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ECONOMICS

Simple naturalization solutions don't work

Naturalization reform should lead to better integration. However, economists have found that it often exacerbates the generation gap in the family.



Norbert Häring

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Girl with headscarf at school

Many Muslim parents want to keep their daughters in the traditional culture.
(Photo: Wolfram Kastl / dpa)

Frankfurt . The strong influx of migrants in 2015 and thereafter made the topic of integration very big again. Four economists examined the effects of the reform of German citizenship law 20 years ago on the integration of the children of immigrants from foreign cultures. The result is a warning of too much trust in simple solutions.

Since the beginning of 2000 , children born in Germany have been granted German citizenship by foreign citizens under certain conditions. This is intended to promote their integration into German society. Until another reform in 2014, they had to choose between the German and the

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nationality of their parents at the age of 18.

The basic idea is obvious. As a citizen you can vote, you can work in the public service and you also automatically have a work permit in other EU countries. This should increase the willingness to integrate into German society.

But it's not that easy, as Gordon Dahl, Cristina Felfe, Paul Frijters and Helmut Rainer from the Universities of San Diego, Würzburg, London (LSE) and Munich found in their investigation. It is entitled: "Caught between Cultures: Unintended Consequences of Improving Opportunity for Immigrant Girls".



TOPICS OF THE ARTICLE



The "unintended consequences" mentioned in the subtitle mainly affect girls from the Muslim culture. They apparently result from the fact that parents often do not share the goal of the reform, greater assimilation to western culture, and work increasingly against it after the reform.

This exacerbated the generational conflict that the girls are exposed to anyway. Her desire and expectation to be integrated has been strengthened, as have her parents' efforts to keep her in the traditional culture.

Girls in conflict

The authors examined how this manifests itself by interviewing immigrant children in 57 German schools 15 years after the reform, i.e. in the last year of compulsory education. Only those who were born six months before and after the time of reform were included in the investigation. This should ensure that as few other influences as possible distort the comparison.

Those who still fell under the old rule and were unable to obtain citizenship due to birth in Germany were compared to those who were born after the cut-off date.

It was found that girls from Muslim families who were born after the cut-off date no longer considered themselves as Germans, but by 22 percentage points less than their classmates with the same background, who were not "favored" by the reform. They believed less that foreigners in

Germany can have a good life. They participated less in extracurricular activities and had less support in a circle of friends.

At the same time, they felt considerably worse than their classmates born earlier. Their assessment of their own life satisfaction was as much lower than that of people with moderate depression. The high suicide rate of girls of Turkish origin in Germany makes it clear that this is not a statistical artifact.

In boys and non-Muslim girls, on average there was no difference between those born before and after the cut-off date on these questions.

Frustration with unfulfilled expectations was identified as the cause of the supposed gift for Muslim girls becoming such a burden. The girls born after the cut-off date wanted to study at a higher percentage, but their expectation of being able to achieve their own educational goals was almost 40 percent lower than among those born before the cut-off date. They considered the risk of having to give up a professional career for a family was significantly greater.

The authors consider it plausible that the problem arises less among boys, because girls are more likely to be seen as educators of many future children and thus keepers of traditional culture, while the role differences in cultural circles are smaller for boys. Parents who want to preserve their traditional culture would, above all, strive to keep their daughters in it.

The researchers found strong evidence to support their thesis that parents actively sabotaged the integration goal of the reform. In keeping with this, the researchers found that parents of Muslim girls born after the cut-off date never spoke German to them 50 percent more often than the parents of girls not affected by the reform.

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The girls affected by the reform also received far less support from their parents for schoolwork than their somewhat older Muslim classmates. There were no such differences in Muslim boys.

Hope for the future

However, the study does not allow a final judgment on the success of the reform because it only refers to the first 15 years in which the beneficiaries were still minors and were therefore under the dominant influence of their parents. Theoretically, the results could change after reaching legal age.

In fact, the Muslim girls born after the cut-off date were significantly more optimistic than the other groups that their living conditions would improve in the future.

For most, however, it should be difficult to study without the support of parents and to fully overcome the consequences of the restrictions and lack of support in the formative adolescent years.

The scientists do not have any concrete lessons from their disillusioning results, except that the integration of Muslim girls requires different or additional measures than giving them easy access to German citizenship.

The unexpected effects could easily occur with measures such as those recently discussed, such as a headscarf ban for schoolchildren. It could motivate devout Muslim parents to keep their daughters away from perceived dangers to their morals by severely restricting their out-of-school social contacts.

Since restrictions on the custody of the parents for their underage daughters reach narrow limits, there is hardly any way around influencing the parents if Muslim girls with religiously conservative parents want to be easier to integrate into Western society - however difficult that may be.

More: [Europe is afraid of a new influx of refugees.](#)

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