

Policies implication or personal experience? Integration of refugees in France and Sweden

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Short abstract

This paper assesses the integration trajectories of refugees in Sweden and France using two national-level sources of data. The “Trajectoire et Origines” survey of 2008-2009 collects information on immigrants and their descendants in France. The 2010 “Level of Living Survey for Foreign Born Persons and their Children” includes information on resident immigrants in Sweden. Through quantitative analysis based on these two datasets, we will investigate which are the factors that most influence the different spheres of integration of refugees in both countries. We look at economic, social, cultural and demographic indicators of the first generation of refugees. Finally we look at the impact of different national integration policies on the integration of refugees in Sweden and France. Thus, with this contribution we aim to answer to the following research question: Could the observed differences in the integration paths be attributable to national policies or to personal characteristics of the refugees?

Rationale and aim of the study

The literature on migrants’ integration focuses on two principal theoretical frames, which refer to the classical theory and the segmented assimilation one. The first approach – classical assimilation – was developed by the Chicago school in order to explain the assimilation paths of European immigrants in the U.S. in the early twentieth century. Researchers acknowledged that immigrants faced many difficulties to integrate at the beginning of the migration experience; however over time and across generations integration was a natural and irreversible process, by means of which immigrants become similar to the host country population (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie, 1925). Those who remained embedded into their own culture were marginalized (Park 1928). While the assumptions of classical assimilation theory are reflected among migrants belonging to the first waves of European emigration to the United States (Alba and Nee 1997), they do not fit with recent immigrants and their descendants (Esser 2003). Length of stay in the host society is not necessarily a proxy for integration, and migrants’ ties with their country of origin seem to be rather complements than substitutes for integration, in particular in the case of economic integration (Cela et al. 2013, Fokkema et al. 2012, Guarnizo et al. 2003, Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002). Accordingly, the segmented assimilation theory has been introduced, considering integration as a multidimensional and non-linear process, and leading to highly differentiated (i.e. segmented) assimilation outcomes according to, partly, migrant groups’ different ethnic and social-class backgrounds.

The integration of immigrants has also been defined as two way process, which implies efforts from both the newcomers and the host society. This is even truer when we consider refugees because we need to include the implication of the reception policies from the host country. Bevelander and

Pendakur (2009) emphasize how the differences in the Swedish labour market among refugees and family reunion immigrants are mainly depending by the integration policies in the country.

France and Sweden have two different histories of welcome and integrate refugees in their society. Today, in Europe we are in the middle of a refugees 'crises, therefore the international debate is on whether welfare societies have sufficient capacity to welcome and integrate the new refugees flows and how each European country must contribute.

Sweden has been always referred as an example of generous welcome and integration policies (Valenta and Bunar 2010). After a long history dominated by out-migration, Sweden have, in the past 50 years, become an immigration society, first with immigrants workers from the neighbor countries and then from the 1990s with refugees and family reunification from all over the world. As stressed by Fog Olwig in 2011, the immigration policy established in 1975 in Sweden is based on a multicultural ideology of 'equality, freedom of choice and partnership'. That policy gives a lot of emphasis on the right to maintain cultural specificities and on the right to benefit of the welfare society like the native population.

Sweden is characterized by a high share of immigrant population and especially refugees and asylum seekers. In 2014 were counted 14 refugees for 1000 inhabitants and the number will soon increase if we consider the recent events. Additionally Sweden is characterized by a system of inclusive immigration policies and a universalistic generous welfare state (Sainsbury 2006).

France has been since more than one century an immigration country: immigration was encouraged in order to meet the needs of the labor market and to compensate French demographic deficits. After the international crisis of 1973, France like other Western European countries closed the doors to labor migration. Since then immigration to France is largely lead by family reunification and since the end of the 1990's by high skilled migration. France is historically one of the major destinations for refugees in Europe. The French Office for the refugee's protection (OFPRA) was created in 1952: at that time most of the refugees arrived from Eastern Europe; during the 1970's there was a great number of arrivals from Chili. During the 1980's and the 1990's refugees arrived in France from Africa and from Asia. Nowadays there more than 160,000 refugees in France, almost half of them are from Sri-Lanka, Cambodia, Vietnam, Turkey, Democratic Republic of Congo and Russia. Since 2007 the number of asylum application in France has raised except for the year 2014 when it was recorded -1% decrease in the asylum application compared to 2013. In the same year the number of asylum application has increased in other European countries, especially Sweden, Germany and Italy (Mounaouar 2015, OFPRA 2015).

As far as integration policies are concerned, conversely to multiculturalist Sweden, France is conceived as an assimilationist country: the so called republican model of integration (modèle d'intégration républicaine) has characterized French integration policies till the Fall of 2005 when, following a large riots of immigrants origin youths in the country, the model was largely debated and challenged (Bertossi 2007).

While policy reforms to be implemented to face the actual refugees crisis are largely debated at present in Europe, few quantitative researches have addressed the integration of refugees within different national reception contexts in Europe, therefore our study aims to fill this gap in order to assess if the differences in the integration paths could be attributable to national policies or to personal characteristics of the refugees.

Data, measures and method

The process of integration is complex and multidimensional, for this we aim to study diverse aspects of this process. We believe that all this aspect are interrelated so one could impact the other and we will keep this on mind in our elaboration and interpretation of the results.

To study the Swedish case we use cross-sectional data from the Level of Living Survey for Foreign Born Persons and their Children (LNU-UFB). The data were collected in 2010 and utilized the Swedish registry data to select a representative sample of the adult (18-75 years old) immigrant population resident in Sweden for at least 5 years. About 30% of the sample is refugees.

To study the French case we use the TeO (“Trajectoire et Origines”) survey: a nationally representative sample of 22,000 individuals aged 18 to 60. Data were collected in the period September 2008-February 2009. The questionnaire covers a wide range of topics related to integration such as education, employment, migration history, family formation, social relationships, etc. About 10% of the sample is composed by people that obtained the refugees status when they first arrived in France.

Through quantitative analysis based on these two datasets, we will investigate which are the factors that most influence the different spheres of integration of refugees in both countries. Our first two models are designed to compare the integration of refugees with those migrated for other reasons in both countries. We look at economic, social, cultural, and structural and demographic indicators of the first of migrants. Finally we look at the impact of different national integration policies on the integration outcomes of refugees in Sweden and France, and we compared refugees in the two countries.

Thus, with this contribution we aim to answer to the following research question: Could the observed differences in the integration paths be attributable to national policies or to personal characteristics of the refugees?

Preliminary results

Results will be available in time for the EPC meeting.

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