

# **Labor and the Integration of Immigrant Workers: Germany, France, the United States and United Kingdom in Comparative Perspective**

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## **Project summary:**

The purpose of the proposed research project is to examine the contributions labor unions can make to the civic integration of immigrant workers. An often-neglected phenomenon in studies of both immigration and unions, workplace-based activities have always offered a potentially important site for the economic, social and political integration of workers and their families. As one of the key associative forms of industrial civilization, unions have long provided a central, if complex and contested, venue for the integration and education of immigrant workers in industrial societies. In today's global economy, the role of unions in this regard is more important than ever.

Thus we propose a two-year comparative study of contemporary worker interest representation and the integration of immigrant workers in four advanced industrial societies: Germany, France, the U.S. and U.K.<sup>1</sup> There are three streams to the research. The starting point is a *consolidation of findings from existing literature*. While many studies have been conducted on the problems of immigrant workers, no one has brought together the research findings and analysis to present an overall picture of current knowledge as it relates to the role of labor unions. We believe there is much to be learned from published and other available research – including our own previous research on innovative union strategies and social coalition building – to strengthen the foundation for our study and enrich the analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> To clarify, our focus is on unions in the U.S. and U.K. and on unions and works councils or works committees in Germany and France (and in this proposal we will use the generic “works councils” to cover both). In the U.S. and U.K., unions are the relevant actors for both internal processes of integration and for external coalition building. In Germany and France, works councils are most relevant for internal strategies, while unions play the leading role in external coalition campaigns.

The other two streams together make up the focus of our primary research efforts. First, we will look at the workplace, and specifically *the ways in which unions and works councils do or do not integrate immigrant workers into the organization of work and the life of the union*. Our sample will include selected national unions in each country as well as local unions in selected metropolitan areas. We will consider cases in which unions and works councils have specific integration strategies, and we will seek out “best practice” cases that can inform future research on unions and immigrant workers. This research stream addresses largely, but not entirely, individual integration into the institutions of worker interest representation.

Second, we will study cases of *union collaboration with other social actors in campaigns that include immigrant advocacy groups*. In a recent survey conducted by the Survey Research Institute at Cornell University, as part of our two-year study of union coalition building funded by the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, we found – surprisingly for us – union collaboration with immigrant rights groups to be the best predictor (among all the groups considered) of union coalition work with other social actors in the U.S. From this and related findings, we have reason to believe that common efforts including unions and immigrant groups have the potential to bring immigrant workers into a broader nexus of social integration. In this research stream, we will examine selected coalition campaigns in each of the four countries to determine the extent to which such integration occurs, again with an eye out for what works and does not work, and for best practice cases to inform future research and policy recommendations. The coalitions research addresses largely, but not entirely, collective civic integration.

A four-country comparative analysis presents challenges of logistics, comparability and personnel. In this regard, our research strategy includes two dimensions we believe will facilitate multi-country research and analysis. First, many of the case study reports will be written for us by experts in each of our countries. We will be drawing in some cases on already completed research and commissioning additional country-based analysis by well-regarded scholars of immigration and work. Second, we will coordinate the project

at Cornell University, assigning reports carefully to ensure parallel research and comparability. Reports from experts in the field will allow for efficient research collection and cross-national comparison at a cost considerably less than the cost of conducting our own research in all four countries.

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