Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the dimensions of immigration into industrialised countries, its principal determinants and its economic impacts on the host countries. Furthermore, it assesses the state of social and political (voting) rights for immigrants in Western Europe. Finally, it reports findings in the economic literature concerning the influence of immigrant voting on economic outcomes and the possible effect this has on natives’ attitudes towards political rights for immigrants.

Keywords: immigration, social rights, political rights, voting

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1. **Introduction**

Immigration, and its political and economic effects, has been and is again currently among the prevalent and hotly discussed topics in Europe and the rest of the world. Receiver countries of large net immigration are often struggling in deciding upon which stance to take on the (potential) immigration they are facing, ranging from the degree of restriction they put on immigration (e.g. migration quota, selection criteria) to the degree to which they are promoting the integration of immigrants into society once they are allowed in, both economically (e.g. the degree to which they are entitled to receive social welfare benefits) as well as politically (e.g. the degree to which they are allowed to take part in political decision-making such as voting).

In the following, we will review some facts concerning immigration, the most important motives for immigration and some of its economic aspects and have a look at current social and political rights of immigrants in Western Europe. We will see that the granting of social and political rights to foreign citizens is among the most contentious issues in immigration and integration policies. Whereas there seems to be a general sentiment of resistance against an extension of both of these types of rights to foreigners, social rights in general are granted more readily than political ones – even though this means that foreigners are excluded from collective decision-making on public revenues and expenditures they share in. Several possible reasons for this fact have been explored in political studies\(^2\), and a particular one is derived in a political economy model in Mayr (2003). Here, it is found that natives might oppose extending the franchise to immigrants because immigrants’ votes could tilt the political balance to what would be to them an unfavourable (a non-optimal) outcome with respect to the level of redistribution.\(^3\)

2. **Some Facts on Immigration**

Migration has been of concern to countries all over the world at all points of time. In Western Europe more recently, post-war immigration, particularly that of migrant workers in the 1960s and 1970s, created large communities of long-settled foreign citizens. Furthermore, with the adoption of the Treaty of Rome (1957) by the European Community member states by 1 January 1993, European citizens became free to move, reside and work anywhere within the new common market. Fears of mass immigration from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have been raised with the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the prospect of

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\(^2\) see for example Rath in: Layton-Henry (1990) and Guiraudon in: Joppke (1998)
ten new member countries joining the European Union by 1 May 2004. Finally, the term ‘fortress Europe’ signals the perception of a threat from immigration from other continents such as Africa and Asia.

The definition of immigrants used henceforth is the one of ‘non-citizen legal residents’ – along with the common definition used in most European countries of ‘a person who moves to a country and resides there for longer than a specified period that is often quite short, usually from three to six months’.  

A rough impression of the magnitude of immigrant stocks and flows world-wide is given by the fact that approximately 100 million people in the world live in a country other than their own.  In the OECD area (where data were available) alone, the stock of the foreign population rose by over 13 million between 1988 and 1998, to reach nearly 57 million persons, or 7 percent of the total population. In Europe, the proportion is relatively low at about 5 percent in 1998, compared with around 20 percent in Australia and Canada and nearly 10 percent in the United States. Table 1 shows immigrants as a percentage of the population in selected OECD countries in 1981, 1991 and 1998. Within Europe, immigrant population percentages are found to be highest in Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland and West Germany with more than 8 percent in 1998.

Table 1. Immigrants as a Percentage of the Population
(from: Friedberg and Hunt (1995: 24) and OECD Current Issues (2001))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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3 see Section 7
4 Layton-Henry (1990: 5)
5 Friedberg and Hunt (1995: 25)
6 Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 9)
7 In interpreting migration data, one needs to be cautious and bear in mind the statistical caveats (see Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 6) for problems with definitions and comparability across countries of migration statistics).
8 Also, one has to bear in mind that official data may underestimate the level of migration due to the movements of illegal or clandestine immigrants (see Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 10) for an estimation of illegal immigration to the U.S., Europe, Japan and Australia).
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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Germany</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. People are defined to be immigrants according to their nationality (European countries, Japan) or the fact that they are foreign-born (Australia, Canada, United States).

Sources: OECD, Trends in International Migration (1994) and National Statistical Institutes (1998 data)

As explained in Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 5ff.), policies on immigration vary across countries and in general, two different schemes can be distinguished. In Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the U.S., ‘permanent’ resident or settlement systems are in place, which are typically based on specific selection criteria. In Europe, and also Japan and Korea, immigrants commonly enter through ‘temporary’ permit systems (even if they often remain in the host country indefinitely or for long periods of time). Different attitudes in immigration policies are also reflected in the application of citizenship acquisition policies, which are either more liberal or protectionist. In the U.S. and Great Britain, the basic principle of jus soli is dominant, where persons are considered to be citizens if they are born in the national territory. It is also dominant in France, the Netherlands and Belgium either directly by acquisition of citizenship at majority (automatically or by option) for aliens born in the country, or under the form of ‘double jus soli’ where children born in the country, having one parent also born in the country, are citizens. In Germany, Switzerland and Sweden, for example, jus sanguinis is prevalent, and citizenship is reserved to those descended from earlier citizens. Here, the children of foreigners can only acquire citizenship by naturalisation, even if they were born in the country.⁹

⁹ De Rham in Layton-Henry (1990: 172)
In nearly all OECD countries the majority of new arrivals is due to family reunification, but the volume of asylum seekers has increased in many OECD countries over the past decade. The third main category of immigrants is those who come primarily to work. As to the skill characteristics of the foreign population, educational attainment levels of immigrants have been below those of natives in many OECD countries in the past, possibly also due to active immigration policies aiming for the attraction of low-skilled labour. An increasing emphasis on inflows of skilled workers could lead to a reversal of this trend.\textsuperscript{10}

3. The Principal Reasons for Immigration

As mentioned in Issac (1947: 23), among a number of possible motives for migration, ‘an economic consideration, the desire to become better off, has been predominant.’ It is further stated that, even if not every individual who has the opportunity of becoming better off through migration has the desire or the opportunity to do so, the movements which actually took place were mainly due to economic reasons (with the exception of refugee immigration).

There are many and complex factors operating both in the host and the source countries that have an influence on the expected economic costs and benefits of immigrating. However, there is a common distinction between supply side factors (‘push’ factors) that affect the interest and willingness to emigrate and demand side factors (‘pull’ factors) that affect the demand for immigrants in the destination country.\textsuperscript{11}

On the demand side, there can be a specific need for certain types of workers in the host country, as mentioned in the previous section above. This was most notably the case between the mid 1950s and the early 1970s where widespread labour shortages led to the active promotion of immigration from migrant workers to Western Europe and Australia, for example. In recent years, host country labour demand has shifted towards skilled workers such as technicians and engineers due to prevailing labour shortages in the information, communication and technology industries in many industrialised countries.\textsuperscript{12}

Supply side-wise, relative expected incomes between host and source countries are generally thought to be an important factor influencing the incentive to migrate. Table 2 displays the proportion of average per capita income in the source countries (where the data were available) relative to the host country. Income discrepancies thus measured (that is, ignoring

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{10}] see Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 9)
  \item[\textsuperscript{11}] Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 11)
  \item[\textsuperscript{12}] Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 13)
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
differences in income distribution within source and host countries) are quite pronounced. In nearly half of the listed OECD countries, the average annual per capita income in 1997 of the source countries is less than half the level of the host country, and the average for all the countries shown is close to two thirds. The income difference seems to be especially large for immigrants to the U.S. However, one has to bear in mind that this calculation excludes primarily skilled temporary migrant workers, so-called ‘non-immigrants’.  

Table 2. Per capita income in source relative to host countries in current PPP $, 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host country</th>
<th>Average number of immigrants * (thousands)</th>
<th>Per cent of total immigrants included in calculation</th>
<th>Weighted source country GDP per capita in 1997, PPP$</th>
<th>Ratio of source country GDP per capita to host country GDP per capita in 1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>12 265</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>17 688</td>
<td>77.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>207.3</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>9 900</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark b</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>16 679</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>8 744</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>6 231</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>679.3</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>10 016</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy c</td>
<td>111.0</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>8 279</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>243.9</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>10 387</td>
<td>43.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>75.6</td>
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<td>32.6</td>
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<td>Switzerland</td>
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<td>50.4</td>
<td>19 262</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom b</td>
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<td>89.4</td>
<td>14 832</td>
<td>71.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>773.8</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>6 371</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on immigration flows between 1995-98.
* a) Immigration data refer to average 1995-97.
* b) Immigration data refer to 1998 only.
* c) Source: OECD International Migration Database; World Bank Development Indicators, 1999.

There are some qualifications to consider, however, when assuming a close correspondence between relative income discrepancies and actual migration movements. Firstly, the measure of relative incomes for a given year does only very incompletely represent expected lifetime costs and benefits of the migrant, which is considered by some researchers as the more relevant concept when assessing the incentive to migrate. Secondly, actual immigration crucially depends on the immigration policy of the destination country (‘demand factors’). Finally, non-economic factors are very important as well. Psychological stress associated with moving to another country, language and cultural differences and the (non-)existence of

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13 see Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 12) footnote 9 for more detail  
migrant networks in the host country all contribute to non-economic costs or benefits of migration that have been found likely to influence decisions about migration.15

4. The Economic Impact of Immigration on the Host Country

The importance of the subject of immigration into industrialised countries is mirrored in an extensive literature. Part of the economic migration research – and one of high potential influence on politics – is dealing with the question of ‘Is immigration – and how much of it and of which type – good or bad for the host country?’ From an economic point of view, one might as well ask: ‘Does immigration increase the national income of natives?’ or ‘Are immigration benefits bigger than the costs?’

To answer these questions, economists have most importantly analysed the labour market effects of immigration, that is the effects of immigration on native wages and unemployment rates. According to a quantitative comparison of parliamentary debates in a few chosen European countries (Austria, France, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden, Netherlands) during 1996 and 1997, labour market arguments are among the most common arguments used by parties which are against immigration (‘Immigrants endanger the jobs of the native population or take jobs from them.’)16 In fact, it was found that ‘Austria is the country where employment policy and questions of work are most frequently explicitly linked to immigration.’17 Economic studies have tried to shed light on these contentious questions of whether immigrant workers cause a reduction of domestic wage rates and/or displace domestic workers from jobs. In theory, the labour market impact of immigrants depends on how their skills compare to those of natives in the host country. ‘One should expect that the wage income of the migrating factor – predominantly unskilled labour – and of other with which it competes will rise in the source country and fall in the destination country (or, if wages in the destination country are inflexible, unemployment will increase), while the wage and income of complementary factors will move in the opposite direction, as production adjusts to the new factor intensities… The size of wage effects from immigration typically depend on the wage elasticities of labour demand and native labour supply. In general, the lower the elasticities, the larger the wage impact of any given amount of immigration.’18 According to

15 Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 13)
16 Wodak (2000)
17 One possible explanation given for this is the fact that ‘immigration from countries of the former Eastern Block – partly in the context of the planned eastern expansion of the EU – is seen publicly and in the discourse of the right wing as a threat to ‘genuine’ Austrians…Immigration is discussed with reference to the competition between Austrian workers and the new immigrants who are viewed as cheap labour and criminals.’ (Wodak, 2000)
18 Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 14ff.)
the Heckscher-Ohlin model, in an economy which is open to international trade, factor price equalisation will occur either through trade or specialisation, given a few realistic assumptions. However, economic theory does not provide unequivocal support for the popular belief that immigration adversely affects labour market outcomes of natives.  

As mentioned in Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 15), the precise size and nature of the labour market effects of immigration will not only depend upon the relative skills of immigrants, but also their volume, different immigration waves, settlement patterns and other characteristics such as sex, age, country of origin and legal status. Furthermore, the effects are likely to vary over time as immigrants acquire new skills and experience in the local labour market and as investment and production decisions adapt to relative wage changes.

Empirical studies for the U.S. fail to find evidence for an increase in unemployment due to immigration.  

For Europe, some studies report small negative effects of immigration on unemployment, at least in the short run.  

Empirical studies on the wage effect of immigration also generally support theoretical predictions and find that immigration on average has small negative impacts on native wage levels.  

Jaeger (1996) finds that immigration to the U.S. during the 1980s had a larger negative effect on the wages of the low-skilled and a positive impact on those of high-skilled native workers. A similar result was found for Germany during the 1980s by DeNew and Zimmermann (1994).  

Apart from labour market effects, natives also sometimes fear adverse effects of immigration on public finances and the distribution of income. Indeed, further arguments that were found to be featuring prominently in parliamentary debates on immigration are: ‘Immigrants and asylum-seekers abuse the system. For example they live at the expense of the taxpayers.’ and ‘Asylum-seekers cost too much.’ These refer to other important economic effects of immigration, namely public finance effects, that is effects on tax payments and welfare benefits. The concern is whether immigration places an additional load on social welfare, education and health systems, which is not compensated for by higher tax payments – that is, whether the net contribution of immigrants to the budget is positive or negative. Yet, in contrast to the labour market effects, the economic literature has not devoted sufficient

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19 Friedberg and Hunt (1995: 42)  
21 Winkelmann and Zimmermann (1993), Gross (1999)  
22 see Greenwood and McDowell (1986: 1767) and Friedberg and Hunt (1995: 42)  
23 Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 16)  
24 Wodak (2000)
attention to the public finance implications of immigration for the host country.\textsuperscript{25 26} The results of any attempt to compute the net fiscal contribution of immigrants will depend very much on ‘the methodology adopted, the time period concerned, the assumptions about what should be considered and excluded, which public services are regarded as pure public goods, the appropriate discount rate and the demographic unit of analysis (individuals or households).’\textsuperscript{27}

Studies on the relative welfare spending on immigrants generally find that ‘foreign born individuals are less likely to receive public assistance and, when they do, to receive lower levels of such transfers than the native-born population with similar characteristics.’\textsuperscript{28} Also, it was found that ‘welfare recipient rates among immigrants tend to fall with length of settlement in the host country towards the level for the native-born population.’\textsuperscript{29} Long-term analyses taking into account life-cycle effects on demands for public services and the payment of taxes ‘have mostly suggested that in net present value terms immigrants and their descendants tend to contribute more in terms of tax revenues than they absorb via higher government outlays, but the orders of magnitude are typically small.’\textsuperscript{26} Findings are, however, sensitive to the ‘composition of new immigrants, particularly their level of educational achievement and age at arrival in the host country.’\textsuperscript{28}

5. The Social Rights of Immigrants

In Layton-Henry (1990: 11-13), social rights are defined to ‘include the right to a minimum standard of living and to share in economic welfare and social security benefits, general educational and health provision’. They are ranked second to last in a ranking of rights of foreigners by ease of access, only topped by political rights in the length of stay that is required in order to obtain them. While social rights are usually granted after a certain time after admission to the country, political rights are usually obtained only with naturalisation.

Comparative evidence on the legal entitlement and actual participation of non-citizens in host countries’ welfare systems is hard to obtain and, according to Baldwin-Edwards (1997), it is ‘perhaps one of the most complex yet under-researched areas of contemporary policy.’ Social rights for foreign citizens in the European Union are often regulated in bilateral labour

\textsuperscript{25} Borjas (1999)
\textsuperscript{26} Obviously, there are important links between the labour market performance and the welfare participation of immigrants. For example, questions dealing with the skills and the assimilation of immigrants do not only have important labour market implications, but also possibly determine the tax contributions and welfare participation of immigrants.
\textsuperscript{27} Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 19)
recruitment agreements which grant social security equality with nationals or multilateral conventions governing migrants’ social rights including the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as the most significant one. They differ according to the legal status and the nationality of the migrant. Thus, according to a survey on European Union countries in Baldwin-Edwards (1997), education and health services are most generally available, even to illegal immigrants. Unemployment benefits are generally available if the migrant satisfies the conditions of the scheme, while (means-tested) is rarely available and can threaten the residence status of the applicant, and public housing is sometimes available in principle, but hard to obtain in practice. Therefore, it is concluded that the best-protected migrants are Convention status refugees and those with permanent residence rights, so-called denizens, followed by workers and illegal immigrants who are the least protected.

Social rights protection of non-EU immigrants therefore is far from unified across the EU and does not only vary greatly between countries, but also between legal statuses of the migrants and their different nationalities, even though ‘suggestions of extending the EU co-ordinating rules on social security to third country nationals are now being made.’

At the national level, ‘the trend of governments has been to diminish the rights of (legal) migrants’ as exemplified by the case of Austria, where in June 1996, all bilateral social security agreements with Yugoslavia, Tunisia and Turkey were cancelled on the ground that they were too expensive. It seems to be true that ‘in all European states there is some resentment that foreigners, and especially recent immigrants…should benefit from the health and social security provision that the modern welfare state bestows on its citizens’.

According to Freeman (1986), this implied ‘membership scheme’ of the welfare state that is reserved to citizens is justified on economic grounds. He argues that ‘the international state system is marked by considerable economic inequalities, so that some states can afford much higher welfare benefits and socially determined living standards than the rest of the world. The very existence of such unequal benefits is a stimulus to migration, but unlimited migration would undermine the high level of these benefits. Therefore migration has to be controlled if these socially determined privileges are to be maintained. The principles of distributive justice need to be legitimised on a basis of solidarity that comes from common membership of a human community. The benefits of the welfare state are thus normally

28 Coppel, Dumont and Visco (2001: 20)
29 see Baldwin-Edwards (1991: 195) for a detailed analysis
30 see Baldwin-Edwards (1997)
33 Layton-Henry (1990: 16)
restricted to citizens, and non-citizens may be wholly or partially excluded’. In other words, immigration control is seen to be necessary for maintaining high living standards and social welfare benefits.

This corresponds to the finding in economic theory that labour mobility hinders redistributive policies: since individuals will, other things equal, have an incentive to locate in a jurisdiction with relatively wealthy residents where they can consume public benefits for relatively smaller tax payments, there will be a tendency towards a distortion in the allocation of resources in the form of inefficient migration into relatively wealthy communities.

On the other hand, the taxation of foreigners might legitimise entitlement to welfare benefits, even if they lack membership in the form of citizenship. ‘Those who contribute towards financing the welfare state should be entitled to its benefits. This would include foreign citizens who pay taxes and who therefore should be recognised as members of the welfare state’.

Indeed, foreign (legal) residents are normally given the economic duties and rights of working and contributing to and (to varying degrees) receiving welfare benefits. However, they are generally excluded from political decision-making and therefore from decisions on how (much) taxes are to be paid and benefits are to be spent.

6. The Political Rights of Immigrants

Political rights are defined to be the ‘rights to participate in the exercise of political power and the decision-making process, the most obvious means being by voting in local and national elections, for local and regional councils and the national government’. Full political rights are usually not immediately granted to immigrants. The common prerequisite for immigrants to take part in not only local and regional, but also national parliamentary elections is naturalisation. There has been much debate on how appropriate this is, especially for long-settled, permanent residents of a foreign nationality who have become full members of their chosen country in every way except for the right to vote. They participate in the labour markets of the country, contribute to social security and receive benefits in turn, but as non-citizens

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34 Layton-Henry (1990: 12)
35 Oates (1972: 83)
36 Also compare Guiraudon (in: Joppke (1998: 272)), stating that welfare benefits for foreigners in western Europe were secured early on while political rights remain contested.
37 Layton-Henry (1990: 11)
38 see Layton-Henry (1990: 1ff.)
they are not entitled to full political rights. For example, according to Layton-Henry (1990: 24), in Europe, the post-war migration of workers who have become permanent settlers without applying for citizenship has led to the presence of large numbers of residents who are excluded from political decision-making, making representative government no longer representative. A general trend in the post-war period is identified that gradually extends social, civil and also political rights to migrant workers and their dependants; as an example, the German laender of Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg are mentioned, which have granted local voting rights to foreign residents. In the current European Union, five countries (Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, and Sweden) out of all fifteen member states automatically deliver voting rights to non-EU immigrants, usually at the local level. However, none does so at the national level, where the level of redistribution is to a large part determined. In most cases, even local voting rights are a hotly debated issue, examples being Vienna, where the proposed introduction of voting rights after five years of continuous residency has been highly criticised by the conservatives and the Freedom Party, or the Belgian Senate, where the same proposal was rejected in March 2002.

What about EU-citizens? The Treaty on the EU states that every national of a member state is automatically citizen of the EU (art. 8). European citizenship provides, among others, the rights to move and reside freely within the EU and the right to vote and stand in local and European Parliamentary elections in the citizen’s place of residence. (Exceptionally, a longer period of residency may be required if more than 20 per cent of the total population eligible to vote are non-nationals, as it is the case in Luxembourg.)

However, whereas voting rights for the European Parliament are guaranteed (Council Directive 93/109), local voting rights are not uniformly regulated yet. Foreign citizens from the EU have local voting rights, for instance, in Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden. However, the European Court ‘has the authority to rule an extension of the right to vote and stand for elective office in national elections if it can be demonstrated that lack of political rights is a barrier to movement’. Political participation at the national level in a state of which the individual is not a national is ‘intentionally excluded from the rights attaching to citizenship of the Union.’

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39 EUROPA, Justice and Home Affairs
40 Mazza and van Winden (1996), p. 354
41 Guild in: Cesarani and Fulbrook (1996: 37)
Immigrants, even if they are EU-citizens or long-settled migrant workers from the 1960s and 1970s, are therefore denied political rights to a large degree. Most importantly, they are not granted voting rights at the national level.\footnote{At the same time, it has become harder for potential immigrants to be admitted. ‘Since the end of the post-war European boom in 1973, labour recruitment has been severely controlled in all the advanced industrial countries of Western Europe, and in some cases it has been reversed. As labour recruitment has declined, there has been considerable increase in concern about the numbers of people seeking asylum in Western Europe, particularly from the Third World. This has resulted in the introduction of greater restrictions on the rights of people claiming the status of refugees. This is partly because some European governments claim that many asylum seekers are not political refugees at all, but economic refugees – that is, they are really migrant workers unable to obtain entry and employment permits.’ (Layton-Henry (1990: 16, 17))}

This fact seems to be rather puzzling and inconsistent, and yet it is true that ‘even in those countries which have led the way in extending voting rights to foreign migrant workers, reformers have found a deep-seated resistance to the granting of national voting rights to foreign residents’.\footnote{For example, the residence period required for permanent status is 5 years in Belgium and the Netherlands, 3 in France and 2 in Denmark. (Niessen (1989) in: Soysal (1994:121) in: Baldwin-Edwards (1997))} What might be the reason for this finding? In Layton-Henry (1990: 16), it is suggested that ‘participating in parliamentary elections might be of great symbolic importance as a national political act that citizens are not prepared to allow easily for people unwilling to take the positive step of becoming a member of the national community through the process of naturalisation’.

However, even if foreign citizens are willing to change their nationality, it is not necessarily easy for them to do so. As we have seen in Section 1, naturalisation laws differ and can be more or less restrictive. According to Layton-Henry (1990: 15), ‘the willingness of West European democracies to grant citizenship to migrant workers varies considerably’. Naturalisation is relatively easy to obtain in Belgium, Denmark, France (especially for the second generation of foreign migrant workers), Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway.\footnote{For an analysis of naturalisation laws in Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland see de Rham in Layton-Henry (1990: 158ff.).} Of those countries, Ireland, Denmark and the Netherlands have also extended local voting rights to foreign citizens. In Great Britain, the acquisition of citizenship was traditionally easy, but was made more difficult, and social rights were tied more closely to citizenship. Only Commonwealth citizens enjoy full political rights. Naturalisation is difficult and partly expensive to obtain in Austria, Germany and Switzerland.\footnote{Required residence periods are 4 years in the UK, 8 years in Germany and 10 years in Austria and Switzerland. (Niessen (1989) in: Soysal (1994:121) in: Baldwin-Edwards (1997))}
It is apparent that in those countries where citizenship is relatively easy to obtain, foreign citizens also enjoy more political rights. A specific symbolic importance of national voting rights does therefore not seem to have much explanatory power.

Rath (in Layton-Henry (1990: 127ff.)) compares the political rights of migrant workers in seven major West European democracies (Belgium, France, Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland) in order to identify causes for country-specific attitudes towards an extension of the franchise to non-citizens. Among the country characteristics that were found to have an influence on immigration policies are size, homogeneity, degree of federalism, the nature of the countries’ electoral systems and their historical traditions, particular political arrangements, internal conflicts or consensus, the strength of particular political traditions and confidence in national security and identity.

Many of these factors refer in one way or another to the degree of homogeneity and consensus among the native population and suggest that the stronger inner consensus on public policy issues is, the more willing countries are to extend the franchise to foreign citizens.

7. The Economic Literature on Immigration and Voting

More recently, several studies on the public economics of immigration have begun to take into account the political decision-making process and the impact immigrants might have thereupon in changing the political constituency of a population, adding to the size of different interest groups.

They all find that taking political decision-making into account can make an important difference when studying the determinants and effects of labour mobility. For example, Razin and Sadka (1997) find that through voting, unskilled migration may lead to a lower tax burden and less redistribution than no migration. This rather counter-intuitive result arises because when educational cost is endogenous, unskilled immigration leads to more of the natives becoming skilled and voting for lower taxes. Mazza and van Winden (1996) find that transfers and disposable income for workers can increase. In an analysis of voting on social insurance contributions, Cremer and Pestieau (1998) find that when the poor (rich) are mobile, the contribution rate decreases (increases) when benefits are increasingly strongly related to earnings.
However, none of these papers considers the possible consequences on natives’ attitudes towards the extension of political rights to immigrants. In recent work of my own, Mayr (2003), I provide an analysis of the possible impact of immigrant participation on the voting outcome regarding the level of income redistribution and determines how this would affect natives’ willingness to grant immigrants voting rights in the first place. It is found that there are cases where immigrants’ votes can either increase or decrease the income tax rate – namely if natives are not homogenous enough in their skills. Then, the majority of natives would be against immigrant voting since it could alter voting outcomes and tilt the political balance to what would be to them an unfavourable (a non-optimal) level of redistribution.

This seems to fit findings in political studies which point to the degree of homogeneity within the native population when trying to explain varying degrees of openness (or resistance) of countries towards non-citizen political rights (see section above).
References


Mayr (2003), ‘Immigration and Majority Voting on Income Redistribution – is there a Case for Opposition from Natives?’, mimeo.


