Immigrants in Society:
Challenges for Education in Ukraine and Latvia

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the problems which are arising in the process of adaptation of immigrants to educational spaces in Ukraine and Latvia upon their arrival in the country of settlement. Among these problems are the differences in educational systems of the output and input countries, difficulties in mastering languages of a learning process in the countries, overcoming misunderstanding in intercultural communication within and outside of schools, unpreparedness of teachers and trainers to face and to solve challenges that are generating by immigrants and the host societies. The discussion is based on the preliminary results obtained during the implementation of the joint Ukrainian-Latvian project “Immigrants in Society: Challenges for Education” sponsored by Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia.

KEYWORD

Education, Educational Space, Immigrants, Integration, Intercultural Communication

INTRODUCTION

International migration has turned into a significant factor in the development of all countries in the world. In 2017 about 258 million people (3.4% of the world’s population) were moving across their country’s borders due to challenging situations in different spheres of their social life, making countries extremely ethnically diverse (United Nations [UN], 2017). “New sources and destinations of migrants are emerging, and in some cases, countries have become important points of origin, transit and destination simultaneously . . .,” according to John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division in the United Nations’ Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Europe and Asia combined have nearly two thirds of all international migrants, worldwide. Northern America is another “container” of immigrants, experiencing the fast growth in migrant stock by an average of 2.8% per year (UN, 2013). These movements have great potential for accumulation (first of all for host countries) or loss (mainly for countries of emigration) of social, labour, cultural, and intellectual capital.

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This article will discuss the interconnection of migrant flows with educational contexts in two countries (Ukraine and Latvia) to reveal the main challenges for both immigrants and host societies, and will show the possibilities for overcoming the problems on the way to integration of newcomers into mainstream social life in Ukraine and Latvia.

**IMMIGRATION IN UKRAINIAN AND LATVIAN CONTEXTS**

The two countries in question (Ukraine and Latvia) recently became important actors in contemporary migration processes. There are three aspects of migration: migration from Ukraine and Latvia; migration to Ukraine and Latvia; and migration inside the countries (especially for Ukraine). Although we concentrate our attention on the second aspect, it is appropriate to give the general picture of the ethnic composition of these two countries to estimate the significance of immigrants in their future development.

According to the All-Ukrainian population census in 2001 and investigations of Ukrainian demographers and sociologists, the ethno-national structure of Ukrainian society is as follows: the Ukrainian ethnos (Ukrainian ethno-nation – 78.0%); ethnic communities, including people with an indefinite status and national minorities (21.0% – Russians, Byelorussians, Moldovans, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Romanians, Poles, Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Tatars, Roma, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Germans, Lithuanians, Slovaks, Czechs); ethnic communities with indefinite statuses, including Gagauz, Karaites, Crimean Tatars, and Krymchaks can be interpreted; and representatives of different ethnic and immigrant groups (2.0%) (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2001; Etnosotsiologiya, 2010).

According to the data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, the population of Latvia on 1 January 2017 was 2,129,320, including 84.4% Latvian citizens, 11.3% non-citizens of Latvia, and approximately four percent were people with permanent or temporary residence permits or foreigners (Pilsonības un migrācijas lietu pārvalde, 2017). The ethnic composition of the Latvian population is as follows: Latvians – 62.0%; Russians – 25.4%; Byelorussians – 3.3%; Ukrainians – 2.2%; Poles – 2.1%; and others – 5.0% (including immigrants from different countries) (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde [CSP], 2017).

Actually, the immigrant component of Ukrainian society today comprises a small proportion of its population. All categories of immigrants referred to in our analysis, according to our estimates, total 300,000 (less than one percent of Ukraine’s population). If one considers only the quantitative parameters of immigration, one may get the impression that the latter is not a significant factor of Ukrainian social and cultural development. However, this significance is determined not only by quantitative parameters, but also by other moments; first of all, by an intensification of migration processes in general and active involvement of Ukraine into them. It means that in the future it might have more than a tangible effect on the ratio between the different components of the population, on the nature of the immigrants’ resettlement in the country, on changes in the balance of ethnic composition of the population at the regional and especially at the local level, and on the problems of their social and ethno-cultural integration into Ukrainian society, or, at least, on adaptation to new conditions of their stay and their interaction with representatives of traditional ethnic communities of Ukraine. A similar situation could develop in Latvia with one distinctive feature – the internal replacements of the population are not so intensive as the Ukrainian case.

There are several categories of immigrants in both countries. In this sense, the situation with immigration in Latvia and in Ukraine is different to some degree. In Latvia the categories of immigrants are distinguished: migrants or newcomers from countries of the European Union (EU); migrants or newcomers from third countries; and remigrants who return to Latvia after a period spent outside the country. In Ukraine there are different categories of migrants: immigrants from the post-Soviet space (mainly students); immigrants from countries of Africa and Asia; refugees (from Afghanistan and Syria); and forced displaced persons (internal refugees, from the Crimea and Donbass regions).
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