

Human Well-Being Research and Policy Making
Series Editors: Richard J. Estes · M. Joseph Sirgy

Angela Papanusso

Immigrant Integration in Europe

A Subjective Well-Being Perspective

 Springer

Human Well-Being Research and Policy Making

Series Editors

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*To my beloved husband, for his love,
patience, and support.*

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Chapter 1

Introduction



Abstract This Chapter aims to illustrate the rationale and structure of the Book. Immigrant integration, understood in its complex and multidimensional character, is one of the key challenges of increasingly multicultural European societies. On the other hand, subjective well-being is recently capturing the research interest of migration scholars and researchers, as a measure of subjective integration. This Book aims to bring subjective well-being into the research strand of immigrant integration, using self-reported life satisfaction. This introductory Chapter begins by outlining the rationale and structure of the Book, as well as providing definitions of key concepts employed throughout the Book and positioning the present study in the broader field. Then, I proceed by providing a short historical overview of immigration in Europe, which is useful to understand the evolution of Europe as a continent of immigration and, therefore, of integration, in the last decades. The final paragraph focuses on the European response to the 2015 refugee crisis and provides insights into recent evolution in European migration governance.

Keywords Immigrant integration · Subjective well-being · Europe · Immigrants · Refugees

1.1 Rationale and Structure of the Book

Immigrant integration is a central issue in contemporary societies. It is at the core of both public debate and intimate reflection since it challenges both national identity and socio-economic cohesion. It pertains, at the same time, the private encounter with the ‘other’ and the communities’ best way of allocating resources and opportunities for all. For this reason, immigrant integration is at the top of European countries’ social policy agenda.

The topic of integration become even more relevant if we think that, as elucidated by Crul et al. (2013), European cities are gradually becoming majority-minority cities, as New York, Sao Paolo, Toronto and Sydney already are (Alba, 2020; Alba & Reitz, 2019). In the next decades, everyone living in a large European city will belong to an ethnic minority group. Some cities, such as Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin

and Brussels have already started this process. But are European cities prepared to this? Will they be able to better respond to this challenge? Do European citizens have open attitudes towards immigrants? To answer these questions it is necessary that European politicians, policy makers, scholars and researchers look beyond national boundaries. An international comparison can make integration policies and practices visible and therefore helpful to develop new perspectives on immigrant integration based on more diversity and equity. Integration should not be understood as a future goal, but as a present constitutive trait of modern societies.

Although the inclusion of immigrants¹ into the host society has been studied through different concepts, e.g., absorption, adaptation, assimilation, acculturation, inclusion, incorporation, and integration (Heckmann, 2007), the latter is widely used to explain the relationship between the newcomers to a residence country and the native or mainstream society in Europe. In particular, “the term integration refers to the process of settlement, interaction with the host society, and social change that follows immigration” (Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas, 2016: 11).

In European countries, the integration of immigrants is a shared political goal, pursued through different instruments inspired by distinct philosophies of the relationship with the other. It is a mutual process of interaction and adaptation between immigrants and natives and between immigrant communities and host societies (Piché, 2004).

For instance, Penninx and Garcés-Masareñas (2016: 14) define integration as “the process of becoming an accepted part of society”. Although the host society seems to have a dominant role in the process of immigrant integration, immigrants, the host community, and countries of origin are all key actors in this complex process of mutual acceptance and adaptation (Piché, 2004).

Immigrant integration is also understood as a multidimensional process (Ager & Strang, 2008). In particular, the international literature refers to four distinct dimensions: (1) a legal dimension, expressed in the acquisition of a legal residence, including the citizenship status of the new country of residence; (2) an economic dimension, meaning the integration of immigrants into the native labour market; (3) a socio-political dimension, leading to the recognition to immigrants of rights similar to those enjoyed by the natives; (4) a cultural dimension, concerning the knowledge of the language, culture, norms, and traditions of the host society (e.g., Penninx et al., 2004, 2006).

¹ According to the United Nations Population Division, ‘international migrant’ is a person who changes his or her country of usual residence for a period that can go from three (short-term or temporary migration) to twelve months (long-term or permanent migration). With the term ‘immigrants’, I refer to people born abroad who are or intend to be settled in their new country of residence, irrespective of their citizenship status, that is whether or not they have acquired the nationality of their country of residence. Sometimes immigrants will be understood with the meaning of people with a migrant background (see, for instance, Chap. 7). According to Eurostat, a ‘person with a migrant background’ is a person who has migrated into their present country of residence; and/or previously had a different nationality from their present country of residence; and/or at least one of their parents previously entered their present country of residence as a migrant.