

Programme on Intercultural Conflicts and Societal Integration (AKI)
at the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB)

LANGUAGE – MIGRATION – INTEGRATION

A Memorandum for Political Intervention

One of the most conspicuous and at the same time most problematic social consequences of international migration is the development of ethnic stratifications: ethnic and other cultural characteristics of population groups combine systematically with disparities in education, income, access to core institutions and social recognition. Ethnic stratification exists in practically every country of immigration, although not all migrants are affected, and the ethnic groups involved may vary. In Germany, the phenomenon of ethnic stratification affects mainly migrants of Turkish descent. Ethnic stratifications do not only limit the possibilities for the individual development of non-native persons in the receiving societies, but hinder the free development of the productive potential inherent in the cultural pluralisation of the host country. Furthermore, they may generate the background for social conflicts.

Knowledge of the respective national language plays a crucial part in the formation and continuity of ethnic stratification, though this part is not exclusive and not independent of other possible influences such as social distances and discrimination. There is a general consensus by now as regards the eminent significance of language for the intergenerational integration of migrants. Opinions on processes and social conditions involved in the acquisition of a second language as well as its effects on a successful education and integration into the labour market are less unanimous, however. In order to identify and clarify the current state of knowledge, the *Programme on Intercultural Conflicts and Societal Integration (AKI)* therefore evaluated the sustainable research findings concerning the interrelations of migration, language and integration, as well as the effects of certain measures to improve language abilities and educational opportunities of migrants and their children:

- Hartmut Esser, Migration, Language, Integration, AKI Research Review 4, Berlin 2006
- Karen Schönwälder, Janina Söhn, Ines Michalowski, Language and Integration Courses for migrants: Findings on their Effects from the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany, AKI Research Review 3, Berlin 2005.
- Janina Söhn, Bilingual Instruction for Migrant Children. Results of Research and Evaluation Regarding its Effect on Second Language Acquisition and Success in School, AKI Research Review 2, Berlin 2005.

According to the results presented in the Research Reviews, language skills are indeed paramount for the integration of migrants into the receiving societies. Despite increasing international connectedness and the existence of a broad consensus regarding the appreciation of cultural

exchange and plurality in general, national language skills, both orally and in writing, remain crucial for education prospects and opportunities on the labour market. Promoting the acquisition of the respective official language has therefore a key position. Political interventions aiming to ensure equal life chances for people with and without a migration background should place particular emphasis on influencing this process.

What has to be done can be evaluated - at least generally and without looking in detail at practical possibilities of implementation - on the basis of the empirical results presented in the Research Reviews. Not all conditions and processes are equally accessible for political and social interventions however, and some of them are not accessible at all, for example conditions of education in the states of origin, individual family biographies or the linguistic distance between country of origin and receiving country.

In order to assess the efficiency and the outcomes of taking (or not taking) various measures to promote second language acquisition, to boost success in school and to improve the integration into the labour market, one has to pay particular attention to processes of mutual reinforcement of good as well as bad conditions (as applies for aspects of the integration of migrants in general): Bad conditions, such as low educational background of the parents, have a particularly strong impact on migrant children under further negative conditions such as insufficient facilities and low quality of instruction. On the other hand, every single improvement of such conditions has a particularly strong impact on disadvantaged (migrant) children. Under advantageous conditions, possible disadvantages resulting from the migration biography and language differences are significantly reduced and children with a background of migration win, without other children suffering a loss.

Given the increase of processes of international exchange and migration movements, it is to be expected that significant minorities within the German population will continue to speak a native language other than German, and that newcomers, or people who do not permanently live in Germany, will only have a limited command of the German language. The educational system holds the key to procuring education and opportunities on the labour market and must therefore deliberately and energetically adapt itself to the cultural pluralisation and its resulting language problems, because the pluralisation is continuous and to be regarded as permanent. Political interventions, for example via the educational system, can and must jointly support the goals of structural integration and cultural plurality with its ethnic identities and the formation of communities without paving the way for social segregation and ethnic stratification. Acceptance of such interventions will grow as it becomes obvious that cultural diversity and using its potential benefits all groups of society.

The following statements and recommendations concern the specific relationship of language and structural integration and the state of knowledge in this realm, documented in the three AKI Research Reviews. Their motivation is to bring intergenerational structural integration within reach and to counteract the formation of ethnic stratification more effectively than before.

Promote second language acquisition and offer a variety of formal and informal opportunities for learning

Politics of integration should attach great importance to the promotion of acquiring the local language, both by strengthening the motivation for learning and by offering a variety of formal as well as informal opportunities for learning.

Support early interethnic contacts and language acquisition in preschool and school education

Especially the acquisition of oral proficiency in the local language depends on everyday opportunities and social contacts. To facilitate its informal acquisition, interethnic contacts between children should be consistently promoted as early as possible, independently of potential measures for adults. Within the framework of state measures for integration in support of migrant children, such intervention can occur primarily in public institutions such as preschool and school education.

Avoid ethnic segregation with concentrations of problems

Biographies of migrants frequently involve specific problems of education and language. One should therefore seek to avoid an exceedingly high concentration of migrant children whose native language is not German in kindergartens and schools, or at least to counteract further segregation. This is particularly true here, where the effects of unfavourable conditions accumulate, but the improvement even of just a few problematic circumstances helps disadvantaged (migrant) children specifically. By measures such as granting free choice of elementary school or increasing the sale of municipal housing stocks, however, ethnic segregation might be intensified.

Consistent improvement of the facilities and the quality of instruction in schools situated in areas of concentrated disadvantage

This could be accomplished first of all by employing staff trained in teaching German as a second language and by giving parents of migrant children extra intense support concerning the advancement of their children by sending them to kindergarten, by choosing a good school, or by seeking help should language- and school problems occur.

Evaluate the efficiency of costly intervention programs systematically

Concepts and programs for linguistic and educational integration and for the integration into the labour market should be assessed systematically, and efficient programs should be developed. Measures such as (pre-)school coaching in German as a second language, counselling in questions of education, bilingual instruction models etcetera, particularly those that are still in their pilot stage, have to be evaluated by independent institutions, not only with regards to conceptual coherence, implementation and acceptance, but in particular with regards to their effects. Intervention programs that are financed on a long term basis should be based on the results of such analyses. Since 2005 a (language) training program for adult immigrants is offered in

Germany that is hitherto not based on verified insights with regard to probable effects on knowledge of German or structural integration. It is urgently advised that the necessary systematic research start early and with appropriate methods. A decision concerning the continuation or extension of such programs should be based upon the results.

Establish an intergenerational panel study on migration and integration

In Germany, a (permanent) monitoring of the development of migration- and integration processes by means of a suitable long-term study (“integration panel”) as demanded by the *Zuwanderungsrat* is urgently needed. Such a study should comprise the most important old, new and future groups of migrants in samples of adequate size. It should be accompanied by the establishment of an advisory board for migration and integration policy, working on a rigorously academic basis. Both measures represent important conditions for policies grounded in sound knowledge.

Doubtless, the implementation of the abovementioned recommendations is not an easy task. In any case, noticeable effects can only be expected in the long run. However, the chances for their implementation are politically more feasible and more acceptable from a humanitarian point of view than with regard to measures such as attempts to break up ethnic residential concentrations or limiting the recruitment of migrants specifically to entirely “unproblematic” groups. In view of a public acceptance of the recommended measures it is important to point out that preventing ethnic stratifications generally serves a collective purpose that cannot be valued too highly: It allows us to make use of the potential of cultural diversity, to discover and enjoy hidden talents and ethnic resources, and to lastingly attenuate one key aspect of the social background of ethnic conflicts and violence, that is to say the structural marginalisation of migrants and their children.

Prof. Dr. Klaus J. Bade
Prof. Dr. Hartmut Esser
Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Heitmeyer
Prof. Dr. Amélie Mummendey
Prof. Dr. Friedhelm Neidhardt
Priv.Do. Dr. Karen Schönwälder
Dipl.-Soz. Janina Söhn

Steering Group and academic team of the Programme on Intercultural Conflicts and Societal Integration (AKI) at the Social Science Research Centre Berlin (WZB)

February 2006