Integration of Immigrants in Western European Countries: A Comparative Sociology Perspective

Two lines of the research were proceeded in the framework of the project. The first line of research examined modes of immigrants’ labor market incorporation into European societies with specific emphasis on the role played by immigrant status (i.e. first-generation immigrants, immigrant descendants and native born without migrant background), region of origin (European and non-European regions of origin), and gender. The research focused on two aspects of labor market incorporation: labor force status and attainment of occupational status, and examined immigrants’ incorporation in the UK, France, Sweden and Belgium (as well as in nine ‘old immigration’ Western European countries together). The data for the analysis were obtained from the European Union Labour Forces Survey (EULFS) 2008 Ad-Hoc Module: “Labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants” and from five rounds (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010) of the European Social Survey (ESS).

The main results of the research suggest that in all countries non-European origin is associated with greater disadvantage in finding employment not only among first-generation immigrants, but also among sons and daughters of immigrants (i.e. second-generation). Moreover, the relative employment disadvantage among immigrant men of non-European origin (as compared to immigrant of European origin) is especially pronounced in the second-generation. Further results reveal that the relative odds of labor force participation among second-generation non-European women are significantly higher than those of first-generation immigrants. Yet, the odds of unemployment among second-generation non-European women are only slightly lower than those for first-generation immigrant women. Whereas the relatively low rates of labor force participation among non-European women could be driven, at least in part, by traditional gender roles and values of seclusion that dominate several non-European communities, the data show that in the second-generation, more non-European women are joining the economically active labor force, but still experience difficulties in finding employment. Immigrants of European origin, especially in the second-generation, however, seem to experience less difficulty than non-Europeans in incorporating into the labor force.

As to the attainment of occupation status, first-generation immigrants, regardless of origin (and regardless of gender) are less likely to attain high-status jobs in the four countries (and in Western Europe as whole). At the same time, the likelihood of second-generation, of both European and non-European origin, to be employed in high-status jobs (versus low-status jobs), once entered the labor market, are
similar to those of the comparable native-born populations. The results of the study reveal that patterns of labor market incorporation vary considerably across origin groups and across immigrant generations (immigrants and immigrant descendants). The patterns do not vary as much across countries, despite cross-country differences in welfare state regimes, migration integration policy and composition of migration flows. The disadvantages faced by immigrants of non-European origin, even in second generation, in all four countries (and Western Europe as whole) in finding employment may have significant consequences for future ethnic relations and social solidarity in Europe. Therefore, the findings presented by this research warrant further investigation, not only by social scientists but also by policy makers.

The second line of the research focused on the union membership among migrant workers in Europe, as one of the important indicators of immigrant integration and on the relationship between migrants and trade unions. This line provided the following main results. First, the lower unionization rate of migrant workers can be attributed only in part to the impact of labour market segregation. Moreover, the gap between the unionization rate of local and migrant workers varies substantially across countries. This gap is larger in those countries where trade unions enjoy organizational security, either in the form of state financing or a single dominant confederation. Second, unionized workers are likely to express lower levels of objection to admitting immigrants into society and tend to view the impact of immigrants on society in more positive terms than non-unionists. Part of this difference is explained by higher socio-economic position of unionized workers, and part of it is related to the greater job security enjoyed by unionized workers in comparison with non-unionists. Thus, unionized workers are less threaten by the potential competition with migrants. Third, migrants, in the great majority of European countries, have higher levels of trust in trade unions than native-born Europeans do. Although with time spent in the country, migrants’ level of trust decreases, this occurs only very slowly. In addition, migrants coming from countries with lower quality political and civil systems tend to express higher levels of trust in trade unions than migrants coming from countries with higher quality of institutions.

These findings have very significant implications for the relationship between union movements and migrant workers and for the future strength of trade unions in the advanced European democracies since migrant workers, across Western Europe, a growing section of the national workforce and, potentially at least, an increasingly important constituency for unions. The attitudes of union members towards immigrants, as well as the attitudes of migrants toward unions, may well be an important factors in shaping the strategy of union leaderships related to recruitment of migrants. The research in demonstrating that union members are, in fact, more positive than nonmembers in their attitudes and that migrants have higher level of trust in unions than natives, suggests that union leaders may have more room for maneuver than is commonly assumed.

The details of research papers published in the framework of the project and the researcher contact details can be find here:
https://telaviv.academia.edu/AnastasiaGorodzeisky
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