

Integration of immigrants in the European Union: what do the EU citizens think?

Since the migration crisis in 2015, migration remains an important political topic for Czech and EU citizens. On the occasion of World Refugee day 2022, the European Commission published the results of a Special Eurobarometer survey focused on public opinion on the integration of immigrants in the European Union.



With approximately 8% (37 million persons) of the current EU population having been born in third countries and with no doubt that migration will be a key feature of European societies for the years to come, the integration of immigrants stays a topic of primary importance. This survey aimed at providing clarity on the public opinion on this politically sensitive issue, crucial for the EU policy-making.

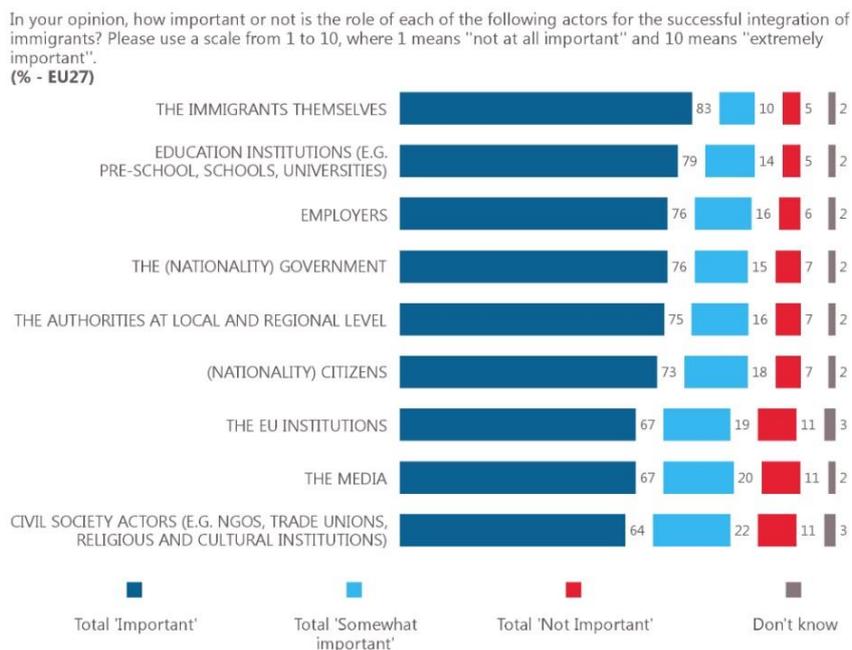
While the EU has taken steps to support Member States in their integration policies, the latter retains primary competence in this domain. The survey is designed to address the challenges of integration and ease citizens' concerns about how their countries can deal with these challenges, doing so while recognizing the differences in views among EU members, as well as between Europeans of different socio-demographic groups. Within the survey 26,510 EU citizens were examined across the EU Member States, among which 1035 were from the Czech Republic.

The integration: a multi-faceted process

When it comes to what constitutes 'integration', Europeans are generally in agreement. Nearly 9 in 10 accentuate the need for the immigrants to adhere to the values and norms of the host society, which goes hand in hand with learning the language of the country to which they move. Some also highlight the importance of

immigrants working in the country and paying taxes to contribute to the welfare system. According to the respondents, the main obstacles of a successful integration are restricted employment opportunities, the limited efforts of the immigrants to integrate or discrimination.

Most of the EU citizens (69%) agree that integration of immigrants is a necessary aspect of the response to the migration issue, where the integration is being understood by most as a two-way process, where host societies and immigrants are equally responsible for its success. Europeans, by and large, point to various different actors such as educational institutions, employers, and the national and local governments that play a vital role in the integration process.



As to the role of national governments, nearly half of respondents consider integration to be an essential component of national development. Despite the generally recognized fragmentation of responsibility for successful integration, only half of Europeans believe their national government, as one of the main players, does enough to promote the integration of immigrants into society and approximately one third thinks that integration should be placed higher on the political agenda.

“Respondents across the EU tend to overestimate the proportion of immigrants in their countries in some cases significantly while around three in ten do not know.”

Another issue examined was how informed the national citizens were about the share of immigrants in their populations. The survey shows that 68% of the EU citizens overestimate the real share. The natural explanation would be a lasting societal feeling created as the aftermath of the 2015 migration crisis. Another, less pleasant explanation can however be offered. With a similar proportion of 62% of Czechs overestimating the proportion of immigrants in their country, we must wonder why this feeling is shared by countries touched de facto so little by the crisis. It could be argued

that immigration topic has become a powerful tool in the hands of numerous political parties across many countries exploiting the topic in order to gain political support for their anti-migration policies. The migration matters being dramatically presented by many as a threat to our society (incorrectly associated in the eyes of the public with Muslim fundamentalism), there is an inevitable impact on public opinion. Moreover, the most common mass media outlets through which Europeans find information on immigration and integration issues tend to inflate the topic like a bubble to raise consumer engagement. As reflected in this survey, the natural consequence of this is that citizens perceive the issue as a much bigger one than it is. Furthermore, as for the general awareness, the survey shows that fewer than four in ten Europeans (38%) think that they are well informed about immigration matters with only a marginal increase between 2017 and 2021.



Perception of immigration: problem or opportunity?

Overall, the survey results indicate that attitudes towards immigrants have improved, particularly in Eastern Europe, while social and professional interactions between immigrants and locals have increased. Regarding general opinions on immigrants and attitudes towards them, Europeans are more likely to say that immigration represents both a problem and a chance, with an increasing number of those who see immigration as a chance.

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Sources:

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