

Preface

Immigration policy is an uncomfortable topic in many countries, including the new member states of the European Union (EU), although they have known migratory movements for centuries, notably the 20th century. On the eve of the 21st century, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Latvia and Poland saw large numbers of their populations emigrating. This process gained strength after the EU accession in 2004 when Poles and Latvians could exercise the free movement of persons, although not all labour markets of EU countries immediately awaited them with unlimited economic possibilities. Nevertheless, the large outflow of human resources from Latvia and Poland resulted in labour shortage that in turn has led to immigration, despite the restrictive national migration policies in place. For example, over 11 thousand foreigners received a temporary residence permit and over 8 thousand already received a long-term residency permit in Latvia in 2007.¹ But in Poland in 2007 over 23 thousand foreigners had resided temporarily, while another approximately 3 thousand foreigners had received settlement residence permits.²

Today Latvian and Polish societies expect that the Latvians and Poles living abroad feel welcome and receive an equal treatment in their host societies. But how welcoming are we as host countries? This is the main question of this publication that is at the heart of the project “Learning to Welcome: the Integration of Immigrant citizens in Latvia and Poland”. The project is implemented by the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS in Latvia, the Institute of Public Affairs in Poland and the Migration Policy Group in Belgium, and co-financed by the European Community under the Europe for Citizens Programme.

This project works under the following two premises. Firstly, we see our societies as diverse societies, where the concept of citizenship is inclusive of all residents who should have equal opportunities and rights, and cannot be seen solely as instruments filling labour market shortages. Secondly, we believe that it is not entirely correct to assume that all immigrants will stay in our societies temporarily. The example of so many Latvians and Poles demonstrates that it often is or becomes a personal strategy to emigrate and settle in another country.³

¹ Latvia's Ministry of Interior (04.03.2008). Informatīvais ziņojums par Vienotās patvēruma un migrācijas vadības sistēmas attīstības programmas 2006.–2009. gadam īstenošanu 2007. gadā [Informative report on the Unitary asylum and migration management development programme 2006–2009, implementation in 2007].

² Poland's Office for Foreigners (UDSC).

³ Although immigrants initially do not intend to stay permanently, many change their mind at a later stage. See, for example, “Migrants’ lives beyond the workplace: the experiences of Central and East Europeans in the UK”. Sarah Spencer, Martin Ruhs, Bridget Anderson and Ben Rogaly. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 29 May 2007.

This gives grounds to question the insistence in some capitals on policies facilitating only circular migration and the alleged non-existent need to work out integration policies to welcome the new members of our societies.

“Learning to Welcome” strives to shift the focus of public and policy debates away from the question of whether our countries do or do not need immigrants. It recognises the reality that our countries already have and will continue to have immigrants who should be encouraged to be active citizens. Weak or absent integration policies that do not encourage the active participation of all citizens regardless of their background may have a detrimental effect on public life, as many recent spectacular events have demonstrated across Europe. The project therefore poses a new question for public debate over whether our countries have developed clear integration policies to guarantee the rights and responsibilities of immigrant citizens and to promote welcoming host societies.

This publication consists of two parts. The first includes a review of EU standards and national policies found favourable for promoting these integration principles, based on the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). This part also compares the state of integration policies in Latvia and Poland in a European context. The second part consists of two research reports about the integration policies of immigrants in both countries, focusing on issues like access to labour market and services, anti-discrimination and political participation. These reports also analyse whether the integration policies in Latvia and Poland have taken into account EU standards, among them the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU.⁴

We hope that this publication will contribute towards promoting Active European Citizenship – active and informed participation of all residents of the EU – by spreading understanding of the rights of immigrants as new forms of citizens in their countries of residence. We also hope to promote understanding of immigration issues and fostering debate that can contribute to inclusive and participatory policy formulation in this important area.

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⁴ Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union. Justice and Home Affairs Council, 19 November 2004.