EUMARGINS

On the Margins of the European Community

On the Margins of the European Community:

Young Adults with Immigrant Background in Seven European Countries

POLICY BRIEF no. 1

Categorisations and Discourses

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Executive Summary

EUMARGINS *first policy brief focuses on the various immigration discourses found in seven national contexts: Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Estonia, Spain, Italy and France. It is based on a chapter in the first published book from the EUMARGINS project: Inclusion and Exclusion of Young Adult Immigrants in Europe: Barriers and Bridges, published by Ashgate. The research focus of the EUMARGINS is on the processes of inclusion and exclusion of young adult immigrants in these European countries, and this policy brief primarily seeks to uncover discursive patterns that contribute to such processes. It displays the contested and ambiguous status of key concepts in public discourses, aiming to raise awareness about the fact that European-wide public policies will be effective only when crucial concepts are similarly comprehended. This policy brief recognises the various levels of hostility in the public discourses on immigrants and ethnic minorities. There seems to be a focus on young immigrants as an assumed "danger" group in the southern region – France, Italy and Spain – while the Scandinavian countries and the UK exhibit a more general scepticism towards non-Western immigrants, in particular Muslims, related to their perceived impact on social cohesion. In Estonia there is a negative public discourse on the country's ethnic minorities, mainly the Russian-speaking one, which is often stereotypically portrayed.*

Introduction: 'Us' and 'them'

The public discourse on immigration and ethnicity produces and reproduces the way we differentiate between 'us' and 'them' through the use of categories of 'nationals' and 'immigrants,' 'majority' and 'minority.' Such categorisations affect the politicians' choices on how to manage migration and cultural pluralism. Whereas young adults with an ethnic minority background are sometimes negatively framed in such discourses, they can also be more indirectly affected, as when signifiers are made to symbolise either one specific ethnic group or the immigrant population as a whole. In this policy brief we look at how these categorisations are rooted nationally and historically, and indicate how public discourses can reflect and reinforce popular prejudices and shape everyday interactions between members of the majority and minority groups.

Context specific concepts

One of the major problems regarding research and policies directed at social exclusion and inclusion is the contested and ambiguous status of the key concepts in public and social scientific discourses. The efficiency of European-wide public policies can only be effective when crucial concepts are similarly comprehended across national borders. Yet our cross-country comparison between seven countries displays that they are not. Given the different national backgrounds as well as the diverse categories through which immigrants are defined in each country, the differences between the national contexts are of key importance.

Take for example the notions of 'immigrant' and 'foreigner,' in use in all seven countries. The connotations are slightly different in each national setting, partly due to differences in immigration history. In France, 'immigrants' are formally considered to be the French residents who were born abroad as foreigners (Eremenko & Thierry 2009:11), while in public discourse the label remains even with descendants after several generations (Ferry et al. 2010). A categorisation of 'immigrants by country of origin' is used, as well as a distinction between naturalized French citizens and 'foreigners' – who do not possess French citizenship (Triandafyllidou & Gropas 2007: 117). In Italy and Spain, there is a tendency to associate the label 'foreigner' with people coming from rich countries, whereas the 'immigrant' label is associated with people coming from poor countries (Alzetta et al. 2009; Feixa et al. 2009). Moreover, the terms 'Italian' and 'black' are mutually exclusive in the majority's perception (Andall 2002). In Spain, however, more recently the notion of 'foreigner' has occasionally been substituted by the more neutral word of 'newly arrived' (*nouvinguts*).

In Norway, the label 'foreigner' is more frequently used than 'immigrant' in self-description among immigrants and descendants of non-Western origin (Øia and Vestel, 2007: 43). The official definition of 'immigrant' denotes an individual who has actually immigrated, while 'descendant' denotes an individual with parents (or grandparents) who immigrated.[1] Still, the notion of 'foreigner' is more likely to be associated with non-Norwegians in general, while the notion of immigrant is also normally associated

[1] Recently, Statistics Norway further broke down their analytical categories into "Norwegian-born with two immigrant parents", "Norwegian-born with one immigrant parent", "Foreign-born with one Norwegian parent", "Foreign-born with two Norwegian parents" etc. (http://www.ssb.no/vis/omssb/1gangspubl/art-2008-10-14-01.html (accessed 12 May 2010).

with the (visibly) non-Western population (Rogstad 2000: 27). In Sweden, statistics categorise the country's 'foreign-born population' by region of origin, and its 'foreign citizens' by country of citizenship. Although the term 'immigrant' is used differently in the media, the core meaning seems to refer to a non-Swede associated with some kind of problem (SOU 2006: 21). In Estonia, the term 'immigrant' has been used to define people who do not see themselves as immigrants – as their migration took place within the USSR (Kaldur et al. 2009). However, Estonian officials have revised the definition of immigrants to post-1991 newcomers, thus redefining the Russian-speaking population as 'ethnic minorities'[2] and also distinguishing between ethnic Estonians and non-Estonians. Those of the latter group do not possess citizenship and are policy-wise treated as immigrants. Concepts pointing to ethnicity and skin colour (e.g. the black/white dichotomy) are widespread in United Kingdom due to its history as a colonial power, making the term 'immigrant' seem particularly misplaced when used on people who have lived in United Kingdom for many generations. The United Kingdom is the only country in our sample that applies racial categories in their official statistics.

What these examples indicate, is that the different categorisations of immigrants and ethnic minorities pose two distinct challenges: First, it hinders researchers and policy makers from articulating their efforts in a common language. A reflexive awareness of the different categorisations is thus crucial in developing a common understanding of which groups are cross-nationally comparable in terms of bureaucratic and public understanding. Second, statistics and concepts associated with the perception of immigration should not be seen as neutral, as they reflect the specific national context of each country – the colonial past, variations in regard to immigrant incorporation regimes (assimilationist, integrationist, multicultural, etc), as well as differing immigration policies.

Deeper categorisation of ethnicity and immigration status ('newcomer', 'asylum seeker', 'descendant' etc.) is needed, as states need to manage migration, monitor the impact of their integration policies and their social policies towards immigrants, and measure the extent to which immigrants or ethnic minorities are discriminated against in the labour market and similar arenas. On the one hand, distinguishing generations of immigrants and demarcating ethnic groups may be useful when there is a need to assess

[2] "In statistics, 'ethnicity/nationality' (*rahvus*) refers to self-reported ethnic belonging and is independent of both citizenship and mother tongue" (Triandafyllidou & Gropas 2007: 87).

the social integration process over a long period.[3] On the other hand, this is seen by some as discriminatory and stigmatising, highlighting the 'otherness' of descendants of immigrants through a conceptual practice akin to symbolic exclusion from the national majority group. After all, categorisation of immigrants itself symbolizes inclusion and exclusion. Both points of view can be found in the approaches to this matter in our selected countries. In France, the tendency not to mention immigrant background or ethnicity (except for politicians of Le Pen's Front National), can make young descendants feel like their experience with ethnic inequalities in the labour market are not being acknowledged as problematic. Norwegian media, on the other hand, has been criticised for referring to ethnic background and/or religion even when this is of no relevance to the topic.

The different understandings and usages of the terms 'immigrant' and 'foreigner', as discussed above, also indicate the variation that these countries' have on immigration and integration issues. Policies determining the right to legal residence, citizenship, social benefits etc. are important topics of discussion in all seven countries. Thus, the discourses on these issues will, beyond concrete policy measures, also have an *indirect* impact on the lives of immigrants as such discourses tend to reinforce the image of immigrants as 'problematic'. The role of discourses in conditioning the participation or marginalisation of young adults with a minority background is more vivid in specific debates, as discussed in the following section.

Discursive topics of particular concern

In most of the seven countries, important steps towards a more balanced public discourse have been taken in the past few years. Combating racial discrimination and raising awareness of immigrants as part of the general public have been important focus areas. In Norway, for instance, one focus area has been the improvement of protection against racist speech, resulting in an amendment to the Constitution and changes to the Criminal Code.[4] However, the cross-national comparison highlights that in most of the countries analysed in EUMARGINS, young immigrants are disproportionately negatively portrayed in the media, associated with a host of undesirable actions

[3] The development of useful indicators is one of the current priorities of the European Commission.
[4] As documented in the country reports of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI).

including crime, riots, welfare dependency, radical Islam, black-market work and anti-modern gender patterns. Hitherto we have looked at the *notions* commonly used by the state and public to describe and categorise ethnic/immigrant groups, but the *topics* associated with such groups also merit attention. For the sake of focus, we have chosen to present three topics of particular concern for the inclusion and exclusion of young adult immigrants and descendants: terrorism; riots and crime; welfare and economy.

Terrorism

Immigration as a threat and a security concern has come to dominate the discourse in government policy, according to Buonfino (2004: 24). Several events, such as 9/11, the Madrid train bombing in 2004, the London bombings in 2005, and the 'war on terror,' have generated negative media attention particularly towards the Muslim population in Europe. In many ways, there seems to be a discrepancy between the media's extensive coverage of Islamist terrorism and the actual number of Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe.[5] Another related issue that was the subject of extensive international coverage was the so-called Muhammad cartoon controversy in 2005 with implications spanning over several European countries (Eide, Kunelius & Phillips 2008).

In United Kingdom, this has generated a situation in which the public debate seems concerned with the issue of 'home grown terrorists' and 'radical Islam' (Back and Sinha 2009). France has had to deal with domestic security concerns since the bomb attack in Paris in 1995, although Islamic terrorism has increasingly become a specific issue after 9/11. Right wing politicians have claimed that the French suburbs and prisons are areas where Islamist organizations, such as Al-Qaeda, are recruiting supporters from (Ferry et al. 2009). Both Sweden and Norway have been less involved in the overt violence between Muslim radicals and their host societies — with the exception of a recent discussion concerning the threat posed by 'radical Islam' in Norway (Fangen et al. 2009).

Although there seems to be an increased focus on the link between terrorism and Muslim communities throughout Europe, the attention given to this is comparatively small in Sweden and Norway (and Estonia, which has only a marginal Muslim population). Still, the overall stigmatisation of Europe's Muslim population is prone to

[5] According to Europol's Terrorist Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2008, out of a total of 583 terrorist attacks in Europe in 2007, four were failed or attempted attacks related to Islamist groups.

generate feelings of exclusion among young adult Muslims in most of our target countries. Narrations by young Muslims we have interviewed display that this link between Islam and terrorist threat is something that many young Muslims experience as humiliating and exhausting.

In Estonia, it is the Russian-speaking minority which is often portrayed as a threat: a 'fifth column' inside the country serving the geopolitical interest of neighbouring Russia. Portraying the minority as 'Russia's henchmen' obviously stigmatises the group, and the current dynamic of relations between Russia and its neighbours seems to exacerbate this feeling (Kaldur et al. 2009).

Riots and Crime

The link between crime or violent riots and immigrants is reiterated by the media of all seven countries. In several countries of our study the media tends to focus on the country of origin of criminals, especially when writing about young immigrants as threats to public security. In France, the riots in the *banlieues* in 2005 led to a heated debate separating the French and the foreigners into two distinct groups, and young *Maghrebins* carried the stigma of dangerous scapegoats (Body-Gendrot 2002). Commenting on this suburban unrest, some journalists and politicians constructed a link between foreigner/immigrant and rioter (Ferry et al. 2009). Right-wing parties emphasised the young rioters' ethnic, racial and religious differences from that of the 'French people' and thus constructed them as alien to French society. Alternatively, the riots could be interpreted as resulting from economic and social problems that reigned in the *banlieues* (Body-Gendrot 2002).

Estonia witnessed unrest among its minority population in 2007, mostly among Russians who protested against the dislocation of a Soviet war-time memorial from the city centre to a military cemetery. In Spain and Italy, the media has focused on gangs and criminality when writing about immigrants. In the former, migrants from Latin America are commonly equated with the activities of youth gangs, and the media sometimes refers to 'Latino gangs' when the news concerns a criminal act by members of other groups (Feixa et al. 2009). In Italian media, approximately 50 per cent of all news articles about young immigrants focus on criminality (Alzetta et al. 2009), and 50 per cent of articles on immigration reported crimes committed by immigrants, while only 8 per cent reported episodes of racism and xenophobia (Buonfino 2004: 35). Some

Italian media even use racist labelling when writing about immigrants, e.g. the expression '*vu cumprà'* ('vuoi comprare' in Italian, that is 'would you like to buy?': a sentence used by undocumented/irregular immigrants working as street vendors) (Alzetta et al. 2009). Another Italian example is the emphasis on crime, rapes and homicides supposedly committed by Albanian immigrants, which has contributed to the labelling of Albanians as criminals (Buonfino 2004: 34-35).

Although there are media references to criminal Albanians in Norway as well (Nauni 2009), it is mostly the Somalis that have been the target of accusations of crimes such as rape, robbery, and of supporting terrorism in the home country through remittances (Klepp 2002, Fangen 2006, 2008, Eide & Simonsen 2008). In Sweden (as in France), young immigrant men are often linked to suburban alienation and criminality. Likewise, riots or crime performed by young adult immigrants figure prominently as threats in both Norwegian and Estonian media (Kaldur et al. 2009, Fangen et al. 2009).

Welfare and Economy

In times of economic downturns, immigrants and ethnic minorities are routinely blamed for job scarcity and for straining the resources of the host societies. Discourses linking immigration and the provision of welfare are most common in countries with generous welfare benefits, in our case Norway and Sweden, where immigrants every now and then are believed to threaten the sustainability of the welfare state both economically and socioculturally (Van Oorschot (2008: 4). Economic arguments warn against the social expenditure costs related to immigration, which could undermine the viability of the welfare system in the long-term. Sociocultural perspectives directly centre on nationalistic conservation of culture and, by extension, concerns of social cohesion. A study by Bay & Pedersen (2006) illuminates this, illustrating that the social solidarity of many Norwegians is limited to ethnic Norwegians, possibly because they "distrust foreigners and suspect that they misuse generous welfare benefits" (ibid: 432).

Another discourse prevalent in most European countries revolves around immigrants' participation in the labour market, whether they out-compete the native population or whether immigrants are needed in order to fill jobs that natives will not take. This discourse shifts according to conjunctures, as exemplified during a period of high unemployment in Italy when there were many opponents of immigration arguing that immigrants working in the formal and informal economy compete with native workers

and thus 'steal' their jobs (Venturini 1999: 137). This makes it likely that the current high unemployment rate in Europe will increasingly be accompanied by interethnic hostility and a discourse in which immigrants will be cast as 'job thieves.' From a broader perspective, there is no doubt that migration plays a positive role in the long-term sustainability of European welfare states (Ferrera 2005: 231), especially since the European population is ageing and more young people are needed to fill jobs. A UNDP report on migration argues that migrants generally boost economic output at little or no cost to locals, and urges governments to reduce restriction on movement across borders. The report also laments that throughout the 20th century there was "nothing in the area of migration policy even remotely resembling the rapid multilateral liberalization of trade in goods and movements of capital that characterized the post-World War II period" (UNDP: 30).The rise in unemployment particularly affects young people of immigrant groups. A suspicious attitude towards these groups generates disparate access to economic security for young adults with immigrant background. In our selection of countries, these exclusionist discourses frequently target this group as either welfare dependents or 'job-thieves.'

Conclusion

Although positive representations of immigrants exist both in the media and at the official level, young adults with immigrant background are disproportionately represented negatively. However, the impact of these discourses on the process of social exclusion and inclusion of immigrants also depends on what is not said. The fact that young immigrants from some countries tend to perform better than their peers from the majority population, in terms of grades and length of education etc, is frequently ignored. That is to say that there is little focus on the undeniable success stories of integration in Europe. As a result, mass media representations in particular and public discourse in general tend to reproduce some of the basic elements of social exclusion. These public debates reflect and reinforce widespread prejudices in the majority population – and can have ramifications for the daily interaction between minority and majority. Negative representations of *the others* are likely to reinforce exclusionary tendencies and hidden discrimination, for instance when employers are reluctant to hire people because they have foreign sounding names (e.g. Arabic names in West-European countries, Russian family names in Estonia). This not only contributes to the minority

groups' feeling of being excluded, but also reproduces prevalent discourses, including explicitly hostile and xenophobic ones as well as more implicit forms of cultural alienation and non-recognition of their needs.

The stigmatisation of specific immigrant and ethnic groups, discursively link them to social problems and security concerns, has several detrimental, excluding consequences. First, many individuals from these groups are less likely to strive for a high position in a society where they risk being stigmatised. Second, political inclusion implies enabling and motivating individuals of all groups to participate in public debates. High levels of interethnic conflict in the public make this unlikely, especially when minority groups are stigmatised through sensational media coverage. Third, this can be seen as a vicious circle fomenting xenophobia; as the public opinion is influenced by public and media discourse it will be reflected in the elections, handing political power to immigrant-hostile parties. In fact, one political trend in Europe recently is that right-wing populist parties have been on the rise. Stereotypes allow far right politicians to propose ever-stricter rules on immigration and integration policies, thus creating more barriers against young immigrants desiring societal inclusion.

In sum, social exclusion is closely connected to the issue of social identities. This should be understood not only by examining the representation of immigrants in the media, but also by investigating how immigrants themselves respond psychologically and socially to these representations. This raises the issue of how to promote a more positive social identity for young adults with a minority background at the institutional and governmental level. One important step is to deconstruct the established linkage between migration and social problems. Understanding the different factors that lead to the success of some young immigrants in the labour market and the education system is crucial to unmasking the false presumption of a co-variation in ethnic minority status and marginalisation. Another step is to introduce/reinforce measures to ensure that young immigrants are officially represented in the public discourse, e.g. as politicians and as journalists in the mass media. This also enables immigrants to shape the discourses that directly concern them.

EUMARGINS cross-country comparison indicates how mass media, political and public discourses are effective tools in influencing people's identities. Social discourses influence not only the way the majority population perceives immigrants and descendants, but also the way immigrants and descendants perceive themselves and

their situation. Based on our understanding, stigmatisation has severe implications on the self-image and motivational structure of immigrants and ethnic minorities. Policies attempting to battle social exclusion are often directed towards activating and motivating the targeted group to strive for inclusion. Therefore, when it comes to social exclusion, the impact of politics and policies are intrinsic to the impact of social discourses. We urge that the issues discussed in this policy brief are taken into consideration by politicians, researchers and the public at large when addressing issues of social exclusion and inclusion.

Policy Recommendations

- *Develop a reflexive awareness of the differences in categorisations to establish a more standardised set of concepts. European-wide public policies can be effective only when those who craft and implement them share a common understanding of the crucial concepts. However, categorisations and conceptualisations of immigrants cannot be seen as neutral, as they should reflect the historical and cultural context of each country.*
- *Work towards a less stigmatised portrayal of immigrant and ethnic groups in the media and political sphere, as the dominant focus links these population groups with global and national social challenges and security concerns (terrorism, crime, welfare dependency etc.).*
- *Advocate the use of success stories. When creating role models, the EU should be at the forefront in positively depicting young immigrants. This includes continuing to monitor and critically evaluate stigmatising representations of young immigrants in the public sphere. Success stories of integration in Europe could be used politically as a tool to empower youth with an ethnic minority background who are less likely to strive for upward social mobility as long as they remain discursively stigmatised.*
- *Prevent the regular publication of ECRI-reports from being a sleeping pillow; more direct forms of action towards national politicians and the media and their role in constructing a hostile public sphere are also needed.*
- *Counteract the tendency during periods of economic recession to blame immigrants and minorities for the lack of jobs and for being a burden on the welfare systems of Europe. These groups are financially and demographically vital for sustaining the level of development in Europe – a fact that should be made more explicit in the public sphere, e.g. by informational campaigns.*
- *Seek a discursive mode in which immigrants and descendants are not only discussed, but discussed with. It is vital for political inclusion that our target group is invited to participate in the public discourse. This implies constructing a public dialogue between individuals from the majority and minority groups so that the latter are enabled to influence representations. It also entails introducing/reinforcing measures to enhance the official representation of young immigrants in the public discourse, e.g. as politicians and journalists in the*

mass media. This also enables immigrants to shape the discourses that directly concern them.

- *Reconstruct the image of European Muslims. To be a Muslim and a European should appear as natural as being a European of any other religion. This involves desecuritising the discourse that Muslims are threats, by European level public policies energetically aimed to influence the mass media.*

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About EUMARGINS

EUMARGINS is a collaborative project financed by The Seventh Framework Programme for research and technological development (FP7) of the European Union.

Research institutions in Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Estonia, Spain, Italy and France are members of the EUMARGINS project team. The research focus is on inclusion and exclusion of young adult immigrants in these seven European countries. The project lasts for 3 years; from 2008 to 2011.

New scientific knowledge produced by EUMARGINS will be published in the form of journal articles, reports, policy briefs and a final book. For the dissemination of policy recommendations, policy workshops will be organised in each participating country at the final stage of the project. An international scientific conference on the research findings will be organised in cooperation with the EU in 2011.