

Düzen Tekkal: What migrants from outside the EU contribute

My name is Düzen Tekkal. I am a freelance TV-reporter/editor specializing on documentaries concerning migration subjects. I grew up in a Yezidi-Kurdish family that was part of the labour immigration from Turkey to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus I don't have a European migration background. But a discussion about mobility and migration in Europe would be incomplete without a look at the many millions of immigrants from outside the EU. That's why I would like to tell you about my own family background:



Had the German authorities sent my father back home during the first “oil crisis” of the early 1970s, I would have been born in southeastern Anatolia, a part of Turkey known for its backwardness and political unrest. I might have finished the obligatory 5 years of elementary school and then cared for younger siblings, got married around 1996, and by now would be caring for my first or second grandchild. Barely being able to read or write, more or less illiterate in two languages: Kurdish and Turkish. This would have meant: no brain drain for Turkey but also no brain gain for Germany. I would have actually been some kind of a non-entity for both, at the cultural as well as the political level.

The fact that my father opted to stay in Germany clearly meant he had to integrate into German/European society. This he did, pursuing his idea of happiness by applying for German citizenship and raising a family in a united Europe. Actually, in our case, he made certain that his 11 children all received a sound education, acquiring professional skills or academic degrees. Again no drain on any educational investment in his country of origin, but a substantial gain for the country which welcomed and naturalized him and his family. So, my existence became a factor for German society.

As you can see from my personal example the influx of migrants is not only a question of

material investment, but in many cases also a question of mental investment, of creating a society that gives shelter to people discriminated or oppressed in their home countries. During the last 300 + years , Germany in particular has benefited from various waves of skilled immigrants, people who had to flee their home countries, from the Huguenot emigration to Prussia to more recent waves of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and war-torn Middle East and Central Asian countries. Future immigration for example from African countries devastated by famine and civil wars will also include quite a number of skilled immigrants for the simple reason that these are the people who are able to pay for the passage to the Promised Land. Their brainpower is drained from their home country, but Germany and Europe will benefit.

For integration to work, migrants of the first, second or any other generation need to feel welcome. The outbreaks of xenophobia that we come across in some places are not acceptable. What we in the EUis what I would like to call a skill of citizenship.