



## **POLICY NOTE OF WORKING PAPER 3.19**

### **SOCIAL CAPITAL, NATIONAL VALUES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES**

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#### **OBJECTIVE**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between social capital, national values and immigration attitudes comparatively in three groups of countries – old EU members (WE), new member states (NMS) and neighbouring countries (NC). When presenting the results about immigration attitudes, distinction is also made between the responses of native and non-native respondents.

#### **SCIENTIFIC/RESEARCH METHODS**

Empirical analysis of the current study is based on EVS 4<sup>th</sup> wave data, which pertain mostly to year 2008 (for some countries year 2009) and are available since 2010 (EVS 2010). Total sample covers more than 66 600 respondents from 45 European countries. EVS database was preferred to most often used European Social Survey (ESS) data because the former includes the information for much larger number of EU neighbouring countries. In the context of this paper, another advantage of using EVS database stems from the fact that it covers larger variety of immigration attitudes (8 items as opposed to only 3 in ESS) and additionally also 5 questions about the importance of different national values, enabling thus to combine more broad-based information relevant to the research aim. Immigration attitudes and national values are analysed by initial survey indicators as well as by reduced factors obtained with exploratory factor analysis.

First we map the basic socio-economic characteristics of immigrant population in Europe, followed by the comparative analysis of the importance of national values and attitudes towards immigrants in three country groups, also distinguishing between the responses of native and non-native respondents. Finally, correlations analysis is performed in order to clarify possible relationship between the factors of social capital and immigration attitudes.

It should be noted that active research on the relationship between social capital and immigration started in Europe as late as in 2000s (almost a decade later than in the U.S) as a reaction to the opening EU labour markets and resulting increase in

migration flows, especially from new member states to more wealthy “old” Europe. Still, there is no well-defined framework for assessing the links between immigration, social cohesion and social capital, although some authors (e.g. Cheong et al 2007) have tried to fill this gap in the literature. Majority of earlier studies attempt to explain factors behind anti-immigrant attitudes (Rustenbach 2010 gives an exhaustive overview of possible explanations). However, only few of them have included social capital as possible determinant of immigration attitudes into analysis, usually in the form of institutional or social trust (e.g. Husfeldt 2004, Halapuu et al 2013). This study is mostly explorative in nature and fills several gaps in the existing literature, broadening both the dimensions of immigration attitudes and social capital, and the scope of countries under study.

## POLICY VALUE-ADDED

Several policy implications can be drawn on the basis of the analysis results. Firstly, the share of immigrants in total population seems to induce more negative attitudes towards them, especially among natives in WE who worry most of all about the possible threats to economic and social welfare as a result of immigration. This indicates the serious need for policies that help to shape more friendly attitudes towards immigrants, as it is clear that extension of immigration is continuous trend in today’s globalizing world in general and in aging Europe specifically. However, this logical but distressing rule had also some exceptions. For example, respondents in WE were less afraid that immigrants take away jobs, as compared to respondents in NMS and NC-s. This is surprising result in the light of the fact that most of the immigrants in WE are in working age and actively participating in labor market, and they also reported higher income and educational levels as compared to natives. One explanation could be drawn from the relatively low participation rate among natives, but the situation might change if labor market policies attempt to bring more inactive people to the labor market. On the positive side these findings enable to suggest that the human capital of immigrants promotes economic growth and development in host countries, and this argument could also be more strongly used in shaping pro-immigrant policies.

Secondly, when generalizing the overall pattern of national values and immigration attitudes in different population and country groups, following results are worth to highlight. First, native people in WE worry more about the possible threats to economic and social welfare as a result of immigration, while natives in NC worry more about threats to local culture and customs. Second, native respondents from NMS had average scores in most aspects of immigration attitudes. As an exception, they were least that immigrants undermine country’s culture, closely related to lower scores regarding the opinion that there are too many immigrants in the country. These findings enable to develop more precisely targeted policy measures in order to promote pro-immigrant attitudes among native population. However, different pattern of immigration attitudes appeared in case of non-native respondents, among whom respondents from NMS showed highest fear that immigration is harmful to host country’s economic and social welfare. In general it could be concluded that it would be difficult to design universal policies for all European countries. Instead, each country should learn to understand the specific fears of its population groups related to immigration, and based on this knowledge develop suitable pro-immigrant policies.

Thirdly, there was a general tendency that immigrants have less social capital than natives in all three groups of countries, suggesting possible negative indirect effect of immigration on economic development, as social capital is one important factor in development process. There were two exceptions from this general result: first, in WE immigrant respondents had much higher institutional trust than natives, and second, in NMS and NC there was higher general trust among immigrants as compared to natives. This is extremely important because higher levels of trust expectedly ensure higher social cohesion in host societies. Also, it is quite understandable that immigrants have less bridging social capital in the form of different networks.

Finally, correlation analysis provided several robust results which hold similarly in all three country groups and both among native and non-native respondents. First, respondents having more social capital were less afraid of the possible negative effects of immigration on host country's economic and social life. In this respect, social capital support economic development both directly and indirectly, through more positive attitudes towards high-qualified immigrants. Second, higher levels of social capital associated with higher importance to respect host country's political institutions and importance to speak local language, leading possibly to higher social cohesion in host societies. Third, stronger national values were related to lower general trust and less formal networks, but with more institutional trust and stronger social norms. This result confirms that nationalism tends to decrease the extent of trusting unknown others and socialising with them, being thus possible development obstacle in multicultural societies. However, in general there were much less statistically significant correlations between social capital and immigration attitude measures in NMS and NC countries, especially when controlling for education and income levels. This means that current lower levels of social capital in these countries might be not so unfavourable from the perspective of pro-immigration attitudes, on the one hand, but on the other hand it could be suggested, again, that pro-immigrant policies which work in Western European countries might be not suitable for Eastern European countries.

For conclusion, it should be reminded that this study presents exploratory analysis and according to the best knowledge of the author there are no similar earlier studies to compare with, especially regarding comparisons between three different groups of countries in Europe. The aim of this study was to provide first empirical insight on the basis of most recent data. Chosen comparative approach poses also limitations: as earlier rounds of EVS did not contain data about most NC-s and also NMS-s, it was not possible to analyse the changes in the relationship between social capital and immigration attitudes over time.