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Learning from Canada? Useful Insights for Germany's Integration Policy

Germany is experiencing a growth in diversity resulting from migration. Against this backdrop, German political leaders and civil society representatives are looking to Canada for insights into how to advance their own development as an immigrant society. An active dialogue between Canada and Germany makes it possible for these two nations to strengthen their partnership while also fostering diversity to the benefit of all.

Canada has long been regarded as role model for successfully managing immigration, integration and diversity. In Germany, the diversity resulting from

migration continues to grow, prompting German policymakers to turn to Canada for valuable insights into shaping their country's development as an immigrant society. In March 2023, Germany's Federal Minister of the Interior and Community Nancy Faeser, Federal Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Hubertus Heil, and a delegation from the parliamentary committee for internal affairs and community traveled to Toronto, Ottawa

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and Winnipeg to learn about Canada's migration and integration policies (see German Bundestag 2023; Federal Ministry of the Interior and Homeland 2023). While the political discussion in Germany usually spotlights Canada's points-based immigration system as a mechanism for regulating migration, the exploration here will concentrate on the issues of integration and coexistence.

This policy brief begins with a concise overview of immigration in Canada, spanning its historical and contemporary contexts. It then sheds light on certain aspects of Canadian integration policy, exploring them deeper with the help of illustrative examples. Following this, it addresses the present challenges within Canada's multicultural society. Finally, drawing insights from Canada's experience, it presents viewpoints that can offer guidance for integration policy in Germany.

1. Immigration in Canada: the historical and contemporary context

With its history as a destination for colonial settlers, Canada has fundamentally embodied an immigrant society since its inception as a modern nation in the 19th century. For a long time, the nation's immigration policies were profoundly influenced by ethnic and cultural considerations. Until well into the 20th century, these policies leaned toward the recruitment of white Europeans, particularly from the United Kingdom and France. It wasn't until the 1960s that the country introduced radical changes to its immigration policy that were driven by both normative values and economic factors. The policy shifted toward economic criteria that had

Background

This policy brief is based on a series of exchanges between the author and experts from academia, government and civil society in Toronto. The author's month-long research visit took place in May 2023 as part of the Civil Society and Public Administration Fellowship program at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU). During her stay, the author focused on the question of what Germany can learn from Canada when it comes to integration and cultivating a respect for diversity.

little to do with an individual's place of origin. This shift was accompanied by the adoption of an official policy of multiculturalism. This acknowledgment of cultural diversity became increasingly integral to Canada's image of itself as an inclusive society that seeks to provide equal opportunities to native-born and immigrants alike (see Triadafilopoulos 2022; Schmidtke 2021).

Record-high immigration levels
With its "Immigration Levels Plan 2023-2025," the Canadian government aims to welcome **historically high levels** of more than 460,000 immigrants per year (see Government of Canada 2022a). In 2022, more than 437,000 people immigrated to Canada. At approximately 59%, new residents citing "economic" reasons for moving to Canada accounted for the largest share. Those who arrived due to reasons

associated with "family" or "refugee and humanitarian" issues accounted for 22% and 17%, respectively. The leading countries of origin were India, China and Afghanistan. Currently, about 23% of Canada's total population comprises individuals who have migrated and currently hold Canadian citizenship or permanent residency (see Statistics Canada 2023).

Just as immigration levels have risen to an all-time high, so too has public support for the country's immigration policies its highest level ever, with seven out of ten Canadians endorsing the current approach. These attitudes are rooted in a **public consensus** on the need for immigration to foster both economic and population growth. In addition, it is increasingly expected that the Canadian government should open up its borders to people from regions besieged by conflict, such as Ukraine and Afghanistan (see Neuman 2022).

2. Characteristics of Canadian integration policies

While Canada's historical and geographical context differs from that of Germany, this does not preclude a constructive dialogue on how to effectively navigate cultural diversity. Looking to Canada can offer Germany valuable insights and inspiration in this regard.

Political consensus on immigration

A key factor contributing to widespread positive or more laid-back attitudes on this issue in Canada is the presence of an enduring **political consensus,** nurtured over decades, around the notion that immigration brings benefits to the nation and its social fabric. Initially rooted first and foremost in

economic considerations, the government's policy of multiculturalism has been aimed, since the 1970s, at recognizing, protecting and promoting cultural diversity. This has cultivated an ethos in which immigration and diversity are embraced as values and foundational tenets of Canadian identity and democracy (see Schmidtke 2021).

While political debates and controversies, some clearly along partisan lines, are inherent to this ongoing process, the acceptance of cultural diversity remains deeply ingrained in both society and politics. This attitude is reflected in political discourse and societal norms. Because cultural diversity is perceived as a **societal norm** in Canadian society, political factions and parties have limited opportunity to exploit anti-immigrant sentiments for their agendas (see Neuman 2022; Neuman 2019).

Contributing to the success and credibility of this policy is the **visible representation** of diversity within the Canadian political leadership. In 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made headlines by introducing a cabinet that vividly embodied the concept of inclusivity, surpassing the endeavors of his predecessors (see Klatzer 2015). Similarly, the prominent contenders in Toronto's recent mayoral election were an accurate reflection of the city's diverse population (see Jeffords/Rieti 2023). Hong-Kong born Olivia Chow, a member of the New Democratic Party, won the election (see Michael 2023). The visibility of diversity in a community's political leadership serves to normalize the idea of diversity while also signaling an environment of inclusion and a sense of belonging.

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Investment in integration

The Canadian approach to integration is deeply rooted in a **service-oriented** philosophy and founded on the understanding that successful integration benefits society and creates value (see Government of Canada 2023a). Demonstrating commitment to integration and equal opportunity yields both economic and cultural dividends for society, while deficiencies in these areas incur lasting financial and social costs (see Saunders 2018). The services offered to newly arrived immigrants in Canada are delivered through an extensive and diverse network of state-funded organizations. In Ontario alone, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) acts as an intermediary for more than 200 organizations dedicated to serving immigrants. This umbrella organization not only coordinates responses to needs but also fosters professionalism, exchange and unity within the sector, representing its collective voice (see OCASI 2023). Thanks to a comprehensive yet regionally tailored service structure spanning the entire nation, newly arrived immigrants encounter minimal obstacles in accessing integration services. For instance, the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program provides direct assistance within school environments to children, adolescents and parents, helping them adapt to the Canadian education system and society (see Government of Canada 2022b). A central tenet of the government's integration policy is the consistent evaluation of integration programs receiving state funding (see Government of Canada 2023b).

In Toronto, Canada's prime destination for immigrants, the municipal administration has adopted a similar services-oriented approach with the intention of **removing obstacles**. With the Greater Toronto Area boasting the highest share (47%) of immigrants for any region in the country (see Statistics Canada 2022), the city proudly celebrates its diversity through its official motto, "Diversity Our Strength" (see City of Toronto 2023a).

The municipal administration has a "Newcomer Strategy" and a corresponding "Newcomer Office" which is responsible for coordinating efforts to implement the strategy and advising other administrative units (see City of Toronto 2022). One priority of the current strategy is to train administrative staff who interact directly with immigrant communities. The objective here is to deepen their comprehension of the experiences and challenges faced by immigrants, while also nurturing heightened sensitivity toward these issues. Another goal involves ensuring that administrative staff have swift access to translation services while communicating with clients, whether through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations or online exchanges. The city also operates a universal hotline that provides information in more than 180 languages (see City of Toronto 2023b).

Distinguishing itself as a "Sanctuary City," Toronto reinforces its dedication to inclusion through administrative practices by sensitizing staff to the circumstances of individuals with irregular immigration status. This commitment involves structuring procedures in ways that facilitate participation for this specific demographic (see City of Toronto 2022). Anchored in a **global perspective of solidarity**, this practice aims to provide assistance and support to migrants facing particularly precarious

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circumstances (see Toronto Metropolitan University 2023; Whalen 2021).

Strengthening civic resilience
Even in culturally diverse environments such as Canada and the Toronto metropolitan area, social cohesion and equitable, inclusive communities are not a foregone conclusion. Embracing diversity across society requires an ongoing commitment to promoting **knowledge and empathy** among the population. In Canada, public broadcasting plays an important role in achieving this aim. For example, the Canadian network CBC Radio One consistently features a range of formats that explore issues offering insights into the experience of cultural diversity, the historical narratives of First Nations communities, and issues pertinent to their contemporary realities.

Through their joint "Toronto for All" initiative, the City of Toronto and OCASI cooperate in an effort to stimulate public discourse on matters related to diversity. Eye-catching posters draw attention to issues such as racism, Islamophobia and the predicament of undocumented individuals, as well as concerns pertinent to First Nations, sparking introspection and prompting individuals to explore their own biases. The campaign also addresses topical social issues such as homelessness and domestic violence (see City of Toronto 2023c).

These examples highlight the city's concerted effort to cultivate **civic resiliency** through public dialogue. The concept of civic resiliency involves empowering the city's residents to navigate the continually evolving intricacies and diversity of their social environment, to cultivate meaningful relationships and to embrace change as an

avenue of opportunity. Resilient citizens are thus not only aware of the barriers encountered by those around them due to distinct traits or group affiliations, they also actively engage with these challenges (see City of Toronto 2023c).

Understanding and fostering arrival cities
Among the changes experienced by people living in areas marked by growing diversity is a transformation of the urban landscape, especially in those neighborhoods where immigrants have settled and, for example, established businesses. This phenomenon can lead to the emergence of larger ethnic communities, an occurrence often met with skepticism in Germany and associated with the negatively charged term "parallel societies." However, such perspectives often stem from a narrow and undifferentiated understanding of such communities. The work of Canadian journalist and migration expert Doug Saunders sheds light on this matter (Saunders 2011; 2018). Drawing on examples like Toronto and other urban hubs around the globe, he illustrates how these **arrival cities** potentially offer valuable resources to newcomers, including affordable housing, social networks, low-threshold employment opportunities and assistance in navigating the host society's administrative procedures and culture. Ideally, these cities serve as social and economic springboards for immigrants, if not for themselves then for their children.

However, there is no guarantee of advancement or permeability between arrival cities and broader society. The extent to which these cities can actualize their potential for integration, social mobility and participation depends on specific factors, all of which can be shaped by policy. Some of

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the most relevant factors include access to a quality education, good public transportation services, urban facilities and an urban design facilitative of social interaction and economic – particularly entrepreneurial – activities. However, cities or neighborhoods with affordable housing that lack these additional characteristics risk becoming "traps" for their residents. Such circumstances could give rise to isolation, limited prospects, poverty and, potentially, even crime. The subsequent repercussions generate both tangible and intangible costs, ultimately contributing to a tarnished reputation for these areas. This, in turn, exacerbates issues of discrimination and inequality (see Saunders 2018).

Promoting naturalization

Another significant factor contributing to integration is the not-too-distant prospect of attaining permanent residency and eventually naturalized citizenship. This is important because it instills a sense of **purpose** in a person's life and the lives of their children. When inclusion and the ability to participate in society as citizens are attainable goals, investments in education, training, business ventures and property acquisition become meaningful and worthwhile (see Saunders 2018).

In Canada, regular permanent residents are eligible to apply for citizenship after three years of residency, whereas in Germany, the current requirement stands at eight years of lawful residency. However, as part of the reform plans of the current government, this demand is slated to be reduced to a standard five years or three years in exceptional cases. Furthermore, another planned amendment to the current legislation will enable individuals to retain their existing citizenship, obviating the need to renounce it during the

naturalization process. This step would bring Germany closer to Canada's regulations. The recent shift toward a *jus soli* principle, conferring citizenship upon children born in Germany to foreign national parents, also signifies a progressive step. The latest draft of the law also allows these children to have dual citizenship, which means they can hold both German citizenship and the citizenship of their parents, provided at least one parent has been a legally permanent resident in Germany for a minimum of five years, instead of the previous requirement of eight years (see Tagesschau 2023). In Canada, every child born in the country automatically acquires Canadian citizenship, and naturalization applications can be submitted online. However, the feasibility of such a process in Germany depends on the extent to which procedures have been digitalized in a given federal state or local administration. The fee for naturalization in Germany is €255 for adults, which is lower than the CAD 630 fee charged in Canada.

The Toronto-based Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC), which advocates for the naturalization of immigrants in Canadian society (see ICC 2023a), encourages active citizenship through programs and projects that are designed to inspire inclusion within the framework of a **welcoming culture**. The ICC thus contributes to democracy and social cohesion in Canada.

One of its key activities involves the organization of citizenship ceremonies, carefully curated in terms of location and structure to honor the significance of attaining Canadian citizenship. These ceremonies actively engage new citizens, providing them with platforms to share their life stories and immigration journeys, often in

roundtable discussions. Additionally, the ICC champions the recognition of citizenship's importance among employers, advocating for paid time off to attend these ceremonies (see ICC 2023c).

A second facet of the ICC's approach to fostering an active welcoming culture is to grant new citizens and permanent residents access to an array of cultural and recreational activities for an entire year. Facilitated through its "Canoo" app and an extensive network of partners, this program helps immigrants feel wanted and at home in the country while providing them accessible, family-friendly insights into life in Canada. The extent to which the "Canoo" concept could be adapted for the German context is currently under exploration in a project funded by the Robert Bosch Foundation at the DeZIM Institute (see DeZIM 2023).

Through its activities, the ICC fosters the emergence of a community of intercultural bridge-builders and ambassadors. These individuals are of key importance when it comes to fostering peaceful coexistence among people in a diverse society. They carry out the essential work of mediation in everyday life as well as within their social networks. Furthermore, by maintaining contact with the community, they create a network that embodies a valuable resource for the research activities of the ICC. For example, surveys can be carried out to identify tangible concerns and needs, thus making it possible to better understand the factors that contribute to successful integration and participation.

3. Challenges facing Canada's immigrant society

Canada is rightly seen as a role model and source of inspiration when it comes to issues of immigration and integration. At the same time, however, Canada's immigrant society is also highly complex and faces a number of challenges. One key area of tension can be found in the relationship of the modern Canadian state to **First Nations communities.** At issue here is not just the ongoing structural disadvantages faced by indigenous people; the Canadian government also comes under repeated fire from critics who argue that its reconciliation efforts are an attempt to relegate Canada's colonial history to the past and to conceal the continued existence of colonial situations and power relations in the present day by means of multiculturalism and anti-discrimination policies (see Midzain-Gobin/Smith 2021).

A number of other topics are also publically addressed in Canada, including Islamophobia, anti PoC **racism** and, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian racism, for example as part of the "Toronto for all" campaign (see Chapter 2).

Furthermore, in the spring of 2023, a growing number of **asylum-seekers** arriving via Roxham Road (an unofficial border crossing from the United States to the province of Québec) once again caused a political and media uproar (see CBC 2023a). Similar incidents had already occurred in years prior (see Park 2018), and the Trudeau government this time reacted by renegotiating an existing agreement with the United States. This resulted in the closing of the Roxham Road border crossing (see CBC 2023b), a move that was heavily criticized by

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Amnesty International (see Amnesty International 2023). When it comes to refugee policy, Canada follows a relatively restrictive approach to asylum and relies heavily on resettlement programs, in which the state works in a targeted manner in cooperation with private sponsor groups and the UNHCR to bring people seeking protection into the country (see Triadafilopoulos 2022).

In recent years, **naturalization rates** in Canada have fallen (see ICC 2023b) and research is still underway to find out why. One hypothesis points to a shift in the countries of origin: today, India and China play an important role, but at the same time these nations do not permit their citizens to have two passports. This might discourage individuals from applying for naturalization in Canada, as relinquishing a previous citizenship may make it more difficult to maintain private and/or business contacts in a person's home country. Two additional reasons that might help to explain the decline in naturalization are increased fees and changed rules for proving person's language skills (see Carlaw 2023).

Among the other factors that should be considered in this context are increasing international mobility and the shifting nature of identity in a globalized world. In this regard, states first try to maintain influence over their citizens residing outside their own territory by means of "diaspora policies." Second, nation states compete with transnational communities in the sense that alternatives to an identity based on a nation state are formed (see Kastoryano 2016).

And, finally, for some time now, Canada has been seeing increasing **income inequality** between immigrants and individuals who are already citizens. One of the most important factors contributing to this is an ineffective approach to recognizing the qualifications of highly skilled migrants. This has become a well-known problem in society, for example with regard to physicians. In turn, the issue has also been discussed in public, not least in the context of the crisis of the Canadian healthcare system, which many see as having been caused by demographic shifts (see ICC 2023c). Highly qualified migrants often work in poorly paid jobs that do not correspond to their level of education and training. Another issue that has received more precise attention is the precarious situation in which an increasing number of temporary foreign workers find themselves. These individuals are often confronted with even worse working conditions and less legal protection. In spite of the ongoing need for their labor, it is common for them to have their temporary employment contracts renewed for years rather than to be given any prospects of a secure residency status (see Schmidtke 2021; Carlaw 2023).

4. Insights for Germany's own integration policies

It is a key part of the political consensus in Canada that immigration and the commitment to integration and inclusion are very much in the interest of society and the domestic economy. Today, this perspective has become more firmly established in the political mainstream in Germany, as well. Still, at the same time, migration continues to be framed in terms of disadvantages. Although the focus has shifted somewhat to include the opportunities associated with migration, more often than not the focus is placed on the presumed costs and problems. In part, however, these issues are either

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created or exacerbated by inappropriate political and social reactions to immigration, including xenophobia, discrimination and high barriers to participation (e.g., in education and the labor market). These and other shortfalls in managing migration are not only problematic in terms of establishing norms; they also stand in the way of successful integration and thus block – or at least slow down – the economic and social value creation that results from immigration.

In terms of creating a welcoming culture and fostering diversity amid people living side by side, Canada certainly has an edge over Germany and can serve as a role model. In an effort to make the future of Germany's immigrant society fair and profitable for all residents, the following aspects of the Canadian experience can serve as **inspiration** in encouraging German policymakers to further develop similar approaches in their country:

- The existence of an overarching political consensus held by democratic parties with regard to Germany's self-image as a land of immigrants
- The visible representation of people with so-called "migration backgrounds" in public positions and (role-model) functions
- The tearing down of barriers to participation by means of timely, comprehensive, nationwide and practical support for integration
- Regular evaluations carried out on integration programs
- The cultivation of civic resilience through an active public dialogue in Germany's immigrant society

- Consideration for how "arrival cities" function in practice as well as for the connections between integration and infrastructure/urban planning
- Rapid naturalization as a vehicle for inclusion, integration and (material and immaterial) investments by migrants

In the current debate on asylum in Germany, some conservative politicians reference Canada as a model when seeking to promote quotas as a potential approach to dealing with refugees coming into the country. However, this proposition has sparked a vigorous debate due to its potential implications for curbing the individual right to asylum. Social democrats have sought to harmonize the individual right to asylum with immigrant admission programs, rather than pitting the two against each other (see Deutschlandfunk 2023). Without having to go any further into detail here about the relationship to asylum law, we can say that the "resettlement" programs practiced in Canada (see UNHCR 2023a) can provide inspiration for Germany. In particular, those programs based on the Canadian idea of "private sponsorship" serve to activate the **potential strengths of civil society** for the welcoming and integration of refugees (see UNHCR Canada 2023b). In Germany, this approach is already being tested as part of a pilot program known as "NesT – Neustart im Team" (New start on the team) involving partners from government and civil society (see Bertelsmann Stiftung 2019; NesT 2023).

The characteristics and examples of Canadian integration policy examined in this policy brief offer both the inspiration to establish similar approaches in Germany and the momentum to expand their scope. They

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can also serve as foundational points for an ongoing exchange and **dialogue** between the two countries. The RODA Initiative, for example, which stands for "Renewing our Democratic Alliance," provides a framework for German-Canadian cooperation at the level of government and civil society. The initiative aims to foster cooperation in tackling global challenges based on shared values and interests (see CIC/KAS 2023). In this context, issues relating to immigration, diversity and integration present opportunities to deepen the existing partnership between the democratic countries of Germany and Canada.

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