



**Anita Manatschal (Project Leader),  
Verena Wisthaler, Christina Zuber**

—  
**The Regional Dynamics of Integration and  
Citizenship Regulation: An International  
Comparative Perspective**

University of Neuchâtel  
Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies  
Rue A.L. Breguet 2, 2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Contact: Anita Manatschal, [anita.manatschal@unine.ch](mailto:anita.manatschal@unine.ch), T +41 32 718 39 65

**Regional governments compete with national and supra-national actors for ownership of the regulation of immigration, asylum, and integration. Regions, Bundesländer, cantons and provinces as well as US States increasingly set their own, distinctive, policy priorities. This might lead to conflicts between governmental levels, and ultimately affects migrants' lives. This project provides the first systematic, internationally comparative analysis of the drivers and effects of regional immigrant integration policies in multi-level systems across the world.**

---

**Messages for Decision-Makers**

- Regions all over Europe, the US, Australia and Canada increasingly engage in immigrant integration policy making, challenging or complementing central and federal governments' policies.**
- Emerging regional policy differences affect immigrants' daily life, their political participation and their willingness to become citizens of the country where they live. They also impact on the cohesion of the overall regional population.**

---

The UNHCR and the Italian state both condemned the system of asylum accommodation in South Tyrol, Italy's most Northern province, as "violating national and international norms" when in October 2017 a Kurdish disabled teenager died on the streets of Bolzano, after he had been denied shelter and accommodation for four consecutive nights. Similarly, in Switzerland, a Muslim woman living in Ticino is more restricted in her daily life, and cannot wear a Burka, which would be possible for her in nearby Uri or Wallis.

How and why do regions, Bundesländer, cantons, provinces and US states formulate different policies towards immigrants? And why is regional policy making relevant for immigrant integration? To answer those questions, we focus on the subnational level in seven federations (Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, USA, Canada and Australia) and two decentralized unions (UK and Italy). The selected settings represent heterogeneous immigration contexts, as they are embedded in so-called classical settler states (USA, Canada, Australia), Post-World War II immigration states (UK, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium), as well as former emigration countries, which only recently turned into countries of immigration such as Italy and Spain.

**Regions Are Becoming Increasingly Active in Immigrant Integration Policy-Making**

Distinct regional policies targeting immigrants and their children constitute a steadily growing realm of legislation in all the countries that are part of our comparison. For example, by the 2000s, all but two of Italy's 20 regions had passed their own regional immigrant integration laws. In the US, the immigration and integration legislation activity of states almost doubled within only five years, increasing from 123 bills enacted in 2005-2006 to 218 in 2009-2010. In this project, we show that what immigrants receive

(e.g. in terms of specific integration programs and access to public services) and what they owe (e.g. in terms of civic duties and requirements for cultural adaptation) varies not only across countries, but also across regions of one and the same country. Regional integration policy variance occasionally even exceeds international variance.

### **Regions Are Mediators ...**

Regions can take up a role of mediator between the national and the local level. We find evidence for this particular role of regions in relation to access to education for minor asylum seekers in the UK. While the British government in Westminster does not finance their education as they are waiting in detention centers for the processing of their asylum claim, the city of Cardiff, hosting a large detention center, asked for granting them access to education to improve their life's perspectives. In 2016 the Welsh government mediated between the two levels and provided partial funding to ease the conflict. Also border regions can act as successful mediators. The Euroregion Tyrol – South Tyrol Trentino on the border between Italy and Austria moderated between the two national governments and prevented the announced border closure following the increase of refugees moving north early in 2016.

### **... Laboratories**

Regions can become laboratories and test policies in a specific field. Other regions and occasionally the state may take up successful policy initiatives introduced at a lower governmental level. The Swiss city of Basel, for instance, was the first to rely on the principle of “supporting and demanding” (“*Fördern und Fordern*”) in their integration measures for migrants. The canton of Zürich followed and in 2005 the federal government aligned the Swiss integration law to this principle. In Spain, the autonomous community of Barcelona was the first to introduce a “Plan on Immigrant Integration” in 1993, before the Spanish government developed such a plan in 1994, following the structure developed in Barcelona.

### **... Gap-Fillers**

Regions may also step in and develop integration strategies when the central government is not active on this front. Lacking a national strategy of access to health care for undocumented migrants in Italy, regions such as Tuscany provide specific services to this vulnerable group within the framework of their general welfare services, thus overcoming a national dearth. Flanders has become active in setting up its own immigrant integration strategies, followed by Wallonia and Brussels, while there is still no Belgian national immigrant integration model.

### **... and Alternative Loci of Belonging**

Finally, regions can emerge as alternative loci of belonging for immigrants. Although setting the conditions for naturalization generally remains a domain of the nation-state, devolution has enabled regions to pave immigrants' way towards regional citizenship in very heterogeneous manners, relying on their competency in the fields of social policy, health care, education, housing and labor market.

### **Regional Immigrant Integration Policies Are More Pragmatic Than National Ones**

Regions tend to be more concerned with social inclusion and access to regional labor markets than with grand narratives of national identity and symbolic belonging. Comparisons of Italian regions or US states show a prevalence of policies focusing on the socio-economic dimension of immigrant integration and less on the cultural dimension at the regional level.

### **Party Politics, Policy Legacies and Minority Nationalism Define the Content of Integration Policies**

Neither the share of the migrant population within a region, nor the regional economy have the greatest impact on the particular regional immigrant integration policy. Instead, various dimensions of party politics, such as party ideology or the center-periphery cleavage in a multi-level party system, minority nationalism and path dependent policy making contribute to regional variation within one country, but also to variation between regions of different countries.

### **Key Publications**

- Caponio, Tiziana, Gaia Testore, and Verena Wisthaler. “Intergovernmental Relations on Immigrant Integration in Italy. Insights from Piedmont and South Tyrol.” *Regional and Federal Studies*, 2018 (online version).
- Gundelach, Birte, and Anita Manatschal. “Ethnic Diversity, Social Trust and the Moderating Role of Subnational Integration Policy.” *Political Studies* 65, no. 2 (2017): 413–31.
- Manatschal, Anita, and Isabelle Stadelmann-Steffen. “Do Integration Policies Affect Immigrants' Voluntary Engagement? An Exploration at Switzerland's Subnational Level.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 3 (2014): 404–23.
- Wisthaler, Verena. “South Tyrol: The Importance of Boundaries for Immigrant Integration.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 8 (2016): 1271–89.
- Zuber, Christina Isabel. “Comparing the Politics behind the Immigrant Integration Laws of Catalonia and South Tyrol.” *GRITIM-UPF Working Paper Series 22* (2014).