

# Heinz Kühn, The Present and Future Integration of Foreign Workers and Their Families in the Federal Republic of Germany (1979)

## Abstract

Heinz Kühn (1912-1992) was appointed in 1978 to the newly created post of “Federal Commissioner for the Promotion of Integration among Foreign Workers and Their Family Members,” known in common parlance as the “commissioner of foreigner affairs.” He held this office until 1980. His “Kühn Memorandum” was far ahead of its time, recommending integrative measures in education policy, an option right of naturalization for young people born and raised in the Federal Republic and the introduction of municipal voting rights for foreigners. The memorandum met with little enthusiasm.

## Source

[...]

The alarming situation concerning the future prospects for 1 million foreign children and adolescents in the Federal Republic calls for large-scale efforts in order to prevent major harm to individuals and society. Current problems, and others that will most certainly arise in the near future if rapid and radical change is not undertaken, are a challenge that must be addressed now; otherwise the problems threaten to become insurmountable and will present disastrous consequences.

The measures taken thus far have obviously been inappropriately determined by the priority attached to labor market considerations. Less attention has been given to the equally important social and socio-political needs.

Therefore, the friction-generating problems of foreign workers and their families require a new and corrective approach that would take far greater account of socio-political conditions and needs. It must be recognized that an irreversible development has taken place and that social responsibility for foreign workers and their children, most of whom were recruited some years ago and have now been living in this country for a considerable time, cannot be simply recalibrated according to the labor-market situation. The apparently large number of migrants who are willing to stay in the Federal Republic (comprised particularly of members of the second and third generations) must be offered unconditional and permanent integration.

The vague notions of a “temporary” integration are incoherent and unrealistic, and the current situation is clear and intractable proof of its inadequacy. The strategy of encouraging foreign workers to return to their home countries should not be overemphasized; this option can be reasonably successful only if it focuses on those who are seriously interested in returning. But this also requires that the foreign workers concerned be fully informed about alternative possibilities.

On the basis of this analysis, the proposals put forward in this memorandum envisage a consistent integration policy with the following priorities:

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1. Recognition of *de facto* immigration (while maintaining the ban on further recruitment);
  2. A considerable increase in integration measures, in particular for children and adolescents, i.e. at the preschool, elementary school, and vocational training stage;
  3. Abolition of all segregating measures, e.g. “nationality classes” in schools and similar concepts;
  4. Acknowledging the right of young foreigners to unrestricted access to jobs and training opportunities;
  5. Developing opportunities for young foreigners born and raised in the Federal Republic to opt for naturalization;
  6. A general review of legislation regarding foreigners and naturalization procedures, in order to improve their legal situation and take greater account of the legitimate special interests of foreign workers and their families;
  7. Improving their political rights by granting them the right to vote in local government elections after a certain period of residence;
  8. Improving qualified social counseling. [...]

The capacity of preschools to support parents in the education of their children is particularly important for foreign families, especially in terms of integration. Parents themselves are faced with considerable difficulties that, without appropriate assistance, make them unable to prepare their children for life in the Federal Republic. [...]

Pilot projects have shown that an organized union for foreign staff would contribute to greater motivation among parents, as well as to improved scholastic achievement, and would not create any major initial difficulties. It would facilitate psychological access to foreign, and in particular to Turkish, families. Moreover, foreign teachers would have a special understanding for the language difficulties and the family background of the children.

The situation for foreign children and adolescents at school is characterized by insufficient school attendance, an extremely low rate of success in upper-primary education, and a remarkable underrepresentation of foreign children in secondary schools. It has been estimated that 25% or more of foreign pupils do not or only irregularly comply with their obligation to go to school. [...]

Source: Memorandum of the Federal Government Commissioner, Bonn 1979, official English translation. Reprinted in *Germany in Transit. Nation and Migration 1955-2005*, ed. Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, pp. 247–49.

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