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The future for migration research in Europe

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Publication date
2008

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Kraal, K. (2008). *The future for migration research in Europe*. (IMISCOE Policy Brief; No. 7). IMISCOE.

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With the support of the European Commission, 6th Framework Programme for Research- Citizens and governance in a knowledge-based society

IMISCOE

POLICY BRIEF

March 2008 No. 7

The Future for Migration Research in Europe

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Aim and summary This policy brief will discuss the challenges for future migration research in Europe in relation to migration developments and policy making. The brief is based on the IMISCOE publication ***The Dynamics of International Migration and Settlement in Europe*** (Amsterdam University Press 2006), by Rinus Penninx, Maria Berger and Karen Kraal (eds).* This publication is the first joint endeavour of the IMISCOE network and provides a state of the art of migration research and sets out directions for future research, from both scientific and policy perspectives. This policy brief will focus on directions for future research and is of interest to policymakers in the field of research development and the research-policy nexus. The main arguments of this brief are:

New directions for future migration research

- Changes in international migration in Europe have given rise to new dynamics that are not yet fully understood.

Policies do not have adequate responses to new forms of migration

- Policies do not yet have adequate responses for the `management' of these new dynamics in migration and settlement processes and the political debate is frequently phrased in analytical concepts and terminology of the past.
- Migration research in Europe has been highly fragmented and strongly embedded in national contexts and did not structurally produce comprehensive insights in present migration processes and their consequences for countries of origin and destination.

Migration research could feed the political debate but needs to be reorganized and change focus

- The political discourse on migration and settlement could be fed more efficiently by research. Research could develop new approaches and perspectives to better understand the dynamics of migration and settlement in Europe in the present and future era.
- To achieve such a crucial role for research and improve the knowledge-based debate that seeks to answer important societal questions we should aim at:
- **Systematic comparison**
- **Multi disciplinarity**
- **Integrating different levels of analysis**
- **Rethinking the relation between migration and integration**
- **Shifting our focus from migrants to institutions in host societies**
- **Bringing in perspectives from outside**

IMISCOE aims to develop an international comparative and interdisciplinary research programme

- IMISCOE, as a European Network of Excellence, has taken such important first steps to new forms of research that can overcome the fragmentation of research and can transcend disciplinary and national borders.

The need to better understand new migration and integration dynamics

Immigration is a very important European theme and its influence will only grow in the coming decades

International migration has become a major phenomenon and one could state that Europe has factually become an immigration continent. Between 1985 and 2000 the number of residents in Europe that have been born outside their present country of residence grew from an estimated 23 million to more than 56 million, or 7.7 per cent of the total European population. In 2005 a total net migration of 1.69 million (on a total population of 462 million) to the EU-25 contributed significantly more to population growth than 0.327 million natural growth. Demographic developments (greying population) and labour market developments (shortages of low and high skilled workers) as well as an increased migration pressure through globalised communication media and transport facilities will most likely lead to a further increase of migration to Europe in the coming decades. Net migration is expected to prevent an absolute decrease of the EU population until the year 2025.

Migration and settlement are very complex phenomena:

- **The type of mobility has changed**

Besides being major phenomena, international migration and settlement are also becoming more and more complex phenomena. Nowadays, immigrants come to Europe from all over the world in significant numbers, for different reasons, for short-term and longer stays, have consecutive stays in different countries, alternate their residence between countries, etc. This causes new practices of residence, integration and community formation.

- **Within Europe experiences differ**

Furthermore, within Europe countries are characterised by very different histories of immigration when looking at the start of their immigration experience: from before World War II for countries like Switzerland and Belgium to just a few decades ago for countries like Greece and Spain. Such historical changes are reflected in varying sizes, compositions and concentrations of the immigrant populations in the countries concerned.

- **Within countries experiences differ: cities change rapidly**

The picture is made even more complex when looking at the immigration experience within the countries in question. More than in the past, new immigrants have tended to concentrate in urban areas since that is where the jobs, housing, schools, support services etc. are concentrated. Large cities and metropolis have seen their composition change rapidly and within these cities certain (deprived) districts and wards are even more confronted with changing populations.

Policies' reactions to changing immigration and integration

Policies' reactions:

- **Europe does not conceive itself as an immigration continent**

When looking at policies' reactions to immigration we can see a strong contrast with the more explicit, proactive policies of countries like Canada and the Unites States. European countries have consistently defined themselves as non-immigration countries. Such a framing of the migration question has been a constant factor in Europe, irrespective of the fact that quite a few countries have even had higher immigration rates than classic immigration countries.

- **Integration became a central but sensitive theme since the 1990s**

When looking at integration we can see this has become a central theme in politics in Europe since the 1990s. And in becoming so, it showed that integration policies inevitably go far beyond the simple idea of providing facilities for newcomers to adapt and function in the new society. This made integration policies as sensitive politically as immigration itself. There is also a new tendency in policy thinking that sets integration requirements as criteria for the selection and admission of immigrants.

- **Experiences differ within Europe**

Within Europe, especially between the Western and Southern Member States, experiences of course differ and for most of the ten new members of the EU the topic of migration and integration is relatively new. The European Union is growing in importance as a framework for common migration and integration policies.

Research can feed the public and political discourse

Research could help to support policy makers in developing local, national and EU policies that can regulate migration flows more effectively and create and sustain a minimum of unity, loyalty and social cohesion in society.

The challenges for migration research

European research lacks comparison, cooperation and integration of analytical levels

Initially in the 1960s and 1970s research in Europe consisted of individual researchers focusing on particular flows of immigrants. The 1980s saw the first research institutes with more comprehensive programmes in the UK, Sweden, France and the Netherlands and later also in other Western and Southern countries. This research was traditionally strongly embedded in national contexts both in terms of framing and funding and reflected strong national concerns and perspectives. The development of research in Europe has thus not kept pace with developments in the field it studies. The most common qualification of the weakness of European research on migration and integration issues is that it is fragmented.

Re-organising and re-focusing research:

Three forms of fragmentation are regularly brought up: lack of comparative research, lack of cooperation between disciplines and lack of integration of the different levels at which phenomena are studied. Such weaknesses of the present European research call for specific efforts in the organisation and methodology of research for the future and the development of new theoretical and analytical perspectives.

Working on comparative research:

Systematic comparison as a strategic tool Working on systematically comparative research will provide a sound basis for policymakers who are looking increasingly across borders to see how other countries are dealing with the dilemma's they are confronted with and policymakers who are searching for a common European framework. At the same time it is scientifically a significant challenge that will bring research a fundamental step further. But what does this mean in practice?

- **Comparable data**

Comparability of data We will have to critically assess the comparability of seemingly simple data such as those on migration, possibly leading to practical

proposals for change. The problem is that administrative data are collected within specified institutional contexts for specific purposes, using definitions that reflect their particular tasks and may not measure the same phenomena in different contexts.

- **Comparison in research design**

Comparison in research designs We will have to make different forms of research design complementary. A design that compares different immigrant populations within one national or local context, for example, will draw attention to explanatory factors *within these immigrant populations*. A design that compares the same ethnic group within different national or local contexts will focus on factors *within these contexts*.

- **Comparable concepts**

Comparability of concepts We need to design analytical frameworks in which abstract concepts and notions like *integration policies* or *assimilation* and *multiculturalism* are operationalised in such a way that empirical data can be collected in different contexts. Such concepts are often used in different national or local settings. Using these terms may create the illusion that the same phenomena are dealt with, which research has shown is often not true. They are also used frequently in public and political discourse and in the process may acquire strong normative connotations, which makes it difficult for scholars to use these concepts in communication with a broader audience.

- **Transcend the old division of disciplines**

Multidisciplinarity The challenge for future migration research is also to transcend the old division of disciplines. Cooperation across disciplines can be achieved most fruitfully when researchers act as active links between their discipline and the thematic field. This can be achieved through multidisciplinary organisational structures and through interdisciplinary projects and programmes in which such cooperation is built into the central questions and design, the collection of material and the analysis and reporting.

- **Integrate the different levels of analysis**

Integrating levels of analysis The relations between different levels of analysis are to be connected and integrated. Different levels of analysis may lead to an incomparability of data. Research on the level of small groups may for example have no relation to research on the level of populations. Such fragmentation may also take a more space-based form, particularly when the unit of analysis refers to different levels such as the borough, the city, the region, the national state and supra-national (European) or international agents.

Next to these specific efforts to re-organise research and develop new methodologies we have to consider new theoretical perspectives.

- **Interconnect the fields of migration and integration**

Rethinking the relation between migration and integration International migration and integration have established themselves as more or less independent fields of research and theory. International migration in recent decades has however changed in character: the migration process has become more complex, more fluid and less permanent. Furthermore Europe's self definition as non-immigration countries has had far-reaching consequences

for the nexus between international migration and integration. There is a need to reformulate the research field as one complex field rather than two separate ones and introduce new perspectives and questions that focus on this more complicated interconnectedness.

Shifting the focus from migrants to society Nearly all research focuses primarily on migration, immigrants and their integration, while the societal systems into which the phenomenon of migration and the immigrants themselves are to be integrated is taken for granted. If we really want to make sense of the difficult terms of integration and social cohesion we must include in our analysis the core structures of societies and important societal realms (such as politics, the economy, law, science, education, health, religion, mass media, arts, sports and the family), both as determinants of integration processes and as structures that (may) change as a consequence of migration and settlement.

- **Include the effects of migration on the core structures of the receiving society**

Perspectives 'from outside' The thematic field of international migration and integration is finally not to be regarded as an isolated one. Taking a different angle may yield unexpected insights. For example, systematic comparison with other forms of mobility that do not imply crossing national borders, such as internal migration, or movements of a shorter time horizon, such as cross-border commuting, tourism and business travel, may bring the special characteristics and underlying mechanisms of international migration to the fore.

- **Include other perspectives like that on tourism and business travel**

First steps to new forms of research that can better inform policy making

First steps to reorganize research and provide a knowledge base for policy making

It was the 6th Framework Programme for Research of the European Union that offered a possibility to overcome the fragmented and national bound nature of research. In this framework Networks of Excellence were introduced as instruments to strengthen scientific and technological excellence on a particular research topic through durable integration of institutional research capacities.

IMISCOE: uniting institutes and researchers

In April 2004 IMISCOE was launched as a Network of Excellence on the themes of International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion, with a focus on Europe. With IMISCOE 23 major research institutes and over 500 individual researchers from all European countries and of all branches of the economic and social sciences, the humanities and law were united to plan and coordinate research across disciplinary and national borders bringing scientific results to a broader public so as to improve their societal impact. With IMISCOE European migration researchers have taken an important step to create a broader-based foundation from which to conduct and contextualise research that can help answering globalisation's many border-crossing, time-spanning questions.

Transcending national borders and disciplines

* *The Dynamics of International Migration and Settlement in Europe* on which this policy brief is based is a joint endeavour of the IMISCOE Network and provides a state of the art of migration research. In order to take stock of research, IMISCOE has formed nine clusters of researchers that cover the most important sub-domains. Two clusters have worked on the process of international migration itself: one from the perspective of the destination countries and one from the perspective of sending countries. Four clusters of researchers have worked on the political, economic, social and cultural dimensions of the process of settlement and integration. Three more clusters of researchers have worked on cross-cutting themes of a) interethnic relations, identity, representation and discrimination, b) gender, age, generations and family structures, and c) the multilevel governance of migration and integration. Each of these clusters was tasked with writing a state of the art of ongoing research with the additional purpose of creating a common analytical framework and identifying directions for future joint research. The elaborate versions of most of these overviews have been published on the IMISCOE website. The nine chapters in *The Dynamics of International Migration and Settlement in Europe* are based on these overviews. Consequently they are the result of work done by groups of researchers that is larger than the ones who actually wrote the chapters. You can order the title here.

IMISCOE (International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe) is a Network of Excellence funded in the Sixth Framework Programme for Research of the European Commission (a grant of €4.5 million for the period 1 April 2004-1 April 2009). With over 500 researchers from 23 European institutes, IMISCOE has developed a research programme, a system of training and a world-wide infrastructure for communication. The research and expertise of IMISCOE scientists form the basis of the Network's publication programme comprising 1) the IMISCOE-Amsterdam University Press Series 2) IMISCOE Working Papers and 3) IMISCOE Policy Briefs. www.imiscoe.org

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