

Support Fund for the Reception and Integration of immigrants and their Educational Support: Latvia's Statements and Comments

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This comments paper shortly presents Latvia's experience, explains historical context of migration and its implications for reception and integration of migrants, then it analyses Spain's model of the Support Fund for the Reception, Integration and educational support of immigrants, and finally seeks for possible transferability of good practices to Latvia. These comments are based on the discussion paper, submitted by the researcher María Concepción Carrasco.

Brief note of the policy context in Latvia

Today's Latvia can be mainly described as rather being an emigration than immigration country. Therefore in regard to integration policies and practices, we have to take into account three distinct groups of people with very different integration needs: (1) *return migrants* and their family members, (2) first and second generation *established* national minorities and migrants, who arrived to Latvia during the Soviet Union and (3) *recently* arrived migrants. To put in broader context, we need to give a short historical note of migration processes in Latvia. We want to stress that the Spanish experience could be partly transferred for reception and integration practices regarding the latter group of people.

Latvia has experienced several waves of migration in the twentieth century. After the Second World War, during which Latvia was annexed to the Soviet Union, until 1991, when Latvia regained its independence, ethnic proportions in Latvia changed significantly due to inward migration. During the Soviet era many thousands of Russian-speaking people from Slavic Soviet Republics, especially from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, arrived to live and work in Latvia (Zvidrins, 2002). The ethnic proportions changed dramatically during the Soviet time: comparing the census data of 1935 to the data of 1989, the proportion of ethnic Latvians shrunk from 76.99% to 52.04%, while the proportion of ethnic Russians grew from 8.83% to 33.96%, the proportion of Ukrainians - from 0.10% to 3.45%, Byelorussians - from 1.41% to 4.49% (Dribins, 1998). Most of the people who arrived lived in the biggest Latvian cities and towns, therefore in 1989 in seven biggest cities, including the capital, ethnic Latvians were the minority.

Many of those who arrived during the Soviet time are integrated in Latvian society, know Latvian language, and have obtained Latvian citizenship. Yet 16.361% of the population remain non-citizens, in fact with a form of quasi citizenship, given to those ex-citizens of the former Soviet Union who, or whose parents, were not citizens of Latvia before the Soviet Union annexed Latvia in 1940 and 2.034% were holding foreign citizenship. (Statistics, Naturalisation board ad of 1st October, 2008).

Latvia's inhabitants according to nationality

	Inhabitants	%	Citizens	%
Latvians	1 345 100	59.1	1 342 215	99.8
Russians	638 410	28.0	367 035	57.5
Belarusian's	83 799	3.7	31 196	37.2
Ukrainians	57 281	2.5	17 442	30.4
Poles	54 121	2.4	40 635	75.1
Lithuanians	30 780	1.4	18 385	59.7
Israeli	10 168	0.4	6507	64.0
Roma	8593	0.4	8000	93.1
Germans	4371	0.2	2236	51.2
Tatars	2863	0.1	809	28.3
Armenians	2759	0.1	1058	38.3
Estonians	2504	0.1	1496	59.7
Other	35 533	1.6	20 494	57.7
Total	2 276 282	100	1 857 508	81.6

(Source: Office of the Citizenship and Migration Affairs to 01.01.2008)

At the end of the 1980s, when the so-called Awakening process started followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union and Latvia's subsequent independence, a key legal act (Cabinet of Ministers Regulations, 1989) to prevent inward migration was enacted, creating long-term consequences. As a result, and given the dismantling of borders at that time, since 1990, migration flows changed significantly turning to a negative balance of migration (more people left than came to the country).

Latvia has experienced also forced emigration and deportations during and after the Second World War, and another significant voluntary outflow in recent history after the collapse of the Soviet Union and joining the EU. Many went abroad legally, especially through processes of family reunion, as well as labour and educational contracts. However, some overstayed their visas and therefore much labour emigration in the 1990s went unregistered. While many people emigrated after the EU enlargement in 2004, in reality unknown numbers of former inhabitants of Latvia were already living abroad, only with irregular status.

Summing up this historical context it should be underlined that today in Latvia there are two terms defining foreigners: one refers to 'established immigrants', while the other refers to recently arrived 'new immigrants.' (Akule, 2007). At the same time it also should be noted, that these people are not called migrants in public discourses, but national minorities to avoid negative connotations of a term 'migrant', even if legally some of them could be described in such way. The numbers of newcomers are still very low. To illustrate, there are just 35 officially recognised refugees or persons with subsidiary protection status in 2008; 3201 foreigner received a temporary residence permit to stay in Latvia for the first time in 2007.

The number of foreigners compared to number of inhabitants

	2006.	2007.	2008
Number of inhabitants (<i>Eurostat date</i>)	2 294 590	2 281 305	2 270 894
The number of the permanent residency permits			33 060
Permanent residency permits rate compared to number of inhabitants			1,45 %
The number of the temporary residence permits	5799	7880	12815
Temporary residency permits rate compared to number of inhabitants	0,25 %	0,34 %	0,56%

Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs Latvia, 2008.

Official migration data do show that, the total number of foreigners (persons with permanent and temporary residence permits) compared to number of inhabitants in Latvia is small – approximately 2% of the number of inhabitants.

When it comes to emigrants, Latvians living abroad have left in different periods of time, come from different social, education and cultural background. Therefore they have differentiated needs, expectations and future orientation towards their homeland. The latest wave of economic migration within the free movement of labour in the EU also comprises individuals with varied professional and educational background, and is going through different stages of integration in the host country, practicing circular migration or leaning towards possible return migration to Latvia. Some of them also have specific reintegration needs, since their children have already started education in host countries and need special support to be able re-integrate into Latvian society and education system.

Brief explanation on institutional framework and policy intentions to support integration of migrants

Institutional framework: national level

Due to the complex and multifaceted nature of migration, the regulation of these issues is the responsibility of various institutions:

- The Ministry of the Interior;
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- The Ministry of Welfare;
- The Ministry of Justice;
- The Secretariat of Special Assignments Minister for Societal Integration (hereafter -Ministry of Integration).

Each of the above institutions is being in charge of a specific range of topics in the area of migration.

The Cabinet of Ministers Regulations state that the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs is governed by the Ministry of the Interior and its mandate covers the implementation of the state migration policy; it rather focuses on immigration policy.

The Ministry of Welfare and the State Employment agency (under the ministry) are the main institutions, which are responsible for development and implementation of labour migration policy. The main governmental institution to deal not with migration regimes, but social integration of both returning Latvian migrants and incoming migrants from third countries is The Ministry of Integration. Its main objective is to develop a common system of integration into the society of citizens and residents of Latvia, establishing and strengthening a framework for co-operation with the Latvian diasporas abroad.

There are no yet institutional settings on regional or local level to respond to migration realities.

Policy programmes and intentions

Measures already implemented by the Member State:

On February 1, 2006 the Cabinet of Ministers approved The Program for the Development of the Single Asylum and Migration Management System, 2006-2009 (hereinafter – the Program).

Integration of Foreigners

The funding from the European Commission, the project “*Latvia – Equal in Diversity I*” was launched to raise the public awareness of refugees and to prepare the informative material “The ABC for Refugees”.

Activities of the institutions of public administration and NGO partner network to eliminate discrimination, to promote tolerance and inform about the European Union (EU) anti-discrimination policy priorities were carried out in the framework of the project „*Latvia - Equal in Diversity II*”.

The project „*Latvia - Equal in Diversity III*” envisages the integration of foreign students, implementation of anti-discrimination policy in Latvian regions and the training of mass media representatives on issues of diversity and tolerance.

In 2006 in the framework of the European Refugee Fund two projects were realised with the aim of preventing manifestations of racism and xenophobia.

To promote the activities of non-governmental organisations (hereinafter- NGO) on issues related to integration and the promotion of tolerance, the Secretariat of the Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration every year provides support for the implementation of NGO projects within the limits of state budget subsidy programmes. In 2007 in the framework of The National Programme for the Promotion of Tolerance 6667 LVL were allocated in total for the implementation of 5 projects. In the framework of the national programme “Reinforcing the Civil Society, 2005-2009” (The Cabinet of Ministers order No. 141, March 4, 2005) the Secretariat in 2007 allocated state budget subsidies in the amount of 40 000 LVL to advocacy NGO programmes for the implementation of 11 projects, of which 1 was implemented by Romanian-Moldovan association “Doina”. The objective of the project was to establish informative advisory service and to develop other “mechanisms for inclusion”, so that guest workers from Moldova and Romania would enjoy their social, culture and economic rights, would not be discriminated against and to ensure positive integration processes.

In 2007 the Secretariat in cooperation with the Institute of Social and Political Research organised the seminar "Social Integration – an Element of Sustainable Society". The seminar aimed to promote the awareness of the social integration process – its essence, principles, problems, aims and desirable results. The indicators for measuring integration and the role of social integration in the context of sustainable society were among the topics debated at the seminar.

In 2007 in the framework of the state programme "Reinforcing Civil Society, 2005-2009", the marketing and public opinion research centre SKDS carried out a study "Attitude towards Civil Society", to identify also the public attitude towards race or ethnicity.

The decision No. 771/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2006, declared the year 2007 „European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007) – towards a just society" (hereinafter – Year of Equal Opportunities). The Secretariat was the responsible institution entrusted with the coordination and the implementation of the Year of Equal Opportunities activities in Latvia. At the beginning of 2007 on the basis of a competition 10 NGOs received financial support of the EC and the Secretariat for the implementation of 13 projects within the framework of the Year of Equal Opportunities.

A state programme called "Integration of Society in Latvia 2001" (Integration programme, 2001) was the main policy planning document of social and ethnic integration so far, setting out the vision for the development of an inclusive society in Latvia and cooperation amongst Latvians all around the world.

Although there are no policy guidelines for local level yet, some local institutions have gained experience and developed good practices in regard to integration of national minorities and established migrants (those, who arrived during the Soviet time). For example a Western city of Ventspils prepared its own integration programme (Ventspils, 2005-2007).

As already mentioned in the discussion paper by María Concepción Carrasco, several important steps have been taken to enhance migrants/national minorities' integration policy.

- November 2005: Amendments to the immigration law established criteria for detention and the right to appeal.
- December 2005: Latvian National Human Rights office designated equality body.
- June 2006: Transposition of EU Directive on long-term residents raised debate on status of non-nationals.
- Equality access to institutions - The Trust point for refugees and asylum seekers has been established under the Ministry of Integration¹. Basic Knowledge of the host society Information materials in six languages and web site have been prepared by the Trust point.

There are several policy planning initiatives, however, it should be stressed, that mostly these are declarations of intent, are not yet approved by the government or are in planning stage. A new programme of the Integration of Society in Latvia currently is under preparation to replace the previous programme, approved in 2001.

¹ It is a project based and financed initiative and therefore sustainability is still uncertain under stricter state budget limits and structural changes in governmental institutions, which could take place as of 2009.

Overview of policy planning documents and initiatives on migration

Return migration

- Return migration: The Statement of Intent of promoting return migration, the Integration Ministry. (2006). It aimed to develop state and private partnership model for stimulating the return to Latvia of Latvian emigrants. The Statement was signed by a number of civil society groups representing Latvian emigrants abroad. The Statement of Intent was reviewed by the government in 2006.
- The information report to promote return migration, the Integration Ministry. (2007). The report aimed to outline policy aims and priorities to promote return migration. It concluded that main long term priorities to encourage return are as follows: raising of standards of employer-employee relations, changes in tax and social allowances system to support families and easing of bureaucratic obstacles to launch and maintain small business. It was submitted to the government in 2007, but has been adopted by June 2008
- Return Migration Action Plan, the Integration Ministry (2007). The action plan supplemented the information report by proposing concrete actions to promote return of émigrés to Latvia. It included a wide range of various tasks of different governmental, business and civil society partners. This plan is planned to be submitted to the government in October 2008.

Immigration

- Concept paper on migration policy, the Ministry of the Interior and its Citizenship and the Migration Affairs department and the Ministry of Welfare. (2007). It focused on immigration issues and possible policy scenarios of immigration in future. It has not been accepted by the government at the time of writing (October, 2008).
- The Economy Stabilisation Plan, the Ministry of Economics (Stabilisation plan. (2007). The Plan recommends the government to work out a balanced policy of economic migration in order to reduce the labour outflow and ensure controllable recruitment of labour force that meets the long-term goals of Latvian economic development. The Plan was adopted by the government in 2007.

Integration

Broad policy initiatives to encompass integration needs in regard to return migration, immigration and national minorities:

- A new programme of the Integration of Society in Latvia currently is under preparation to replace previous programme.
- The one year and long – term integration programme of immigrants currently is drafted together with the European Commission.

Relevance of the Spain's policy to Latvia

We fully agree that different integration programmes should depend on whether they are aimed at recent arrivals or second and third generation immigrants. Relevance of the Spanish approach is of a great importance for Latvia to prepare different inclusion policy steps for newly arrived asylum seekers, recognised refugees, economic migrants, migrants' family members.

As already mentioned before, integration policy in Latvia has mainly been focused on those people from national minorities, who arrived to Latvia in Soviet times so far. Fundamental changes has been achieved in citizenship policy since regained independence and more recent changes in education system for minority, mainly Russian speaking people have taken place in Latvia. Bilingual education system has been introduced in minority schools since 1990ties, people who want to obtain Latvian citizenship, have been offered various support to improve command of Latvian language to be able to pass the language exam.

However, no special policies/policy intentions towards returned migrants or newly arrived migrants from third countries have been established so far.

Most migrant workers arrive in Latvia to engage in legal employment for a short period of time because employers offer them short-term contracts. Integration policy for refugees is at the very initial stage: the Trust point for refugees has been established, expert group has prepared recommendations for the Ministry of Integration (Recommendations of refugees' integration, June 2008) and the Trust point together with the Riga office of the International Organisation for Migration provide state language courses and will provide integration and cultural orientation courses for refugees and asylum seekers for the first time in October, 2008². All these activities are co-financed by the European Refugee Fund and the Latvian state.

A group of researchers of the Advanced Social and Political Research Institute, University of Latvia, have been preparing also recommendations of immigrants' integration in Latvia (ongoing project to be completed in November, 2008).

To conclude, Latvia is still in a very early stage to prepare more concrete actions for immigrants' integration. Despite the fact that target groups of newly arrived immigrants are often citizens of third countries, we want to stress that also EU citizens from other countries need integration, culture orientation and language training to incorporate better into Latvian society.

Potential transferability

We agree that integration models adopted by Member States have an important role on which integration measures are developed. Latvia officially does not support either assimilation or multiculturalism policy setting full integration into society as an ideal goal, The Reception Fund, could also be seen as a means to combine integration into the host society under principles of equality and non-discrimination, and in inter-culturality as a system of interaction between people of different origins and cultures.

Some parts of the Spanish policy would be very important and with a potential of transferability:

² Integration courses have not taken place yet at the time of writing (beginning of October, 2008).

- Language training to various target groups;
- Integration and cultural orientation courses very soon after the arrival, not only, when an official status has been obtained (especially in regard to asylum seekers).
- Inclusion of newly arrived migrants, especially children in the education system. (For example, currently children of migrants from third countries with temporary residence permit cannot receive free education in Latvia. (Ķešāne and Kaša, 2008)).
- Coordination of integration practices, sharing of best practices on local level;
- Involvement of NGOs, which could work with various groups of migrants.

Conclusions

Looking from the Latvia's point of view it would be very valuable to discuss in detail at the Peer Review meeting the potential of transferring specific parts of the policy/good practice mentioned above.

It would be also interesting to hear opinions and share experience with various countries about possibilities to prepare and implement specific steps towards so different groups as newly arrived migrants, national minorities and returned migrants taking into account their specific needs.

At last, but not least, we would like to pay attention to the issue of evaluation of integration measures and specific indicators, which could form a basis of evaluation. We agree that, the Immigrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX Integration index, 2007) could be to some extent one of cornerstones of efficient evaluation system, taking into account the EU common principles for evaluation of the measures that help to integrate into the host country.

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