

*Bertelsmann Stiftung (Hrsg.)*

# **Vielfältiges Deutschland**

Bausteine für eine zukunftsfähige Gesellschaft

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## Abstract

Germany's relationship to immigration is ambivalent, and public debate of this issue has been subject to several shifts in tone and focus. In the 1990s, for instance, an increasing stream of refugees spurred debate that was dominated by fears that the country would be overrun by foreigners. But once German society faced a skilled labor shortage and an aging population, there was a sudden spike in calls for qualified immigrants, without whom Germany's ongoing prosperity is imperiled.

At first glance this may appear to represent progress, but closer inspection reveals a shift of emphasis that is largely attributable to a utilitarian view of purely economic considerations. As early as the 1950s and 1960s, public officials set off for southern Europe to find foreign workers for the booming heavy industry sector. Though initially recruited as temporary guest workers, most of those who came stayed on. Already there was an apparent deficiency which – shifts in detail and tone notwithstanding – shadows debate to this day: the course of migration policy is too often informed by short-term calculations while long-term consequences are rarely taken into account. This fundamental mismanagement is the main reason that discourse on migration policy has for decades been accompanied by a monotone account of those qualities which migrants apparently lack: the effort to integrate, the *desire* to integrate, self-betterment through education. At the same time – and this, too, is expressive of the mentioned ambivalent relationship to immigration – it is obvious that despite this discourse of deficiencies, civil society actors and, increasingly, public

sector organizations, have been working since the late 1990s to improve integration opportunities for immigrants. Slowly, but surely, Germany is changing.

The book “Vielfältiges Deutschland” aims to provide the building blocks for a different, more stratified view of reality in the Federal Republic. It aims to offer points of reference for a society in transformation, whose future requires a more nuanced approach to cultural pluralism. In just a few years, demographic effects will radically transform Germany. These changes in social structures bear at once opportunity and risk. From the perspective of the labor market and social systems, sober economic calculation alone can transform the category of “immigrant” to become a sought-after human resource, in a society where migrants are increasingly seen as high performers. However, a shift of this nature can also provoke crises in society. And experience shows us that crises are fruitful ground for restorative public discourse in which migrants become convenient scapegoats for all manner of failings.

By carefully analyzing past developments, “Vielfältiges Deutschland” aims to outline a future in which migrants are shown to be more than just a human resource – though they assuredly are that as well. For a future-oriented society aiming to transform its approach to migration issues, the economic perspective is important, but it is only one perspective among several which must be evaluated. The image of the society itself must change. Self-identification in which a national “us” differentiates itself from the foreign “them” is no longer an appropriate basis for a future-oriented 21st century society. But what should replace it? This far from frivolous question is the central motif of the book.

From different perspectives, the book provides mosaic pieces for possible answers.

The first chapter draws conclusions from the course of German immigration policy since the beginning of the new millennium. This chapter documents the major changes and shift in emphasis in the discourse on migrants and its stasis, or even regression, and forms the basis for a more detailed view, and a vision of the future.

The second capital asks: what binds a plural, multicultural society? We test the robustness of central concepts in the integration debate – multiculturalism, inclusion, national identity, a culture of welcoming – and examine whether they are fit to form a new image of Germany, one which takes into account the variety of life experience within the country.

The third chapter leads the way from the world of concepts and ideas to the real-life context of cohabitation, experiences documented by the Bertelsmann Stiftung's surveys, studies and projects of recent years. They show how the population experiences integration, what Germany gains from immigration and best practice examples at the local level which illustrate practical ways in which civil society can promote sustainable integration.

The fourth chapter takes us from the real world to the sphere of systemic frameworks in which integration processes occur. Future waves of immigration will occur amid global competition for talent and human resources, and so we examine the administrative and legal preconditions with which Germany – somewhat haphazardly – conducts this process at present, as well as ways of improving it through a point and card system for immigrants (black-red-gold card). Canada's experience comes in for close scrutiny – this is the country, after all, which has long been regarded as the worldwide benchmark for immigrant-friendly policies, but it is also currently undergoing fundamental changes in its liberal immigration and nationalization processes. We also examine whether the martial tone of the global “war on talent” with which the major industrialized countries frame their quest for qualified immigrants simply represents old-style colonialism in a new guise. On the other hand, might this be an opportunity to reinterpret old categories of nationhood and homeland through the subversive charm of the culture of welcome?

From here it's a small step to the themes of representation and public discourse. Because when it comes to renegotiating who is German and who isn't, we must consider the mechanisms of the accompanying public discussion. This chapter initially examines the extent to which and how this debate is conducted in the media. It considers

who can appropriately represent immigrants and new Germans and sounds out the conditions for conducting this public debate, which is so susceptible to assumptions, in a way that is objective, evidence-based and fair. At the same time it seeks out the visions of new social forms in art, which can function as both stimulus and irritant in this debate. Irritants are also the subject matter of a young writer who criticizes the crippling inertia and the almost insufferable diversions of the integration debate that is clearly not ready for a young writer from an immigrant background.