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Willkommenskultur und Vielfalt
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| **Verlag BertelsmannStiftung**

Summary:

“Unlocking Germany!” – Establishing welcoming culture and diversity in mainstream society

The notion of a “welcoming culture” has attracted considerable attention in public debates in Germany regarding immigration and integration. As ambiguous as the phrase may be, the goals targeted by this discussion – among policymakers and the economic sector in particular – are clear: Germany must do more to open itself up to immigration, and it must develop an engaging infrastructure for immigrants and their families, and for qualified immigrants in particular. Ultimately, the concept of a welcoming culture focuses on the creation of attractive living conditions for immigrants and their families and therefore involves institutional frameworks as well. What makes a country genuinely attractive to first- and second generation migrants?

Economic and employment opportunities are key factors here, and Germany, as Europe’s economic powerhouse, has much to offer in this capacity. In fact, growing numbers of young, highly skilled migrants from euro zone countries hit hard by the crisis have come to Germany in recent years.

But there are other factors, that is, second-order variables influencing choices made by migrants with employment options in various countries. Factors such as long-term residency permits, the ease with which citizenship can be acquired (i.e., dual citizenship), opportunities for family members, and a fair and tolerant society as expressed in anti-discrimination laws and practices figure prominently here. Considered together, these variables represent the total immigration package offered by a welcoming culture. In a more narrow sense, this is about the laws and regulations governing residency for immigrants

and immigrant families as well as their rights of access to civic participation or citizenship and to protection from discrimination.

In a more broad sense, the concept of a welcoming culture involves the overall approach to diversity found within a society. This includes several other dimensions such as the guiding principles of constitutions or policy programs and their corresponding institutional arrangements, the extent to which ethnic diversity is addressed in school curricula, the representation of individuals with a migration background in the media and public debates, financial support for migrant-advocacy organizations, the extent to which multilingualism is promoted, and active support for disadvantaged immigrant groups.

An integrated society is an open, tolerant society that opens itself up to newcomers so that they feel at home. A goal of this publication is to encourage the development of a society open to new immigrants and able to offer broad opportunities of social participation to its residents with an immigrant background. The contributions outline the present state of affairs in Germany, identify the challenges it faces and offer best practices found here and in other countries that demonstrate how welcoming culture can be shaped and experienced.

The first section of the book addresses immigration regulations in the context of a welcoming culture. The second section focuses on the awareness of and demonstrated respect for diversity in Germany as an integral feature of a welcoming culture. The third section explores examples of institutional frameworks in which welcoming culture is practiced.

The results point to the following elements required in establishing a welcoming culture:

- greater equanimity with regard to diversity;
- transparent and clear immigration regulations applicable to all immigrant groups;
- an integration policy anchored in the interests of civil society;
- new national narratives that include immigrants;
- and a reconceptualization of how to facilitate integration, treating this as a service with institutions tailored to various target groups.

Three of the four above elements – equanimity, immigration as a feature of civil society and an inclusive national narrative – are societal factors that take time and are shaped by the broader public climate. At the same time, they are also shaped considerably by institutional frameworks such as laws, regulations and public administrative agencies. Clearly, these two sides of the “integration coin” are interdependent. It is difficult for appropriate attitudes to spread throughout society without the support of such regulations and institutions. Likewise, if the right attitudes in society are not at some level present, rules and regulations will prove ineffective, as the spirit of their underlying goals will not be implemented.

In sum, a welcoming culture is not an end in and of itself. In an era of globalized migration, it has become an integral element of a society aiming to render itself more attractive as a country of immigration. At the same time, it is equally important for the domestic dynamics of a society aiming to prevent social fragmentation.