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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 was 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). Under this general objective, the following research questions could be identified: how do national values and attitudes towards immigrants influence different aspects of social capital among immigrant population in Europe? And vice versa, which is the influence of immigration on native people's immigration attitudes? Does social capital increase tolerance towards immigrants or not? Are there any differences between EU old and new member states and neighbouring countries due to their different immigration history and path-dependence?

MAIN RESULTS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Empirical analysis of the current study was based on EVS 4th wave data which pertain mostly to year 2008. The sample covered more than 66 600 respondents from 45 European countries. First, the basic socio-economic characteristics of immigrant population in Europe were mapped, followed by the comparative analysis of the importance of national values and attitudes towards immigrants in three country groups, and also distinguishing between the responses of native and non-native respondents.

It appeared first that the share of immigrant respondents was highest in WE – 10.2% as compared to 5.4% in NMS and 5.9% in NC sub-samples. This has lead also to more negative attitudes towards immigrants in WE countries: even 56.1% of all respondents in this country group said agreed or strongly agreed (on scale 1...5) with the statement that there are too many immigrants in the country, as compared to only 28.3% in NMS and 36.7% in NC.

Most of the WE immigrant respondents were in working age (88.3% as compared to 62.4% in NMS and 78.7% in NC) and their employment rate was higher than among natives. Also unemployment rate was higher among immigrants as compared to natives (except in NC), meaning that the share of inactive people is much lower among immigrants. However, surprisingly local people in Western Europe were less afraid that immigrants take away their jobs as compared to NMS and NC respondents. On scale 1...10, in WE 55.6% of all respondents marked 6 or higher score to the statement that immigrants take away jobs from local people, as compared to 66.3% in NMS and 64.2% in NC.

Regarding altogether 13 different survey questions about national values and immigration attitudes, it can be generalised that 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. Native respondents from NMS had average scores in most aspects of immigration attitudes, except the lower (as compared to WE and NC respondents) fear that immigrants undermine country's culture, closely related to lower scores regarding the opinion that there are too many immigrants in the country and that they feel like a stranger. 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.

Further, immigrants in WE and NC subsamples reported higher income and educational levels as compared to natives, so it could be suggested that the human capital of immigrants promotes economic growth and development in host countries. On the other hand there was a general tendency that immigrants have less social capital than natives in all three groups of countries, suggesting possible negative effect of immigration on economic development, as social capital is one important factor in development process. This result also contradicts the empirical findings in earlier literature, where income and education have proved to be most important determinants of social capital. There were two exceptions from this deviation in our study: 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.

Correlation analysis between national values, immigration attitudes and social capital measures provided several robust results, which hold similarly in all three country groups and both among native and non-native respondents. Firstly, 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. Secondly, 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. Thirdly, 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.