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Austrian Migration and Integration Report 2003 Demographic Developments – Socio-economic Structure – Legal Framework

Summary

A project of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) Vienna

Available in bookshops ISBN 3-85435-408-8

Published by Drava Verlag, Klagenfurt/Celovec

1. Setting

Austria is accustomed to a Youth Report, a Senior Citizen Report, a Family Report and a Women's Report, however – so far – not to a Migration and Integration Report. This circumstance rather comes as a surprise looking at the actual size and the social significance of the immigrant population in Austria. Topics relative to foreigners continue to take up a major part of everyday conversations and still decide over gains or losses at political elections. As far as the extent of facts, data and knowledge on the immigrant population is concerned, an alarmingly high deficit is frequently noted. Prejudices, half-truths and generalisations dominate the discussions. "The" Yugoslavs, "the" Turks or "the" Polish are treated without any differentiation and are mentally visualised as one and the same group. The debate is often filled with ideology and is unfortunately also characterized by lack of knowledge.

2. Review

Against this background, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the two editors came to the conclusion to initiate a comprehensive and Austrian-wide report. From the editors' point of view immigration is precisely not perceived as an outstanding incidence, an exception in the current development, but as one structural aspect of a demographically ageing and numerically declining population. In the report immigrants are viewed as a distinct social group in society, confronted with individual problems and not as guests who arrive and depart. It therefore seems legitimate to report on this social group in the same way as is already done on young people or on the elderly generation, women or families.

In other European states migration and integration reports are actually quite common. In Great Britain for example four comprehensive reports have until now been compiled, following the publication of a first survey on the life of family members of ethnic minorities in 1966. Moreover, in Austria's neighbouring country Germany there is a comprehensive Migration Report as well

as several specific integration reports, covering for example Germany's federal province Bavaria.

1998 marked the beginning of the actual planning phase of the Austrian Migration and Integration Report. It was at that time however not always an easy task to reach an agreement with the respective Ministries on the issue of financing and on the question of collaboration in this undertaking. In many cases it was equally difficult to actually find the relevant data and the authors who had the competency to present partial aspects of the issue on a scientific and objective level. Only in the year 2000 financing had finally been secured and one year later, in the year 2001, the team of authors was set up and approved. Following two years of intense work, the first Austrian Migration and Integration Report is now in hand and available in bookshops.

3. Main Objective

The objective of this report is to offer a clearer picture of migration and integration processes on the one hand as well as of the actual life of the foreign resident population in Austria on the other hand. In particular, three things were to be accomplished:

1. A clear and distinct picture of the foreign resident population's living circumstances;
2. The preparation of a coherent statistical basis by way of a comprehensive review of the existing official facts and statistics;
3. The elaboration of a stronger network and more intense exchange between researchers working in the field of migration .

In one way, the report features the structure of an encyclopaedia. It therefore does not actually focus on one central message; on the contrary it puts forward numerous eminent statements, which are of high importance at the political level. In order to gain an insight into these, not all 448 pages will actually have to be read. The authors have tried to structure the report to enable a clear and consumer friendly presentation of the information.

4. Structure

The first "Austrian Migration and Integration Report" was composed by 32 authors and includes 20 chapters. In addition, there is an introduction and a preface. The 20 chapters are grouped under five major sections. Nearly all prominent migration researchers from different universities, from the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO) and from other institutes contributed to the report. An essential point to mention is that the report does not assemble a simple collection of various heterogeneous articles joined together in one book; on the contrary it includes articles actually called for by the editors and a high-level expert team - including Rainer Bauböck, Susanne Binder, August Gächter, Herbert Langthaler, Bernhard Perching, Ronald Pohoryles and Ewald Wiederin. Both the editors and the expert team took care to group the contributions thematically and content-wise, without duplicating information and with the intention of covering as many major topics as possible.

The Migration and Integration Report (short: MIR) is split into five major sections with emphasis on the following thematic contents:

1. Demographic and socio-economic structures (labour market, housing situation, demographic structure, income, social mobility, language acquisition)
2. Life and ways of life: women, family, health (way of life and social situation of women, health situation and medical care, families, elderly migrants)
3. Normative and legal framework (legal development, naturalisations, asylum law and internal security)
4. Xenophobia (empirical results, xenophobia looked upon from the perspective of the "others")
5. Organisational structures of migrants (Islam and Integration, socio-political networks)

5. Major Statements

The wide range of contributions actually complicate the answer to a legitimate question: what is the main statement of the report? It has to be said that there is not one exclusive answer to this question, in contrast, several answers can be given. In the following the editors would like to highlight 10 subjectively chosen points, starting with the most general underlying statement:

1. If there is one overall major statement, then it may be the following: Austria has become a country of immigration – not by choice and not self-determined, but through the actual development. During the past decades Austria has become attractive for immigrants from the nearer and further periphery and there are many social fields actually in need of immigrants: as work force, as consumers, as students or simply as contributors to the social security system. Out of over 8 million inhabitants living in Austria, approximately 750.000 are currently not in possession of the Austrian citizenship. The percentage of foreigners in Austria at present therefore amounts to approximately 9%. In addition there are around 330.000 Austrians, who were not actually born in Austria, but immigrated from abroad, and later acquired Austrian citizenship. Most of them came from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey. In sum, the group of persons with immigrant background currently living in Austria amounts to nearly 1,1 million. This figure is equivalent to the number of inhabitants of a larger Austrian province and hence underlines the actual importance of immigration.
2. If there is a second major statement, then perhaps that of the heterogeneity of the immigrated population: "The" foreigner, "the" immigrant per se does not exist. Quite the opposite is the case: there are many different groups; on the one hand highly qualified and socially accepted immigrants, who increasingly come to Austria as a result of the economic globalisation and who are subsequently employed here, plus those groups, who come from within the European Union to study or to retire in Austria. And on the other hand the mass of foreigners employed in the building industry, in the tourism, commerce or transport sector, in the field of social services or in the metal, textile, leather or clothing industry. As a consequence, a gap between the national and foreign work force as well as between young and elderly immigrants has developed.
3. The tendency towards polarisation is indeed reason for concern and is affirmed in our report in an article on income and on the risk of becoming impoverished. According to the European Household Panel, roughly 30% of the non-EU citizens were endangered of becoming impoverished in the year 1997. This implies that the per capita household income remained below 60% of the total average income (poverty threshold 1997: €

727) In comparison, approximately 11% of the Austrians (including EU citizens) lie below this figure of 60%. In general the risk of “third country nationals” to become impoverished is about three times as high as that of the average population in Austria; If one takes a closer look not only at the current income but also at the living conditions, clothing and living standards, then the risk of acute poverty is even about four times as high. The fact that these results do not apply to the remaining groups of immigrants, - especially not to those from the European Union – simply underlines the tendency towards polarisation.

4. Another reason for concern is the fact that this polarising structure is identically reflected in the educational system. The percentage of foreign school children amounts to approx. 9%, the percentage of foreign children in special classes (with mental or physical difficulties), however, lies at 23%. Children holding foreign citizenship are too quickly sent to special education classes or special schools for school children with mental or physical difficulties. Over the last 20 years the percentage of children attending these kinds of schools has nearly quadrupled (from 6,5 to 23,2%). At the same time a contrary trend can also be perceived. Today more and more foreign students are attending higher education; former Yugoslav and Turkish parents are also becoming more inclined to keep their children in the schooling system beyond compulsory education. Whether this trend is dependant on the fact that the earliest possible entry of young people into the labour market for reasons of financial support is by far not as important anymore as in the past, or if the parents have simply acknowledged that social mobility is actually dependent on the level of education, cannot be clearly established.
5. The segregation encountered within the labour market is to the same extent reflected in the housing sector, however in a twofold way. On the one hand the majority of the foreign resident population lives in rented flats and not in owner occupied, co-operative or city-council flats. They more often live in substandard flats (so called category C and D flats) than nationals; the rents are in comparison relatively high and generally time limited tenancy contracts; as a result, the foreign resident population tends to accept less dwelling space in order to try to minimise living costs. Due to these structural preconditions the majority of the foreign resident population is also geographically segregated. They predominantly live in areas dominated by blocks of flats built in the late 19th century and are clustered around a few specific areas within the towns; This is largely the case for the city of Vienna as well as for Linz, Graz or Salzburg. The trend towards segregation did not decrease during the 1990s, on the contrary it actually rose as a result of the increase in immigration during the first half of the 1990s.

What may have changed is the normative assessment of segregation. Within the scientific community this phenomenon is no longer exclusively associated with negative impacts, but also seen as a chance for setting up individual ethnic structures. Due to segregation the Turkish baker for example is in fact given an economic chance if he is able to find enough “Turkish” consumers locally. Ethnicity thus becomes an economic factor. Turning away from an integration process solely focused on assimilation, the phenomenon of urban segregation becomes, according to the authors, to a certain extent acceptable.

In total, however, heterogeneity again characterises the housing situation of the foreign resident population: in Vienna or in Western Austria one finds, for example, single family houses, owner occupied flats and penthouses which belong to the elite class of immigrants alongside the living quarters with blocks of flats built in the late 19th century where immigrants from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia predominantly live.

6. Heterogeneity also characterises the picture of immigrating women. Women either immigrated together with their spouses, at the same time or later on, arrived as war victims, or even immigrated alone as labour migrants. In part they leave a rural, agricultural society to enter an unknown, urban world, but at the same time continue to live in family structures dominated by traditional gender roles and socialisation forms. They are therefore much more exposed to the different cultural worlds than men are, and in addition forced into various roles by the dominating society. Society either ignores them or on the contrary stresses their diversity. Nevertheless, the narrative interviews cited in the MIB show that the female foreign resident population is relatively satisfied with their life in Austria. Female immigrants especially feel accepted and as part of a multicultural Austrian society when actually married to an Austrian citizen.
7. As already pointed out, the majority of foreign immigrants is employed as unskilled or semiskilled workers. They often perform difficult physical or strenuous tasks, which leave their marks. The Microcensus 1999 investigated the population's state of health. The results showed that persons from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey judged their actual physical condition less often as being „very good“ or „good“ than Austrians did. The differences increased by age and were again not shared by immigrants from the European Union, where the opposite was the case. Immigrants coming from within the European Union actually feel healthier than Austrians do. The subjective age feeling is on the one hand accentuated more within the immigrant population, however – this was also highlighted in the Microcensus – on the other hand less is done to keep healthy and to some extent fit. A healthy diet is less often taken into consideration, physical activities as sports or circulatory training avoided and the doctor only seldom consulted; on the contrary, cigarette consumption is higher. Class and cultural specific effects overlap, leading to a lower life expectancy of the vast majority of immigrants in comparison to the life expectancy of Austrians. This is not actually statistically verified, due to the fact that there is a high number of immigrants, who emigrate for „dying“ and therefore automatically fall into the „emigration statistics“ and not into the mortality statistics.
8. Speaking of numbers, the first half of the 1990s encountered an extremely high immigration rate, leading to the adoption of new regulating mechanisms in order to gain influence on the quantity of immigration and its actual structure. At the same time Austria's accession to the European Union (EU) took place and with it the obligation of guaranteeing freedom of movement to EU citizens. Three extensive chapters in the MIR focus on the legal developments, in particular within the Aliens Act, Asylum Law and Citizenship Law. Detached from any detailed judgements, a clear trend can be made out in direction of quantitative restrictions and structural preferences in accordance with the current national labour market requirements; in the field of asylum the intention is to attain mechanisms in order to be able to distinguish genuine refugees (in the sense of the Geneva Convention) from economic migrants; and as concerns the issue of citizenship the trend is moving towards perceiving naturalisation as the last step of successful integration into society. In total the complexity of the regulating mechanisms has risen in the 1990s.
9. The 1990s additionally led to a de-escalation in the discussion on criminal offences of foreigners. The strong stigmatisation of foreigners and the factual increase of criminal offences undertaken by foreigners at the beginning of the 1990s turned out to be temporary and moreover unusual for the more or less permanent foreign resident population in Austria. The criminality at the beginning of the 1990s was to a vast extent

imported and was not or only to an insignificant extent linked to the permanent foreign resident population. The end of this exceptional situation, which was connected to the fall of the Iron Curtain, has led to a harmonisation of the profile of offences between nationals and foreigners. Whoever speaks about criminality in connection with immigration, is to be advised - this is the underlying tone of the report – to take into consideration that immigrants are to the same extent subject to criminal offences as nationals and furthermore subject to racist attacks. Foreign citizens should not only be viewed as perpetrators but to the same extent as victims. Focus was also laid on this concrete point in the MIR.

10. The final change perceived in the 1990s is the extent of xenophobia in Austria. The fourth part of the MIR is dedicated to this specific question. Thereby, the contributions highlight two major points: A survey of foreign groups exemplifies on the one hand how xenophobia is actually perceived by the immigrants themselves. Based on the answers given by the foreign citizens, xenophobia becomes especially evident in the refusal of intercultural communication – the refusal to greet, to communicate and to take up any form of contact with them; furthermore xenophobia becomes distinct in defamation, less in verbal abuses and hardly in the form of assaults towards foreign citizens. Resentments are in the first place directed towards the former „Guest Workers“; in particular against the Turkish population. One fifth to one fourth of the questioned Turks expressed their dissent towards this form of discrimination.

From a different perspective, one fourth to one third of the Austrians can be classified as being tendentially xenophobic. This applies to women more likely than men, and is more likely among elderly people and people from rural areas. The Austrian wide surveys also pointed out a decline in measurable forms of xenophobia. The accusation that foreigners actually take jobs away from the Austrians found less and less approval in the analysed decade. It dropped from 44% (1992) to 42% (1998) and to 25% (2001). In the year 2001 the idea of foreigners actually enriching society has grown in comparison to ten years ago. In 1992 30% of the questioned persons were able to see a positive cultural enrichment in the presence of foreigners, By 1998 and 2001 this percentage had already risen up to 35%, and 44% respectively. It however remains to be seen if this trend actually can be connected to the legal restrictions towards immigration, the legal migration regime or simply to an increase in educational efforts.

The findings in the last Chapter in fact lead to the concluding sentence. The scientific community's contribution towards reducing the structures of social prejudice, xenophobia or racism is enlightenment. This is the only contribution which can be made: straightforward and objective information on the necessity of migration, on the chances as well as on the social problems that come hand in hand with migration. Only through information and educational work can we fight against naive prejudices. With this in mind the Migration and Integration Report was drafted.

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