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## Attitudes towards immigrants, other integration barriers, and their veracity

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# Discussion Papers

# 812

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Klaus F. Zimmermann

**Attitudes Towards Immigrants, Other  
Integration Barriers, and Their Veracity**

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Opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect views of the institute.

## IMPRESSUM

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# Attitudes towards immigrants, other integration barriers, and their veracity

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## Abstract

The paper studies opinions and attitudes towards immigrants and minorities and their interactions with other barriers to minorities' economic integration. Specifically, we consider the minority experts' own perceptions about these issues, the veracities and repercussions of unfavorable attitudes of natives. Employing newly available data from the IZA Expert Opinion Survey 2007 we depict main trends in the integration situation of ethnic minorities in Europe in a comparative manner. Using a unique dataset, this innovative study is the first to gauge the perspectives of expert stakeholders and ethnic minorities on their integration situation and the main barriers that hinder it. Robust findings show that ethnic minorities: face integration problems; natives' general negative attitudes are a key factor of their challenging situation; discrimination is acknowledged as the single most important integration barrier; low education and self-confidence as well as cultural differences also hinder integration; minorities want change and that it come about by policies based on the principle of equal treatment. Well designed integration policies that take the specific situation of the respective ethnic minority into account, are persistent and enforce anti-discrimination laws are desirable.

**JEL classification:** J15, J71, J78

**Keywords:** attitudes; opinions; immigrants; ethnic minorities; labor market

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## **1. Introduction**

The social and labor market integration of ethnic minorities in the European Union (EU) is still a major political, societal and economic challenge. Ethnic minorities include indigenous, linguistic, and religious minorities; stateless people; and peoples of foreign origin. The EU recognizes that culture and diversity are vital elements to its countries' economies and competitiveness and its international relations with third countries. "Today's strategy promoting intercultural understanding confirms culture's place at the heart of our policies" said Barroso (in EU, 2007). In May 2007, the Commission proposed three objectives: cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; culture as a catalyst for creativity; and culture as a key component in international relations. The Lisbon Strategy, as well as the European years 2007 ("equal opportunities for all"), 2008 ("intercultural dialogue") and 2009 ("creativity and innovation") underline the commitment of the EU to diversity and intercultural cooperation. This is backed by research that emphasizes the indisputable value of ethnic diversity (Ottaviano and Peri, 2006).

Undoubtedly, successful economic integration of minorities is the cornerstone of their social success and can result in positive spillovers to cultural domains. However, barriers to labor market integration of ethnic minorities do exist in some form or another and cultural distance may be an important obstacle. In general, immigrants and minorities lag behind natives and the majority populations in economic, educational, social and political areas. They tend to have higher unemployment rates, lower occupational attainment and wages, a looser labor market attachment, and are least able to find and hold good jobs. Worse, mobility remains slow or nonexistent across generations.

While governments increasingly emphasize the need for more economic migrants, fear of losing jobs, xenophobia and negative sentiments are widespread among natives. Since migration inflows are affected by policy, migration policy is partly responsible for the types of immigrants a country receives, their economic performance, the functioning of the economy, and hence natives' perceptions towards immigrants. Attitudes and sentiments towards migrants, foreigners or ethnic minorities vary widely across countries and could be a major source of disadvantage or prosperity for ethnic minorities. While attitudes and perceptions form our behavior, they are also the outcome of a complex social, political, and economic process, shaped through the engagement of individuals in social and economic life and influenced by public discourse and the media.

We investigate the veracities and repercussions of unfavorable attitudes of natives towards immigrants and minorities and their interactions with other barriers to minorities' economic integration. An intriguing, yet neglected, question about the integration and success of ethnic minorities is how the ethnic minorities themselves, as well as their representatives and other stakeholders, perceive their labor market situation and the roles of various internal and external integration barriers. Listening and responding to what minorities want should be an integral part of any evaluation and policy relevant study. We employ a unique dataset, an expert opinion survey among 215 expert minority stakeholders in EU in 2007, to exploit their opinions about the situation of and attitudes towards ethnic minorities in Europe. The experts represent non-governmental and public organizations involved with ethnic minority integration.

## **2. Attitudes towards ethnic minorities in the EU**

Attitudes toward ethnic minorities have been researched by many. Gang et al. (2002) find that more than 80 percent of rising anti-foreigner feeling is related to behavioral changes among the population. Young people, the higher educated and more skilled are more favorable towards ethnic minorities and supportive of immigrants, while the permanently sick or disabled, the discouraged workers, the unemployed and the retirees have more hostile attitudes. O'Rourke and Sinnott (2006) corroborate these findings, highlighting the role of nationalist sentiments and arguing that natives are less hostile towards refugees than immigrants in general. Zimmermann et al. (2007), report that attitudes of minority ethnic groups are more positive than the majority's attitudes towards individuals from different ethnic groups. Hainmueller and Hiscox (2007) confirm these results and find that negative sentiments are powerfully associated with a cultural threat and perceptions about identity; it is differences in cultural values and beliefs rather than fear of labor market competition and economic well-being that provide the link between education and attitudes towards immigrants.

What causal mechanisms drive this link remains an open question. Definitely, national, ethnic and religious identities become particularly pertinent in the political economy realm. While immigration policy may play a role, natives are more concerned about losing jobs to immigrants in countries with more economic immigrants. However, when immigrant selection conforms to the needs of the host labor market, natives are more in favor of immigration (Bauer et al., 2000). Our study contributes to this literature by highlighting the stakeholders' perceptions of the situation of ethnic minorities and the role of negative attitudes in driving it.

Self-reported discrimination in the EU due to color or race, nationality, religion, language and ethnicity [1] varies by country, as reported in Figure 1. Attitudes and sentiments about ethnic minorities are certainly related to natives' perceptions about them. Natives often say that immigrants worsen their country's standard of living; they exacerbate crime; they take jobs away. This might be because of racist and discriminatory attitudes, because of dire economic hardship, because the economy cannot accommodate the influx of legal and illegal immigrants, or due to selection issues as these countries might attract adversely selected immigrants. If immigrants as factors of production are substitutes to natives, according to economic theory they will cause displacement and unemployment. This threat, coupled with non-flexible and stagnant labor markets in Europe, can easily trigger negative attitudes towards immigrants. Note that attitudes reflect complex historical, psychological, and social processes that may complicate cross-country comparisons and obscure their relation to a realized action, which is of central interest. While, in general, immigrants are more positive and tolerant towards other immigrants, about 15% of them do not want any more immigrants in the host country, possibly reflecting the fear that new immigrants would become competitors in the labor market and in ethnic niches (Zimmermann et al., 2007).

### **3. The IZA Expert Opinion Survey**

The IZA Expert Opinion Survey (Zimmermann et al., 2007) was conducted among expert stakeholders in the EU-27 in 2007 with the objective to: measure the experts' perceptions and concerns about the labor market integration of ethnic minorities; capture the experts' opinions about the perceptions of ethnic minorities in their country on various issues concerning their labor market integration and integration policy initiatives; and identify successful business, non-governmental, and public initiatives aimed at labor market integration of ethnic minorities and to evaluate their success. Out of the 215 organizations represented in the survey, 33.8% focus on ethnic minorities and 29.1% are run by members of ethnic minority groups. In addition, the survey covers 192 business, non-governmental, and public initiatives that aim at the labor market integration of ethnic minorities. This survey thus offers significant heuristic information for scientists and policymakers.

We present the results of a comparative analysis for the whole sample of experts and the sub-sample of experts representing organizations run by members of ethnic minorities. We provide another comparative perspective by the analysis of all minorities in general and the reported minorities at greatest risk of labor market exclusion. In general, the labor market situation of ethnic

minorities in Europe is described as severe and worsening. The leitmotiv is that Roma and Sub-Saharan Africans are facing the largest risk of exclusion and discrimination is acknowledged as the single most important integration barrier.

The majority of the surveyed experts perceive ethnic minorities to be exposed to “high” or “very high” risk of labor market exclusion. This perception is somewhat higher among experts from organizations run by members of ethnic minorities (Figure 2). In addition, the survey shows that an overwhelming majority of the experts (81% of all respondents and 91% of minority respondents) perceive the exclusion risk of ethnic minorities to be constant (53% of all respondents and 56% of minority respondents) or increasing over time (28% of all respondents and 35% of minority respondents). Virtually all experts agree that ethnic minorities desire some change in their integration situation (86% of all respondents and 98% of minority respondents).

Figure 3 presents the areas where changes are most desired by ethnic minorities: paid-employment (hiring, promotion, laying-off, and pay), education, housing, and attitudes (acceptance by society). Social insurance and benefits, cultural, social and religious life, and political representation are also noted by a significant number of respondents as areas in great need of improvement. Note that national and international mobility and self-employment are not viewed as problematic areas. Health care is somewhere between these other areas in terms of importance. These patterns are similarly revealed by both minorities in general and minorities at greatest risk.

Figure 4 illustrates the experts’ views on the attitudes of the general public. Public attitudes are seen as a strong negative force for labor market integration. About 70 percent of the whole sample of minority experts report “negative” public attitudes towards ethnic minorities. Among expert minorities at greatest risk, about 50 percent feel that public attitudes towards ethnic minorities are “very negative”. This may partly explain why these minorities are perceived to be at greatest risk of exclusion. While some said that public attitudes are neutral, less than five percent said that public attitudes are positive and no one said they are very positive. In theory, the business world should be less discriminatory than the general public, because competition makes discriminatory practices very costly. Accordingly, the business world attitudes should not be anti-minorities and this should be in turn reflected in the minorities’ opinion about the business world. Unfortunately, our survey shows that the experts’ opinions about the attitudes of the general public are echoed in the business world albeit in a smaller scale (Figure 5).

Figure 6 sheds light on the integration barriers, as seen by the experts. Insufficient knowledge of the official language, inadequate education, lack of information about employment opportunities,



and internal barriers (social, cultural, and religious norms originating from within the respective ethnic minority), along with institutional barriers (citizenship or legal restrictions) are reported as very significant barriers. The vast majority of experts, however, cite discrimination as the most serious barrier to the social and labor market integration of ethnic minorities. This is consistent with the extremely negative attitudes reported above. Other major barriers preventing full labor market participation and integration, are regional underdevelopment, poverty, lack of legal documents, lack of self-confidence to apply for jobs, non-recognition of foreign educational documents, unwillingness to work, trauma after spells in refugee camps, lack of experience in the host country social context, lack of interest in integration, and competition from intra-EU migrants.

The experts cite general (e.g. anti-discrimination laws) or specific (e.g. targeted pre-school education and information campaigns) public policies and initiatives as appropriate means to overcome these barriers. Business and non-governmental initiatives (including church initiatives) are also viewed as important means of overcoming integration barriers. The experts' suggestions to enhance integration include the following: training in self-confidence, active lobbying, cultural diversity education, immigration law changes, elimination of institutional barriers (e.g. recognition of foreign educational documents), legalization of (illegal) immigrants, public attitudes and media management (promoting benefits of immigrants on national media, challenging racism in the media).

In sum, experts who deal with ethnic minorities or who are minorities themselves firmly acknowledge that minorities in all 27 EU-countries are at grave risk of exclusion, and this risk is either steadfast or increasing. Among the most vulnerable and affected minorities are the Roma and people from Africa. Minorities want change that comes about through policies adhering to the principle of equal and fair treatment. The open-ended experts' responses highlight the need for versatile and tailor-made policy action by local and national governments.

The experts also indicate that while standard efficiency and effectiveness concerns drive the success of integration activities, efficient communication with the affected parties, fairness, and acceptance of integration measures are factors that are instrumental to ensure the success of an initiative. But all measures need to be flexible enough to account for changes and allow time to become effective. This is particularly true when tackling cultural issues such as perceptions and attitudes.

#### **4. Summary and contribution of the special issue**

The IZA Expert Opinion Survey of 2007 reveals the view and experience of stakeholders deeply involved in the ongoing integration of ethnic minorities in EU-27. Our analysis reveals several distinct and enlightening findings. The situation of some ethnic minorities in Europe in terms of risk of labor market exclusion is severe and in many cases worsening. Contrary to the views of some, ethnic minorities by and large want to change their plight, especially their paid-employment opportunities, education, housing, and the public's attitudes and stereotypes about them. Local and national governments are considered by most to be responsible for the initiation and promotion of these changes, although EU institutions, non-governmental organizations, and minority representatives are also seen as bearing responsibility. The survey indicates that experts from organizations dealing with ethnic minorities believe that ethnic minorities mostly prefer the principle of equal and fair treatment to that of special treatment through specific provisions or positive discrimination.

It is disconcerting that the experts find both the general public and the business world having negative attitudes towards them which incubate a strong negative force for labor market integration. Discrimination is perceived to be the single most important integration barrier throughout EU-27. Other significant integration barriers include linguistic, educational, and institutional factors. Internal barriers (social, cultural, and religious norms, immigrants own opinions about themselves, lack of motivation and intergenerational mobility) are also serious culprits of non-integration. Some experts highlighted the role of the media and their crucial role in shaping public perceptions. Many of the suggestions involve active communication programs effectively extolling the often unnoticed benefits of multiethnic coexistence.

The IZA Expert Opinion Survey shows that there is no single explanation for deficits regarding the social and labor market integration of ethnic minorities in EU-27. The situation is more complex, with intricate interrelated parts. On the one hand, observable characteristics, such as deficits in education and training as well as knowledge of the main language, hamper access to the labor market and to steady employment. On the other hand, attitudes and perceptions held by both the minority and the majority population do matter. That is, the power of self-perception of the minorities as well as discrimination by the majority population - cultural differences and prejudices notwithstanding - can negatively interact and produce insidious pressures to socio-economic integration. Finally, institutional provisions of the labor market and the welfare state are instrumental

in facilitating or restricting access to employment and social integration for diverse minority groups. These factors can explain differences in integration across European labor markets.

The situation of ethnic minorities can be improved to the extent that governmental and non-governmental action can change the institutional and societal factors that are found to have a strong impact on the social and economic well-being of ethnic minorities. Overcoming negative attitudes and outright discrimination is paramount as is taking the specific situation of the respective ethnic minority into account. But integration has to be achieved in coordination with other changes in a comprehensive plan that approaches all critical aspects. This is not just an issue of institutional reform; it has to do with the consistent enforcement of and abiding by anti-discrimination legislation. Policies fostering the labor market and social integration of ethnic majorities can work, so long as they are persistent and allow time to become effective; especially when tackling cultural issues such as perceptions and attitudes. The media can also raise awareness by disseminating unbiased information on ethnic minorities, good practices and individual success stories that can stimulate further initiatives.

The next research papers of this special issue cover the specific aspects of immigrants and minorities integration in several immigration countries. The issues of segregation, exclusion, religion, and education are covered in part 1. Migrant ethnicity is particularly pertinent in the context of the labor market (Constant and Zimmermann, 2008; Zimmermann, 2007). Three important pillars of ethnic identity are researched in the following Parts. The topic of citizenship in Europe, its determinants and ensuing success in the labor market is tackled in part 2. The link between inter-marriages and labor market success is studied in part 3, with the US and France as appropriate paradigms. Ethnic entrepreneurship is the subject of part 4. How self-employed men and women fare in Germany, the UK, and the US establishes a positive picture of immigrant integration that is often neglected in the assimilation literature as well as in the formation and continuation of attitudes and perceptions of natives.

## Notes

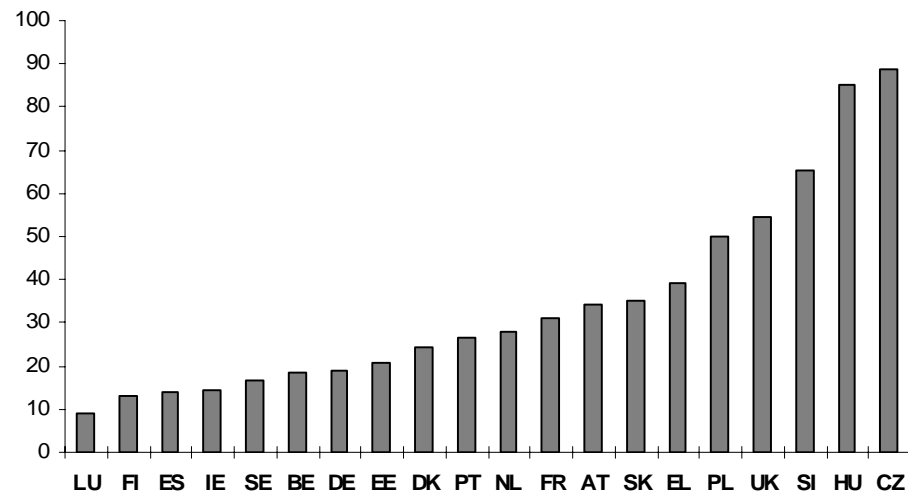
- 1 We exclude those who experience discrimination on grounds of sex, age, or disability.

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## Figures

Figure 1. Self-reported discrimination in percent of ethnic minority population



**Notes:** Data are from the European Social Survey 2004, Eurostat. The vertical axis reports the percent of respondents in the ethnic minority population, who respond positively to the question: “Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in this country?” Only discrimination based on colour or race, nationality, religion, language or ethnic group is considered. The definition of ethnic minorities is broad and includes those born in another country, having a citizenship of another country or speaking non-majority language at home.

Figure 2. The degree of minorities’ risk of exclusion

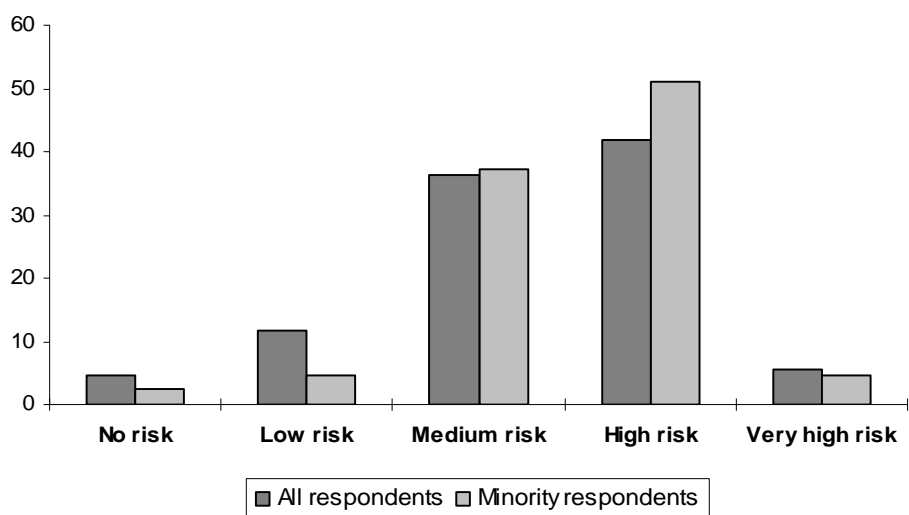


Figure 3. Areas where changes are most desirable

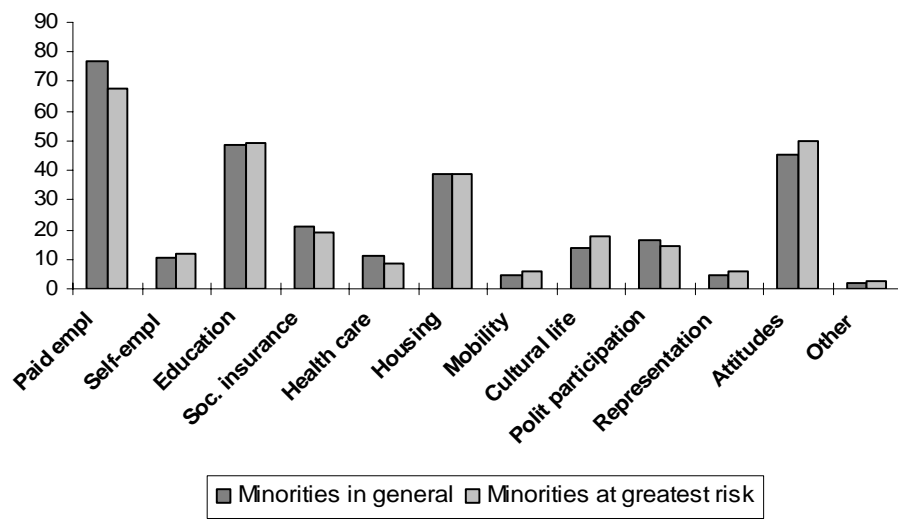


Figure 4. Public attitudes towards ethnic minorities

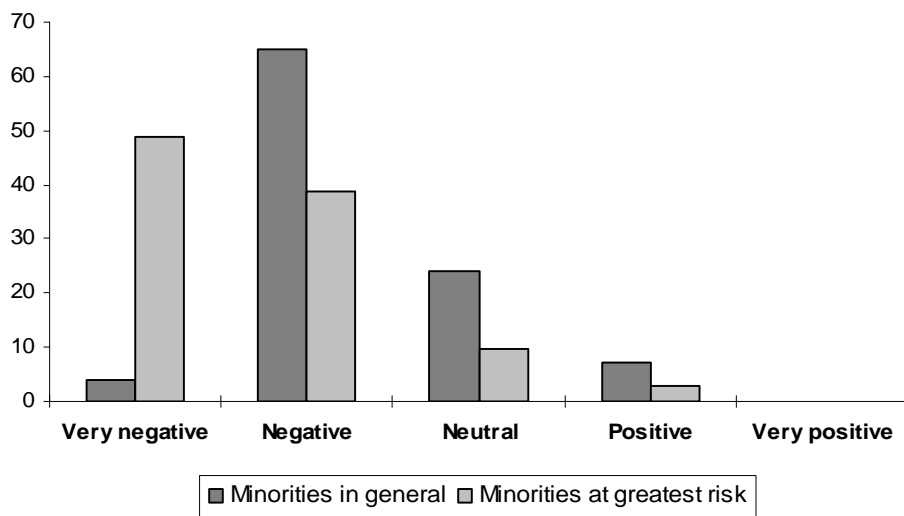


Figure 5. Business attitudes towards ethnic minorities

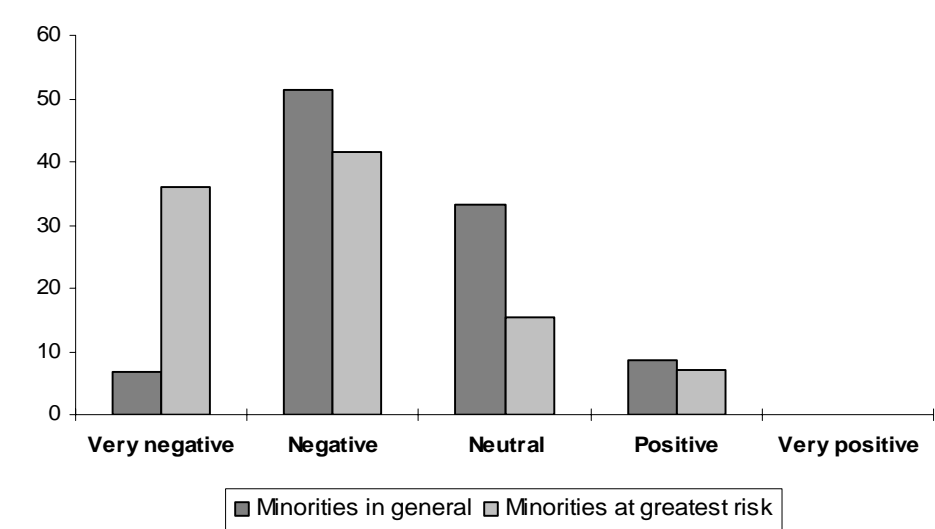


Figure 6. Integration barriers

