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# The Second Generation Is the Deciding Factor

## Food for thought for a change of perspective on German immigration policy

by *Ulrike Scheffer*

**Germany is going to adopt new immigration rules. The immigration of skilled personnel has been the main focus of deliberations. However, lessons learned in countries such as Canada show that even highly qualified immigrants take years to find their feet. With that in mind, we should not expect too much from the new Act on Skilled Worker Immigration (*Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz*), especially since the language barrier in Germany is significantly higher than in English-speaking countries. Nor is the act expected to ease the burden on the asylum system. Germany would therefore be wise to develop a long-term immigration concept. A possible approach could include facilitating the immigration of families interested in education and intensive efforts to integrate the children and adolescents accompanying them. Germany would then have the opportunity to train skilled personnel according to its own standards and to have a formative influence on new citizens.**

Some years ago, the campaign slogan of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) in North Rhine-Westphalia was “Kinder statt Inder” (“children instead of Indians”). At the time, the party was strongly criticised for the slogan as its xenophobic and racist undertones could not be argued away. In a later campaign, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) operated at the same level using a picture of a pregnant woman with a slogan that translates as: “New Germans? We make them ourselves.” However, the demographic facts tell a different story. While the birth rate in Germany has slightly increased over the past years, this is primarily due to mothers with an immigrant background who, on average, have more children than women without this background. According to the Federal Statistical Office, almost a quarter of all babies born in 2017 had a mother who was not born in Germany.

There will be no new baby boomer generation. However, Germany would need one in order to maintain the demographic balance. The United Nations estimates that Germany will lose more than 20 percent of its productive population by 2060. Daniel Hiebert, a Canadian immigration researcher who advises his government on immigration issues, predicts a “rude awakening” for the Federal Republic of Germany if no measures are taken to counteract this development: “At some point, someone could just say: ‘That’s it Germany’, and turn off the lights”. His conclusion: “In view of the dramatic ageing of society, migration is the only way to deal with demographic change”.

The planned Act on Skilled Worker Immigration oriented towards Canada’s immigration policy is a step in the right direction. Yet it can at best be the starting point for steering immigration in a controlled manner. This requires a concept that is tailored to Germany’s particular needs. The approach described in the following favours the immigration of families regardless of the parents’ qualifications. It primarily focuses on the training and integration of the second generation, that is the children. One could also say: We make new Germans ourselves.

Such an approach requires the willingness to rethink immigration. Taking this path also means having to break certain taboos. Nevertheless, the approach could provide a long-term outlook. In any case, the lessons learned by traditional immigration countries show that it is only the second generation that truly manages to become established and integrated in their new homeland. In the past, Germany often failed to ensure even this generation's success due to its lack of an active integration policy. Moreover, families are more likely to be accepted by the German population than those travelling by themselves. They also receive more support from society.

## **Why recruiting skilled personnel will not solve our problems**

### **1. Immigration hurdles in Germany remain high**

The language barrier alone will impede immigration of skilled personnel. As a prerequisite for immigration, the draft of the Act on Skilled Worker Immigration requires language skills that “correspond to the future profession”. This means that the higher the job qualifications are, the higher the level of German has to be. However, there are probably only a limited number of highly skilled specialists who also speak good German. As a rule, immigrants arriving in Germany will have to attend language classes first or at least improve their language skills to enter a qualified profession.

The situation is the same in Canada. Statistics Canada published data on the employment situation of immigrants at the end of December 2018. While the situation has improved in the past few years, the unemployment rate for 2017 among immigrants who had lived in the country for five years or less was still almost double that of people born in Canada. One of the most important reasons is the lack of language skills, despite the fact that English is the predominant foreign language throughout the world. As a result, the average immigrants in Canada start out with significantly higher language skills than potential skilled personnel for Germany. Until a few years ago, the number of people learning German around the world had even dramatically declined according to regular studies published by the *Netzwerk Deutsch* initiative under the direction of the Federal Foreign Office, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the *Goethe-Institut*. Since then, the downward trend seems to have at least stopped.

Another issue in Canada is that, despite the elaborate immigration procedure, many employers ultimately don't recognise the education and training certificates of immigrants because they doubt that the qualifications described correspond to local standards. These problems are also likely to occur in Germany. The Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration writes in its commentary on the Act on Skilled Worker Immigration that there is “hardly any country in the world that has a system comparable to Germany's dual education and training”. Experience in Canada has shown that the unemployment rate only falls to approximately the same level as that of Canadian-born employees among immigrants who have lived in the country for ten years or longer. This is because the new residents have either acquired higher language or professional skills in the meantime, or given up on searching for an adequate position and accepted jobs such as taxi driver or harvest worker. There are no longer any differences between the second-generation immigrants and those who had Canadian citizenship at birth.

### **2. The Act on Skilled Worker Immigration will not reduce the pressure on the German asylum system**

Unlike Canada, Germany can only navigate immigration to a limited extent. The North American country is virtually impossible for people from poorer regions of the world to reach. The fact that refugees have been moving north from the United States for some time has already caused a great deal of fuss in Canada – although the numbers are nowhere near those of refugee movements in Europe. Uncontrolled immigration continues to be the exception in Canada. When accepting war refugees, the country cooperates with the UN Refugee Agency that identifies persons in particular need in camps near global hot spots and suggests them for relocation.

Germany's situation is completely different. Europe lies in the immediate vicinity of poor and troubled regions. In the foreseeable future, many people will continue to set out from these regions, including a considerable number who are neither fleeing from war or persecution, nor among the welcome skilled personnel. If they make it to Germany, they will continue to apply for asylum as usual, even if they have come for economic reasons. This can only be prevented if Europe seals its borders, which has so far only been achieved to a limited extent and even in future can only be implemented – if at all – with huge financial and personnel costs. The consequences of this isolation would be hard to foresee for the migrants' countries of origin where hopelessness and a lack of prospects are causing tensions even now.

### **How Germany could better regulate immigration**

There is no perfect immigration concept. No regulation will solve all the difficulties and conflicts of interest linked to migration. However, focussing on the second generation offers an opportunity to train skilled personnel in Germany according to German standards and to have a formative influence on new citizens. At the same time, the central dilemma of the current development could be alleviated: Germany will hardly find sufficient skilled personnel abroad, but faces enormous migratory pressure from unqualified immigrants.

This approach requires a change in perspective regarding immigration policy. Then the qualification and language skills of the parents would not be the deciding factors for immigration, but rather their interest in providing their children with a good education. The advantage is that this approach would open up legal migration opportunities even for low-skilled people wanting to emigrate from Europe's neighbouring countries, i.e. those who will crowd into Germany regardless. The message to the population in the countries of origin would be clear: instead of collecting money for young men and sending them on their journey to Europe, it would be much more worthwhile to apply for legal immigration to Germany as a family. Thus, a family model could relieve the strain on the asylum system and simultaneously provide the economic sector with more potential skilled workers.

The most important prerequisite for a family-oriented immigration policy is obvious: the German educational system must have a stronger focus on integrating immigrants. This was not the case in the past. As a result, a particularly high number of school dropouts has an immigrant background. This is highly alarming from an economic point of view, and has also long since become relevant to security policy. Not only are those affected at risk of drifting into a criminal lifestyle. Sociologist Naika Foroutan of the Berlin Institute for Integration and Migration Research has also identified a "gigantic integration deficit" especially among adolescent Muslims. They feel rejected, not least at school, and therefore search for an identity "beyond national rootedness". To put it plainly, they are susceptible to radical ideologies.

Schools are the only state institutions that have a direct formative influence on tomorrow's citizens. Their importance cannot be rated highly enough. This is particularly true when it comes to educating and schooling children from patriarchal families and those in which formal education plays a subordinate role. However, integration will not be achieved through more tablet computers in schools, but rather with better support programmes and teachers who see their mission as imparting not only specialised knowledge, but also civic education in the best sense. The discussion of democratic and Western liberal values and social virtues – which definitely can be also considered Christian values – must be given more space. In the Canadian province of British Columbia, this has recently even been given priority over imparting knowledge.

A successful school career, no matter with which qualifications, is an essential prerequisite for the lasting integration of young migrants. It not only ensures that young adults can secure their livelihood and make contributions to the welfare system, but can also help migrants feel like full members of society. Incentives could even enhance this effect: Whoever successfully graduates from school or completes occupational training should immediately receive a German passport. As a general rule, immigration policy and educational policy must be considered together.

## **What price will society have to pay?**

Compromises must be made regarding integration of the parent generation. In any case, this is already the reality of day-to-day life, whether in Germany, France, Sweden or Canada. Networks are particularly important for lower-skilled immigrants or those who have no formal education whatsoever and do not speak the language of the country. Usually, these contacts are people from their country of origin who have been living in Germany for a long time. Critics call such networks parallel societies as they result in the culture and language of specific regions of origin characterising entire city districts. In contrast, in his book *Arrival City* the British-Canadian author Doug Saunders describes traditional immigrant quarters as a stepping stone. He lists examples from 20 cities around the world. According to Saunders, it is the “Arrival City” which particularly helps low-skilled immigrants of the first generation to establish a livelihood in their new country, for example by setting up a small business or by working for tradespeople who immigrated earlier. Ideally, the second generation will then manage to leave the Arrival City behind and integrate into mainstream society – provided that this generation encounters good schools in the Arrival City.

Furthermore, even for those with low skills, there are far more employment opportunities in Germany than is generally believed. In a study on possible legal means of migration for low and medium-skilled immigrants published in December 2018, the research unit of the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration points out the shortages of seasonal workers in the food services, construction and agricultural sectors. The authors of the study base their findings on associations such as the German Hotel and Restaurant Association (DEHOGA). In other words, an immigration model favouring the immigration of families without requiring special professional qualifications from the parents will not automatically lead to a mass run on the German welfare system.

## **How could the immigration of families interested in education be organised in practice?**

The planned Act on Skilled Worker Immigration is likely to present huge challenges, especially for the German missions abroad. Among other things, they will have to check whether an applicant has a sufficiently recognised qualification to find work on the German job market. Not a simple task. Federal Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Hubertus Heil (Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD) speaks of an “assumed professional qualification” that would need to be verified. This is vague and will not help officials on the ground.

An immigration model aimed at families would be significantly less complicated. Regional quotas in connection with a points-based system, taking into account the children’s performance at school or existing language skills, are one possibility. It would be important for parents to demonstrate their interest in providing their children with a good education. This could be verified through personal interviews. However, such interviews are easy to see through and consequently easy to manipulate.

An interest in Germany in general and in educational opportunities in particular can be best ascertained when parents already have their children learning German or send them to a German school in their country of origin. This could be an important criterion for receiving an entry permit. However, the number of courses and schools available in potential countries of origin would need to be significantly expanded. At the German *Goethe-Institut*’s annual press conference last December, Secretary General Johannes Ebert said that, in many places, the institutes can hardly meet the demand for German classes. There is a lack of qualified teachers. A training and recruitment initiative is to change this. More funds are available for this purpose.

The establishment of more German schools abroad, accompanied by scholarships and places at boarding schools for children from families on a low income, would also be a welcome development. Currently, there are only 140 of this special type of educational establishment whose graduates not only speak German very well, but are also familiar with German culture and the way of life in Germany. These schools are an excellent advertisement for Germany. The fact that China prohibits Chinese children from attending speaks for itself. However, the schools abroad are not public, but private schools sponsored by Germany. As a result, there is no systematic development concept.

As early as 2008, the Federal Foreign Office started an initiative called “Schools: Partners for the Future” (PASCH) to counter the German language’s aforementioned loss of importance around the world. Schools all over the world that teach German are sponsored and linked through this initiative. The intention is to make students enthusiastic about the German language and Germany. The number of sponsored schools has almost doubled over the past ten years according to the Federal Office of Administration’s data on German schools abroad. At the same time, “*Netzwerk Deutsch*” has noted a slight increase in the number of students in other countries learning German.

In its benchmark paper on the immigration of skilled personnel from third countries presented in October 2018, the federal government expressly declared its intention to further expand language learning abroad. This is a good sign. However, the fact that only 127 of more than 1,900 schools sponsored around the world are located in Africa is hardly a future-oriented approach. Europe’s neighbouring continent has a particularly young and mobile population. It would be useful to channel the interest in Germany that no doubt also exists in Africa from an early stage. Those who consider immigrants from Africa merely a threat are not familiar with the situation on the ground. All across the continent, start-up centres are being established where young talents implement innovative projects with little money. One young businessman in Kenya, for example, equips small cross-country buses known as “matatas” with Wi-Fi. The technology is simple and reliable. As is well known, this is not the case in trains run by Germany’s Deutsche Bahn. Mobile payment systems also already existed in Africa at a time when they were hardly even talked about in industrialised countries.

### **Why immigration of families can even turn into development assistance in the long term**

When industrialised countries recruit fully trained skilled personnel from third countries, the negative consequences for the countries of origin are often overlooked. Developing countries in particular suffer from what is known as “brain drain”, the emigration of highly qualified personnel. Ultimately, doctors, engineers and tradespeople are urgently needed there as well. It hampers the development of a country when they leave, which, in the long term, may result in further migration. This is a vicious circle.

An immigration model aimed at families would result in significantly fewer disadvantages for the countries of origin. Training of skilled personnel would take place in the country of immigration, i.e. Germany, and be paid for by Germany. At a later stage, young immigrants might even decide to return temporarily or permanently to their parents’ home country where they would probably be very welcome as skilled personnel. While Germany would lose skilled personnel in such a case, it would, however, have provided useful development assistance through the training given.

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