an integration policy for foreigners learning about multiculturalism and allowing foreigners the opportunity to participate and play active roles within all areas of Polish society.

Keywords: social inclusion, integration, migration, foreigners, intercultural relationships, Poland

Introduction

Poland has historically been primarily an emigration country. Recently, however, Poland has been changing into an emigration-immigration country with the latter being boosted by European Union membership and the strong, stable growth of the country's economy. In the last few years, immigrants have started to play an important role in the Polish labour market, which creates an additional challenge for its institutionalised structure. At the same time, the institutional framework for receiving immigrants, especially integration policy, has not been fully developed yet (Duszczek & Góra, 2012). It is addressed only to refugees and repatriates and is provided mostly by NGOs who run various integration programmes (most often focused on providing them with language courses). Public expenditure on integration policies has recently increased. However, data on immigrants, analysis of integration and progress on an immigration policy are still close to non-existent. Perhaps, with the current refugee problem in Europe, Poland will begin to create the required reforms and processes needed for effective immigration policies.

Generally, foreigners can be identified from five main groups in Poland. These represent foreigners coming from:

- The European Economic Area and Switzerland;
- The OECD member states (except for the European Economic Area and Switzerland);
- Poland's Eastern neighbouring countries (Belarus, Ukraine and Russia);
- Far East countries (mostly Vietnam and China);
- Other regions.

The reasons for immigrating to Poland are homogeneous with those for migrating to other countries. First of all, foreigners are looking for “a better life”, resulting in finding work, being allowed to study or reunited with their family. Therefore, at the beginning it is worth analysing the phenomenon of overall migration.

Migrations in Europe

The first of May 2004 marked an important date in the history of Europe as a political, geographic, and social entity. Ten European countries joined the European Union, bringing in their potential and expectations, adding a total population of 75 million people and a territory of 738,000 square kilometers. The EU-25 consists of 452 million citizens.

The main question is: why do people migrate? The answers could be one or more of: to be reunited with family, work to support their family, flee war or other dangerous situations back home and seek freedom and safety in other countries, pursue their faith or to simply seek fun and adventure.

For centuries, European migration patterns consisted mainly of movement around the continent, or away from it. Millions tried to flee religious persecution. Others were driven by hunger and poverty, including impoverished southern Europeans (Barter, 2002).

In the years 1950-1960 workers arrived in their millions to fill the gaps in European labour markets. National policies were fairly liberal, resulting in a lot of foreigners coming to Europe from overseas territories, often with previous colonial and other historic ties. Immigrants from West-Indies and India went to the UK, Algerians and Moroccans to France, and the Netherlands with large numbers of Turkish heading to Germany. During those years, the contacts between Turkey and Maghreb were initiated. The migration from South-European countries to North Europe also began.

The numbers peaked in the early 1960s, creating a net European migration figure, which is far higher than today's. These immigrants, mostly non-white, were not expected to stay.

Policies became restrictive from the 1970's on, due to a saturation of the labour market. In 1973, migration stopped and in the 1980s there was a period of recession. Some possibilities, however remained; family reunification, studies or seasonal work. This forced the asylum system to carry the weight of the migration wave. The 1980's also brought about the accession of the South-European states, such as Greece, Spain, and Portugal, who initially faced immigration restrictions on their people.

In the 1990s Germany had the largest influx of migrants, while the United Kingdom was second. By 2000, many governments had revised their policies, in order to adjust to the changing employment and demographic requirements. In 2002, they started investing in return programmes.

Immigration policy of the European Union

The pressure to move from developing countries is being perpetuated by Europe's own policies. The EU's protectionism, agricultural policies and subsidies

are all contributing to making life tougher for the developing world, increasing the pressure for people to leave.

There have also been other problems, such as smuggling and trafficking networks, striking a balance between security and the basic rights of individuals and a country's historic relationship with minorities and policies for them.

The European Council (1999) held a special meeting on 15th and 16th October 1999 in Tampere focusing on freedom, security and justice in the European Union. The European Council established a common EU asylum and migration policy, which consists of:

- A comprehensive approach that finds a balance between humanitarian and economic admission;
- Fair treatment of third country nationals: to give them comparable rights and obligations to those of nationals;
- Development of partnerships with countries of origin, including policies of co-development.

Communication from European Commission (2000), recommending a common approach which should take into account:

- The economic and demographic development of the union;
- The capacity of reception of each member state, along with their historical and cultural links with the countries of origin;
- The situation in the countries of origin and the impact of migration policy on them;
- The need to develop specific integration policies: based on fair treatment of third-country nationals, the prevention of social exclusion, racism and xenophobia and the respect for diversity.

In the last 10 years, immigration to the EU has increased, due to demand for skilled and un-skilled labour and a low birth rate in the EU. Both the UK and Germany have announced schemes to attract more skilled immigrant workers.

A communication from the European Commission (2008) states that integration is really the key to successful immigration. Integration as a "two-way process" should be promoted, conforming to the Common Basic Principles on Integration. The participation of immigrants should be enhanced, while social cohesion and approaches to diversity in the host societies should be developed. To this end, the EU and its countries should:

- consolidate the EU framework for integration;
- support the management of diversity and the evaluation of the outcomes of integration policies in EU countries;
- promote integration programmes targeted at new immigrant arrivals;
- ensure equal advancement opportunities in the labour market for legal non-EU workers;
- apply social security schemes equally to immigrants and to EU nationals;
- develop means to increase the participation of immigrants in society;
- continue applying the EU asylum policy, while developing the measures further, in particular, through the Policy Plan on Asylum.

Since Poland became a member state of the European Union, the government has adapted its migration policy to EU standards.

Foreigners in Poland

Poland, which is geographically located between Eastern and Western Europe, generally used to be considered as a transit country by immigrants from outside the EU. However, it remains one of the few member states of the European Union that has not fallen prey to the recession and continues to show a positive economic growth trend. This has led to a change in perception among foreigners and Poland is now considered an attractive opportunity.

Poland has a relatively short history of immigration compared to other European Union members. The communist regime prevented the processes of immigration by a restrictive migration policy, making Poland an example of ethnic homogeneity. The above-mentioned historical factors have shaped contemporary Polish society's perception of migration and immigrants in general.

The information about the number of foreigners in Poland is provided by the organisation named Hafelekar. In cooperation with the European Union Foundation, "Leonardo da Vinci" and "Job-in-a-job", Hafelekar (2016) created a "Report about immigrants in Poland". It concluded that, the main countries from which foreigners came to Poland are the countries of the former Soviet Union (Ukraine, Belarus and Russia). A relatively large group of immigrants to Poland are citizens from developed countries, such as the USA, Germany, France, and Vietnam. Every third foreigner living in Poland comes from one of its neighboring countries. The most immigrants came from Ukraine (26.6%), with a large number of people coming from Belarus (9.2%) and China (4.2%).

There are two important characteristics of immigrants living in Poland. Firstly, they are generally very well educated (36% university graduates) and, secondly, they are people of working age (80% are aged between 20 to 59 years). This means that active people migrate to Poland with the majority of them being men. Immigrants from different parts of the world tend not to settle in the same Polish regions. Immigrants from Western European countries and the United States live in Warsaw, Krakow and the surrounding area. Immigrants coming from countries of the former Soviet Union primarily live in the eastern provinces. The biggest group of immigrants resides in the Mazowiecka province (30%), the Małopolska province ranks next, followed by Lower Silesia and Lodz. Approximately 83% of all immigrants live in cities (Hafelekar, 2016).

Social inclusion

R. Penninx (2003, p. 1) claims that, "Integration is the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. This definition of integration is deliberately left open, because the particular requirements for acceptance by a receiving society vary greatly from country to country. The openness of this definition also reflects the fact that the responsibility for integration rests not with one particular group, but rather with many factors—immigrants themselves, the host government, institutions, and communities, to name a few". Integration is also defined as the social coexistence that brings about racial desegregation, equal opportunities regardless of race and cultural origin. The nature of the process is quite complex and may appear in many aspects (structural, cultural, social etc.) affecting both immigrants and the receiving society.

The government supports pro-immigrant initiatives. Many information campaigns and educational activities are organised in order to promote tolerance and respect for cultural and national identity (Matysiewicz, 2012).

The key government strategic document covering the issue of immigrant integration, “Migration Policy of Poland – Current State of Play and Further Actions” was elaborated on by the inter-ministerial Committee for Migration in July 2011 and then adopted by the Polish government in July 2012. In December 2014, the action plan to this document was developed by the Committee and was approved by the Polish government. It specifies ways to implement the recommendations contained in the document, costs, sources of financing, responsible institutions and deadlines for implementation. The majority of actions, which address the recommendations concerning integration, are due to be completed by the end of 2016.

Despite the adoption of the strategic document, Poland’s integration policy may still be regarded as under developed. Polish state institutions are obliged to provide special integration support and services to repatriates and foreigners who have been granted international protection. However, for the other categories of third country nationals, state institutions are not obliged to provide any integration. This task is left to non-governmental organizations which rely on external sources of financing.

NGO activities are highly dependent on the availability of EU funds. Without this external funding, the majority of integration projects in Poland targeted at third country nationals, especially those not under international protection, could not be implemented (Stefańska, 2015). Unfortunately, the government’s strategic documents do not provide for alternative sources of funding for them. Such a situation does not guarantee stability and continuity for these organizations’ actions.

In Poland there are many independent non-profit organisations whose collective mission is to develop an open and diverse society. They aim to do this through supporting intercultural dialogue and social integration, challenging discrimination, increasing knowledge and developing tools that strengthen social integration and equality, as well as empowering social minorities, migrants and migrant communities.

Some of the NGO’s are also engaged in critical analysis of the history of social diversity in Poland, so that past experiences can provide constructive insight into the current debate about contemporary issues related to migration, equality and social inclusion.

Polish NGO’s works toward a vision of society in which every person feels free and safe, can develop and participate in social life in accordance with their needs and ambitions, independent of who they are or where they come from. A society where social diversity is respected, valued and nurtured.

E. Sowa-Behtane (2013) analyses her own research, which investigated the integration of foreigners who are in relationships with Polish nationals and living in Poland. The author identified that the factors important in the process of social inclusion are:

- life plans foreigners (whether they are related to the Pole),
- knowledge of the Polish language,
- knowledge of the country of residence,
- employment,

- participation in the traditions of the country,
- ability to practice their religion and their traditions,
- participation in the Polish cultural life,
- participation in social networks,
- no discrimination from locals,
- perception and opinion of Poland.

The studies has shown that, a foreigner whose life plans are related to the Pole (wife, cohabitant), who speaks Polish, who has knowledge about Poland, who is employed, who participates in Polish culture, traditions and social networks, who is able to practice their own religion and traditions, who is not discriminated by the locals and who has positive opinion about Poland, is best positioned for a fully immersive social inclusion.

As part of the social inclusion process, the following entities also need to be supportive: nursery/kindergarten/school, language school, labor office, employer, volunteering, NGO, office of the city/municipal/district, social welfare center, county family support center, health clinic, tax office and police (Sowa-Behtane, 2012). If all the entities become empathetic to the strategic and tactical requirements for social inclusion, then the integration of immigrants into Polish society will have a positive ending.

Conclusion

Poland is among one of the countries tied to the international movement of populations, therefore, it is also affected by various migration issues. These, in turn, have an impact on society at many levels. Hence, it must move towards dialogue with the foreigners who have arrived, so that, with proper diversity management, there is an opportunity to build inclusive communities together. These can be characterised by the eradication of any social distance between groups, as well as related prejudices and discrimination. In pursuing this intention, social inclusion becomes a key tool, which allows social groups of differing ethnicities, cultures and religions to include them in the host society.

Thus, there is a need for the proper creation of an integration policy for foreigners and for an increase in social awareness in Polish society. Firstly, this translates into the recognition for the need of proper planning and the undertaking of activities related to the phenomena of migration and integration, their dynamics and related processes. Secondly, the pre-migration personal situations of foreigners, as well as the economic and political fabric of the host country, must be considered.

Finally, we must remember, that by including foreigners, we are also helping ourselves improve our everyday living environment. If we brand them as “outsiders”, so shall they likely remain, not only within society but also personally. We will feel this in the quality of our everyday existence which, looking forward, will inevitably become more and more multicultural. Thus, in seeking the creation of a successful Polish immigration policy, we must learn to adopt a positive multicultural attitude and allow foreigners to be accepted as valued members of Polish society.

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