

September 2009

Policy Brief - POLAND

The project aims

EMILIE PROJECT OVERVIEW

EMILIE examines the migration and integration experiences of nine EU Member States and attempts to respond to the new challenges that multiculturalism is facing in Europe in the early 21st century. EMILIE studies three important areas: Education; Discrimination in the workplace; Voting rights and civic participation, in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Poland, Spain and the UK. EMILIE aims to:

- track the relationship between migration-related diversity and citizenship, i.e. multicultural citizenship, across these EU countries; and
- identify whether multicultural citizenship is emerging in Europe, and if so what distinctive patterns and types can distinguished.

Case studies

EMILIE conducted three policy-related case studies in each country. The first set of case studies focused on education policy and the measures and practices adopted in dealing with cultural diversity in secondary education. The second set of case studies assessed the implementation of the EU 2000 Anti-Discrimination Directives in the different national contexts. And the third set of case studies investigated voting rights and overall issues of political participation and representation of migrant communities and ethnic minorities in the countries studied.

Definitions

(Multicultural) Citizenship: The notion of citizenship requires a self-governing political community in which individuals have rights and correlative duties enforced by law but are likely to also have a sense of shaping and being shaped by a public space that goes beyond law and politics. Multicultural citizenship debates ask how citizenship can be fully enacted for and by individuals that are culturally diverse.

Methods, data and period of reference

Each case study focuses in the last twenty year period (from 1989 till today). Data collected include policy documents, media coverage, scholarly studies, statistical data, qualitative interviews with key informants, and where it has been possible discussion groups with civil society actors and policy makers.

Focus

The project is concerned with migration-related cultural diversity and not with historical, native ethnic minorities. Special attention is paid to religious diversity and issues concerning Muslim migrants as their integration in European societies has been approached as increasingly challenging in these EU Member States.

Main findings

- Poland is characterized by a relatively low number of immigrants and has one of the lowest shares of immigrants in its population - approximately 0.1% (OECD, Migration Outlook 2007). According to the population register of December the 31st of 2006, foreigners constituted 0.145% of the total population in Poland (corresponding to 54,883 persons).
- The majority of the immigrant population in Poland is constituted by nationals of the three eastern neighbouring countries: Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. These immigrants join their co-ethnic national minorities that have been established in the country for centuries.
- Old national and ethnic minorities, as recognized by the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Languages of 2005, consist of:
 - the Armenian, Belarusian, Czech, German, Jewish, Lithuanian, Russian, Slovak, and Ukrainian national minorities and
 - the following ethnic minorities: Karaim, Lemko, Roma, Tatar.
- Immigrants' engagement in Polish civic or political life has been extremely limited so far. The concerns of immigrants living in Poland mainly revolve around work and stay legalisation procedures. Moreover, those lacking necessary documents and working illegally try to be as invisible as possible.
- Non-citizens have neither active nor passive political rights.
- There are no structures enabling immigrants to influence political decisions on the local or national level.
- Immigrants do not raise claims for participation in local elections.
- Due to their low numbers and their lack of political rights, foreigners are not perceived as potential supporters by the mainstream political parties.

Features of migrant population and their political participation

- The immigrant population of Poland mainly consists of first generation immigrants. The number of naturalized immigrants remains insignificant – there have been only 10,140 acquisitions of Polish citizenship between 2002 and 2007. According to the estimate of the Central Statistical Office, the number of immigrants residing temporarily (for three months or longer) in Poland at the end of December 2006 was approximately 200,000 (of which Ukrainian citizens constituted the dominant category). 60,000 of these immigrants have been living in Poland for more than 12 months.
- Immigrants do not show interest in taking part in public life. They are mainly preoccupied with their work and stay legalisation and prolongation procedures. In particular, the time-consuming process that they have to go through in order to legalise their stay in the country constitute a significant factor discouraging them from involvement in civic activities.
- The majority of immigrants in Poland do not settle down in the country. Their incomes are not sufficient to bring their families to Poland and shuttle migration is a rather common phenomenon. Immigrants employed in shadow economy try to be as invisible as possible.
- The immigrants' political culture is another factor explaining their non-participation in civic and political affairs. Most immigrants come from countries that have limited or no experience of democracy (former USSR countries, Vietnam). In their case, lack of experience in the country of origin does not encourage engagement in the receiving country.
- The size of the immigrant population in Poland is still small. As a result, politicians do not perceive immigrants as a group of future voters and are not interested, either, in working towards the assurance of their political rights. After all, there is no formal political mechanism that would provide a forum for consultation and dialogue between elected representatives and foreign residents. Nor is there any legal basis that would accommodate the development of the political activation of non-citizens.

In Poland immigrants have no political rights. Citizens of foreign countries and stateless persons cannot participate in national elections. However, those possessing temporary residence or settlement permits have the right to associate on the same basis that Polish citizens do. The undocumented migrants can join a union as long as its statute allows them to do so.

Immigrants raise no claims for political rights in local elections. Moreover, granting such voting rights would require complex changes in existing law regulations and acts. That combined with the low numbers of foreigners and the fact that they are preoccupied about other things (namely, the legalization of their work and stay) are all factors indicating that this topic will not appear on the agenda for quite a while.

In 2005 the first naturalised immigrant was elected in the Polish Parliament. He originated from Bangladesh and had been living in Poland for more than 30 years. There have been a few cases of naturalized citizens that have been elected as local councillors. Such cases of elected representatives do not possess any ethnic base of supporters (voters). They merely enjoy a respectful position in the local community (for example, they may be doctors). Overall, however, such active naturalized citizens are exceptions.

Overall approach to citizenship and diversity

The Polish Constitution (1997) recognizes that not all Polish citizens are ethnically defined as Poles. It accepts their right to express their ethnic identity freely, not only in the private but also in the public domain. Historical minority rights are protected by the Constitution and guaranteed by specific acts as regards education and the media. They are also guaranteed by specific voting regulations (to Parliament) and by the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and the Regional Language (2005). Historical minorities benefit from a special advisory body appointed by the Prime Minister. There is also a parliamentary commission that deals with minority issues, while similar commissions exist on the voivodship level (prefecture). The above might indicate that Poland is close to a civic understanding of nationhood. However, this would be a seriously misleading assumption.

Although it is accepted that not all Polish citizens are ethnically Polish, Polish ethnicity and culture acquire a dominant position. The preamble to the Polish Constitution (1997) clearly prioritises Poles as the core ethnos in an ethnically defined nation state. This is reflected in migration policy in various ways. In particular, in practices of repatriation and in a special treatment of persons who can prove their Polish origin (Act of the Polish Chart of 2007).

As regards foreigners without any Polish roots, they are treated as the citizens of new EU member states have been in the EU15 before the enlargement. They are equivalent to guestworkers that come to cover shortages in the Polish labour market and are expected to return home when there is no demand for their work.

The three Polish Citizenship Acts (1920, 1951, 1962), having been affected by the historical shifts of Poland in the 20th century (World War 2 and its geopolitical consequences), develop a concept of citizenship that transcends from a multiethnic to a monoethnic view of society. Minorities become exceptions to a general monocultural reality. In fact, Poland has become one of the most homogenous states in Europe. However, following the fall of communism in 1989 the question of the “new” Polish citizens preoccupied public discourse.

Forms of participation given to non-citizens

There are no structures enabling immigrants to influence political decisions on a local or national level. The Foreigners’ Forum created in 2008 by the Office of Mazovian Voivodship is the first attempt providing a platform for the expression of immigrants’ views before state authorities. However, in practice the Forum mainly gathers Poles working in immigrant-related NGOs and other institutions.

There are no political parties of immigrants and the question of voting rights at the local level for non-EU citizens is not on the agenda of political parties. Foreigners are not regarded as a potential target-group of supporters by the mainstream parties.

So far, the most visible and successful immigrant associations are those set up the Vietnamese. However, their activities are mainly consumed in self-help and the preservation of their ethnic and cultural identity. In this case, the frequent contacts with co-ethnics result in alienation from the host country. Immigrants of African and Middle East origin have also founded socio-cultural ethnic organizations. However, the scale and intensity of the activities undertaken in these organisations are not comparable with the Vietnamese ones.

Conclusions

So far immigrants engage little in the civic or political sphere in the case of Poland. Nevertheless, we can observe certain strategies that they follow. Our research identified two main models of immigrants' political participation in Poland:

Immigrants' cooperation with historical ethnic/national minorities

This is an 'underground', yet prevalent, strategy of immigrants who belong to the same ethnic group with recognised national minorities. They do not create immigrant-based structures in order to influence political decisions. They influence politics via their 'historical' co-ethnics platforms. Armenian immigrants are a characteristic example. They improved their situation through a political path even though they lacked political rights. They achieved to do so by relying on their co-ethnics: Polish citizens that are descendants of Armenians who arrived to Poland few hundred years ago.

Following Western pattern of political representation

The second model refers to religious minorities and Muslim immigrants. The best example is given by the Muslim League that seems to have replaced the old minority of the Muslims – Tatars who are assimilated to Polish society. Interestingly, at the beginning of the 21st century Muslims were regarded as a marginal and less active group. Today the League increasingly becomes the main body of public/political representation of the Muslims. The example of the League indicates that equal rights or citizenship are not sufficient premises of claims making for Muslim immigration in Poland.

Immigrants raise no claims for political rights in local elections. Moreover, granting such voting rights would require complex changes in existing law regulations and acts. That combined with the low numbers of foreigners and the fact that they are preoccupied about other things (namely, the legalization of their work and stay) are all factors indicating that this topic will not appear on the agenda for quite a while.

Key messages for policy makers

Although immigrants have a limited interest in actively participating in political life in Poland, one should expect changes in their behaviour in the near future. When the economic situation in Poland improves and the numbers of immigrants grow, the special weight of immigration in Poland's economy, society and politics will equally grow. When the second generation of immigrants will come on the scene and the legalization of the migrants' stay will become a less central aspect of their life, immigrants will become interested in more active and broad civic and political participation. After all attracting migrant labour force is a key concern towards Poland's economic development after the brain-drain that the country has experienced through the last decades' emigration.

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The EMILIE Research Project is funded by the European Commission, DG Research, 6th Framework Programme, Citizenship and Governance in a Knowledge Based Society. All Project Reports and Policy Briefs are available through the project's web site <http://emilie.eliamep.gr>.



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For more information on the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Programme of the European Commission please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index_en.html