

**Youth Migration in Germany and the World.**

or:

**Give young migrants a chance!**

A contribution to the

**World Bank International Essay Competition 2011**

By Andreas Kitzing

## Summary

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In the following essay, the author shares his thoughts about youth migration. In most parts, he draws on his personal experiences as a German citizen.

The first part of this essay handles the question how youth migration affects the author, his friends and family, and his country. Amongst other aspects, it includes his personal experiences as an internal migrant; a data analysis of his Facebook friends; and the situation of young immigrants in German society.

The second part of this essay deals with the benefits and the risks of youth migration. For this purpose, the author analyses the risks and benefits of sending countries, receiving countries, and migrants separately before coming to an aggregated conclusion.

The third part examines actions to broaden the opportunities for young migrants. It first structures the actions to be taken in sending countries. It will then give practical advice what to consider before immigrating to Germany. Finally, it finishes with setting up an agenda to improve the integration of young immigrants into the German society.

## Prefix: What is youth migration?

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By migration most people understand the permanent movement of a person (or a group of persons) from one area to another. However, analysts of the subject disagree on the interpretations of what is meant by “permanent” or “area”. The Netherlands, for instance, define “migrants” as people who have been living abroad continuously for at least six months; while in Great Britain this period is set at one year (Cloke et al., 2005). As this essay will in many parts be based on personal observations, I will use a more tautological definition: Unless indicated otherwise, I will refer to a movement as “permanent” when the person who has moved *feels* that he or she has permanently changed their residence. As concerns the “area”, I will differentiate between “international” and “internal”: International migration concerns the movement to another country, internal migration the movement to another region within the same country.

My definition of “youth” will follow the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as cited in the announcement of this essay competition: “... *young people between 15 and 30 years ...*”.

Consequently, this essay will base on the following definition of “youth migration”:

*Youth migration is the movement of people between the age of 15 and 30 to another country or region for a period of time which the migrants themselves regard as permanent.*

In Germany, the term ‘migrants’ is often used interchangeably to describe “direct” migrants and their first- or second-generation descendants.

## Part 1: How youth migration affects me and my country

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Youth migration has multiple dimensions that affect many people, families, regions and states. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) estimates the number of international migrants in 2010 at nearly 214 million people or 3.1% of the world’s population (United Nations 2009). This means that in average one in 32 people we know is an international migrant. Following the UNFPA quote in the announcement of this essay, about one third of those migrants are young people. Given the fact that vast number of internal migrants is not even included in these statistics, it is no exaggeration to say that virtually everybody in the world is somehow affected by (youth) migration.

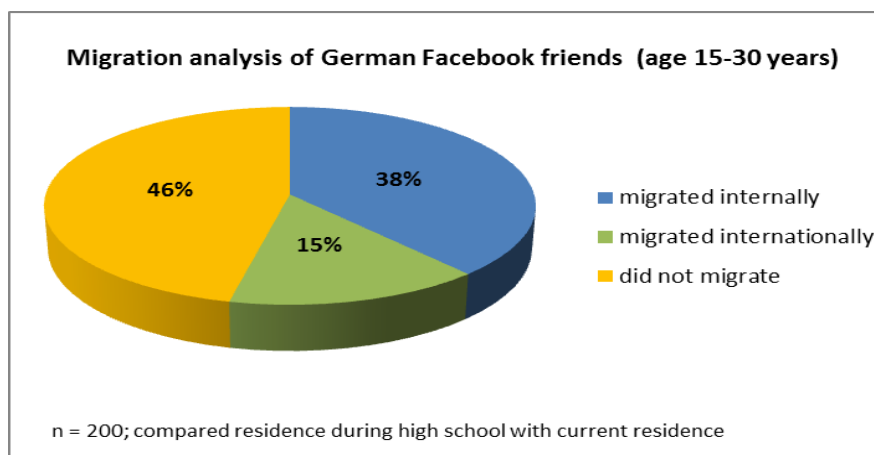
Currently I am living in Brunswick, Germany. I spent the first 24 years of my life in Hamburg, where my parents are still living. In 2010, after finishing my studies, I moved to Brunswick for a job. According to the prefixes’ definition, I am a young internal migrant. Also a huge part of my environment in Brunswick consists of (mostly young) internal migrants, which is why my subjective-point-of-view-analysis on the topic will focus on **internal youth migration**.

A remarkable share of Germany’s young population has an international migration background: According to the German Federal Statistical Office, nearly 7% of the young people between 15 and 25 have migrated from another country to Germany. Another 17% are direct or second-generation descendants of international migrants (Federal Statistical Office 2010). This huge number of international migrants set off a heated debate about international migration in summer 2010. Clearly, from a communitarian German perspective, international migration is much a bigger topic than is internal migration. This is why I will focus on **international youth migration** in my analysis of the general situation of migrants in Germany.

## 1.1: How internal youth migration affects me, my friends, and my family

As mentioned above, I have moved from Hamburg to Brunswick last year to start a new job. I sure would have liked to find a job in Hamburg, but the tense situation on the job market after the finance crisis left me no choice but to look for job offers Germany-wide. Also my Brunswick roommate and my girlfriend moved to Brunswick recently; they both migrated from a small town that had no university. And as for my high school class – people are now spread all across the country (and beyond).

To make the degree of migration in my personal environment quantifiable, I compared the current residence of my German, 18-30 years old Facebook friends with the place where they lived during most of their high school time. The analysis supports the claim that I live in an environment that is highly affected by youth migration: 54% of my friends are now living in another region than during high school; 15% even live in another country. A great share of the remaining 46% has also already made direct experience with migration, because many of them have migrated after high school, but have moved back again later.



A high share of my Facebook friends is currently living in another region than during high school (Facebook 2011).

Indeed it seems like staying in the same city has little priority for the search for an educational institution or a new employer. Nonetheless, I as well as virtually all of my friends lay high priority on staying in touch with friends and family. If we hadn't been sure to have the opportunities to regularly contact or visit our beloved ones, most of us would have stayed. My friend Mark Friedrich, who has moved to Maastricht to study and is currently preparing for an 6 months-stay in Istanbul, puts it in a nutshell:

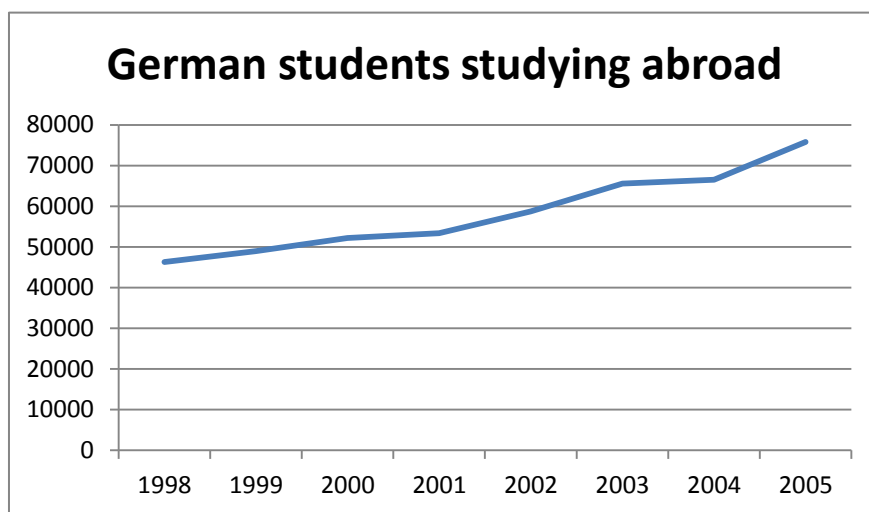
"Being close to my friends and family is my most important value. Anyhow, I also love to explore new places, and I do not like to be limited in my choices where to work or to study. Fortunately, it is the easiest thing for me to stay in touch with everyone through modern means of communication such as Skype and Facebook; and the comfort and relatively low prices of modern transport enable me to visit my family in Hamburg or my likewise migrated friends in their respective homes every few weeks."

## 1.2: How international youth migration affects Germany

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Youth migration in Germany has two aspects: First, the **emigration** of young, usually well-educated adults, and second the **immigration** of young people to Germany and the role of young immigrants in German society.

The emigration of young people from Germany happens mostly for one of two reasons: The search for a higher education or a job abroad. In 2005, 75,800 German students have studied abroad, most of them in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2008). As the name of the corresponding study “*internationalization of studies*” implies, this is a trend that becomes more and more common. As a comparison, in 1998 the number of German students who have studied abroad was nearly 40% lower. The following graph illustrates the development:



The number of German students studying abroad has continuously increased since 1998 (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2008:15).

In addition to the young people who are leaving Germany in search of education, there is an increasing number of mostly well-educated young Germans who are emigrating permanently for a job. Especially among young academics with Turkish migration background, the number of people who are considering to leave the country is very high. According to a 2008 study, 38% of them are planning to return to Turkey after graduation, mostly because they “do not feel ‘at home’ in Germany” (40%; Sontheimer 2008). German integration policies are obviously not as effective as politicians and migrants wish it would be – a notion that is shared by almost 4 out of 5 of Turkish migrant academics (Sontheimer 2008).

The biggest immigrant groups in Germany are Turkish immigrants, accounting for approximately 3.6% of the population (Federal Statistical Office 2010). Their situation is a topic that has often been intensely debated. In summer 2010 for instance, the German politician Thilo Sarrazin hit the media headlines with his book “*Deutschland schafft sich ab*” (English meaning: “Germany abolishes itself”). In this book, Sarrazin criticized the lack of integration of immigrants, especially of those with Turkish or Arab background, and pictured them as an immediate danger for the German cultural identity (Sarrazin 2010). Unfortunately, the resulting debate circulated around whether Sarrazin was right on the most controversial issues (such as his statement that Turkish immigrants have a below-average IQ) instead of focusing on how to improve the integration of immigrants (Kazim 2010).



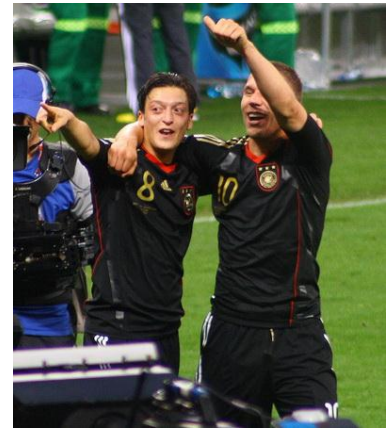
A young Turkish migrant wearing the colours of the German soccer team (List 2008).

Surprisingly, although an astonishing 70% of Germans “mostly or in parts agree” with Sarrazin’s xenophobic statements (Alexander/Lachmann 2010), Germany has given a completely different image during the Soccer World Cups 2006 and 2010 and during the European Cup 2008. All three events showed the beautiful, multicultural side of Germany and were well recognized globally – as a patriotic, but world-open and welcoming host in 2006 (Bernstein 2006), with German fans and Turkish migrants celebrating *together* the German semi-final win over the Turkish team (Röhn 2008), and with a multiethnic 2010 team that enthused the entire world with its fast and successful football and its team spirit (Hockenos 2010).

These semi-annual soccer events prove that there is some common ground for bringing together native Germans and

immigrants. On the other hand, populists like Thilo Sarrazin easily bring to light the anxiety that many Germans have in dealing with issues of migration.

So, what is to be done to make a tolerant, proudly multiethnic German society become reality? And is this really desirable or do the risks outweigh the benefits? There are many answers to these questions, but I will try to give mine in the next two sections.



Turkish and Polish migrants Mesut Özil and Lukas Podolski celebrate after beating Argentina 4:0 with the German national team (sdhansay 2010).

## Part 2: How I perceive the benefits of youth migration versus the risks

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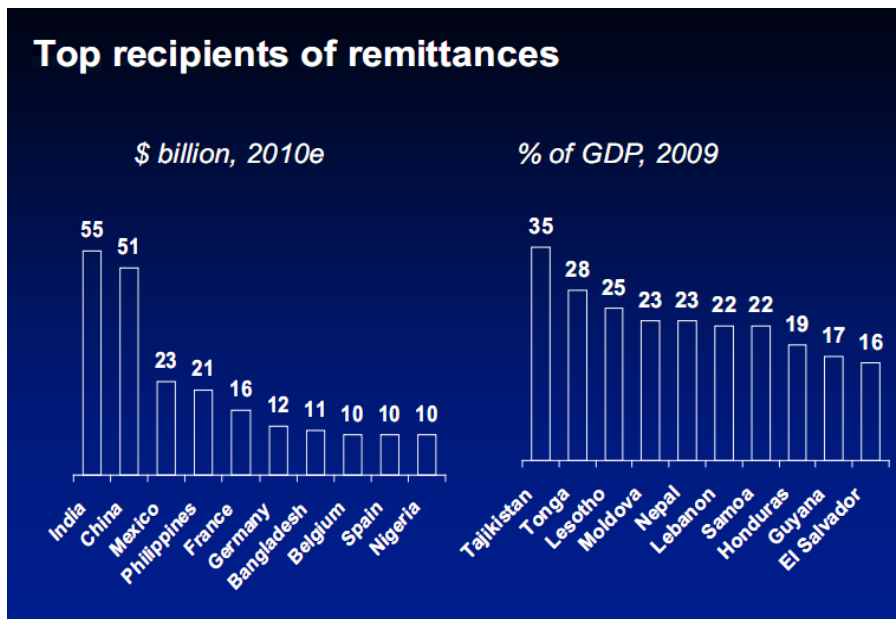
Migration has three major stakeholders that face different risks and benefits. These stakeholders are:

1. The sending country
2. The receiving country
3. The migrants themselves

For **sending countries**, youth migration is a double-edged sword. Given the often-heard claim that “the youth is a country’s future”, sending countries apparently lose parts of their future. Indeed, if a country had to let go the majority of its young people, it would have a big problem. This is especially true when the emigrants are highly skilled, and soon missed as trained labor force (“*brain drain*”).

However, the population pyramid of many sending countries contains a disproportionately high number of young people. In these cases, the economies often grow slower than the populations, so that the job markets cannot produce enough new jobs to employ all young people – even if those are well educated. If youth unemployment is extraordinarily high, emigration may help: It could work like a valve that adjusts the surplus labor supply to a more moderate level. How important it is to take care of the unsatisfied youth could be seen in Tunisia, where discontent young academics ultimately triggered the Jasmine Revolution (Hanafi 2011).

Emigrants are often not entirely lost for the sending country's economy. In many countries, remittances from workers abroad generate an extensively high amount of the gross domestic product (GDP). At maximum, these money transfers may even account for more than one third of a country's GDP (as seen in Tajikistan; World Bank 2010).



Remittances play an important role in many countries' economies (World Bank 2010:11).

A further, more difficult-to-measure benefit of youth emigration is that the emigrants may use their voices to promote their home countries' issues abroad (though this promotion must not necessarily mirror the interests of the sending countries' governments). A good example for this is the high awareness that Tamil immigrants raised in Britain on the situation of their people in Sri Lanka (Hill 2009).

To come to a conclusion, it's hard for me to decide whether sending countries benefit or lose more from youth emigration. Sincerely the situation differs significantly from country to country. However, I think that in most cases the brain drain slightly outweighs the other factors. Hence I conclude that sending countries are facing a small net loss due to youth emigration.

For **receiving countries** like Germany, the value of youth immigration is crucially related to the immigrants' skills. Highly qualified experts are often warmly welcomed ("*brain gain*"). There are even efforts to proactively invite these experts to immigrate, like Germany's green card campaign for foreign IT experts at the beginning of this millennium (Deggerich 2001). Non-skilled migrant workers on the other hand often encounter problems to adapt to their new homes' labor market. In Germany this is definitely backed by the numbers: People with migration background are twice as often unemployed as native Germans. They also live twice as often from social benefits; and even if they work, they have a significantly lower income (Federal Statistical Office 2010). It is thus hard to counter arguments saying that immigrants cost Germany more than they repay through taxes.

Nonetheless, there are two reasons why these arguments do not convince me. First of all, the above-mentioned numbers are just a temporary snapshot. Sure they prove that – at the moment –, immigration is a monetary loss for German society. But this does not mean that this is the immigrants' fault! In my opinion, it just shows that immigrants are not well enough integrated into the labor market. Immigrants, and most notably young immigrants, are not a burden but more an unused asset for Germany's economy. If Germany succeeds in *really* integrating them, the story of immigration could well turn into a monetary success story.

I also refrain from valuing immigration just in monetary terms. I believe that the encounter with people from other cultures is an enormous enrichment for single persons as well as for entire societies. I am absolutely convinced that in a developing multicultural society with different value systems, the most applicable and best developed values “win” and become common sense.

I additionally believe that the same positive synergies can be observed in the exchange of scientific knowledge and in other areas of social life.

Finally, youth immigration has also demographical aspects that have to be considered in Germany. The German (as well as European) society is struggling with a declining and over-ageing population due to the lack of young people. Youth immigration could fill this gap. Even the EU proposes the fostering of youth immigration for this purpose (European Union 2006).

Given the chances that arise, I think that youth immigration makes, in aggregate, a positive contribution to receiving countries. However, this largely depends on what the receiving countries’ societies make of it.

For young **migrants**, migration has both positive and negative aspects. Virtually all of them emigrate because they want to improve their conditions of living. This applies to *pull*-driven migration as well as to *push* migration. Pull-factors deal with aspects in the receiving country that attract migrants, whereas push migration is primarily driven by the desire to leave the sending country (Zimmermann 1996). However, as concerns push migration, the migration itself is not such a bad phenomenon, but merely the symptom of the deeply-rooted causes that ultimately triggered it (such as unemployment or persecution).

A crucial role in the costs/benefits-evaluation of migration comes to the disparities between young migrants’ expectations and the experiences they actually make in their new homes. Often, migrants are surprised by the different social norms and ways of conduct (Eisenstadt 1954); and they underestimate the challenges in the education system (Räuber 2011) or labor market (Gerdes 2007). Furthermore, they may often face problems like xenophobia or exploitation of their workforce, though at least the latter should be mostly impeded in Germany by the strict labor laws.

In aggregate, I see migration as a being largely beneficial for young people, because they may flee from difficult situations in their home country and may have much more opportunities abroad. Although the anticipated benefits will eventually have to be altered to the reality, I am convinced that young migrants generally profit from migration.

My usual way to evaluate normative questions follows John Stuart Mill’s utilitarianism: The goal of an ethical decision is to maximize the overall happiness. To do so, one has to add up the utilities of all stakeholders (Mill 1906).

After adding up risks and benefits, my image of migration is slightly negative for sending countries, more or less positive for receiving countries (plus having great potential for improvement) and generally positive for young migrants. Summarized, I am of the opinion that migration is a positive matter.

In the next section, I will examine how to make it even better.

### Part 3: How to broaden opportunities for young migrants

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The challenge of broadening opportunities for young international migrants can be tackled from two directions: First, from their countries of origin, and second, from their countries of destination. In the following analysis, I will focus on the situation in Germany as a country of destination.

Nonetheless a few words on the countries of origin: Broadening opportunities for young emigrants has four dimensions: First, sending countries should aim to improve their youths' situation to reinforce incentives for staying instead of moving abroad. Second, they should prepare young people who nonetheless plan to emigrate for the challenges that will come with emigration. Third, they should establish regimes to support interaction with their former citizens. Fourth, they should pave the way to easily permit re-immigration.

According to above segmentation, fostering opportunities for young immigrants in Germany begins far away in the sending country. To catch a good start in Germany, immigrants should be well prepared *before* they come here. Of course this will not be possible for everyone – for instance for refugees who hastily fled from their home country – but if enough time and resources are available, the preparation should be done with extraordinary diligence.

I would give someone who plans to immigrate to Germany two pieces of advice:

1. Plan your immigration and the first steps in Germany carefully.
2. Learn German.

Life in Germany is complex. Germany is probably one of the world's most-(though not necessarily best-)organized states in the world, and without a good planning, any foreigner will likely feel lost. If someone plans to move here, they should answer the following questions before they start the journey:

- How will I get to Germany?
- What do I have to do to get a permission of residence?
- Where will I stay once I have arrived?
- How much money do I need for the start?
- What do I want to do for a living in the long term, and how can I achieve this?

While all of those questions are important, especially the last one should not be underestimated. Labor laws in Germany are very restrictive, making it hard for employers to get rid of people once they are hired. This has the drawback that the labor market is highly inflexible and very much attention is put into the recruiting processes. As a result, it is difficult to quickly find a job, especially when someone is not used to the procedure.

The second piece of advice also has to do with finding a job. Although most Germans are literate in English, it is virtually impossible to find work without speaking German.

As soon as immigrants arrive in Germany (hopefully well prepared), the one big issue to tackle in order to improve possibilities is **integration**. I suggest the following agenda to facilitate integration in Germany:

1. **Adopt integration-friendly policies.**
2. **Improve the labor market structure.**
3. **Achieve a shift in public opinion towards a welcoming, tolerant and integrative society.**
4. **Increase immigrants' willingness to integrate themselves.**

According to German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, **politics** are influenced by the public (through mass media) and by lobbyist groups (Habermas 1962). How to deal with the public is already on the agenda at point #3, so by fostering lobbyist activities, immigrants could have a double lever on politics. In a case-study-analysis, Rotterdam professor Rinus van Schendelen identifies four success indicators of professional lobbying: “sufficient cohesion, useful knowledge, an optimal mix of resources and skills, and a good image” (van Schendelen 2002). It’s up to the lobbyist groups to find ways to succeed in these areas. However, one thing is for certain: They can only be successful when they bundle their powers and coordinate their efforts to become powerful.

As indicated in the second part of this essay, immigrants face problems to integrate into the **labor market**. However, labor market integration can hardly be ordered from above (by politics). Changing the market structure is a bottom-up process and needs a lot of time and patience. I suggest doing at least the following to make the market more immigrant-friendly:

- Again, lobby and interest groups can use their influence to appeal on entrepreneurs’ and corporations’ responsibility,
- Most immigrants lack of the long-established networks that are of great help to many native Germans. To catch up, immigrants should actively push forward their networking activities. To do so, they could for instance rely on successful business networks (like “Xing” in Germany)
- A reason for the missing success in the labor market is the immigrants’ relative lack of education (Federal Statistical Office 2010). Fortunately, German politicians have lately realized that they have to take measures to promote migrant education. However, it is still too early to judge on the success of those measures.
- As mentioned earlier, one thing is crucial for integrating into the German labor market: Speaking German. In the last years, there were many efforts to offer [mostly free] German classes for immigrants. If needed, immigrants should not refrain from using this opportunity.

Achieving a **shift in public opinion** is probably the hardest task on the agenda. I would tackle this challenge through at least three different channels: Mass media, politics, and social networks.

In Germany, a small group of media corporations is dominating the mass media market that *makes* the public opinion. By far the most influential are the *Axel Springer AG* with the biggest German tabloid *BILD*, and the *Bertelsmann AG* with various magazines and some of the most important private TV stations. Due to the strictly hierarchical structure of both corporations, the power to control German public opinion is effectively centralized in their managements. One would have to convince the management boards of both corporations to jointly start a long-term campaign for the promotion of integration.

Some first efforts to remind the German public of the benefits of being an integrative society could already been observed during the 2010 soccer world cup, when nearly the entire media landscape emphasized the multi-ethnicity of Germany’s soccer team. As a result, both Germans *and* immigrants could fully identify with this young team and shared a common sense of peaceful patriotism.

For a media campaign to be successful, politics would also have to be included. Still it is far too easy for politicians to draw on old xenophobic resentments to gather votes. If one really wants to achieve a shift in public thinking, it is important that politics do not counteract these activities.

A modern channel to promote common issues is the internet. Especially social networks like Facebook play an increasingly important role in shaping German society. The example of former German secretary of defense, Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg, impressively illustrates this: After some rumors came up that he may have cheated in his doctoral thesis, a large group of Guttenberg opponents quickly organized itself online to scan the entire thesis for plagiarism. Although this would

normally have been a work of weeks for specialists, it became apparent within *few days* that Guttenberg had plagiarized to a large extent. The following rage quickly spread through media, blogs and social networks. Opponents even organized demonstrations against him via Facebook. Ultimately, he resigned after receiving a protest letter from more than 20,000 academics who had again organized themselves on Facebook – within just three days.

The power that social movements can get through social network organisation is enormous. The magazine “*Die Zeit*” even coined that we are currently living in a “*Facebookratie*” (Stolz 2011). If young immigrant movements can capture the powerful momentum of social networks for their issues, they can really influence their standing in today’s German society.

Finally remains the most important aspect to consider for broadening immigrants’ opportunities in Germany: The change towards an integrative German society has to be **wanted** and **actively facilitated** by the **immigrants** themselves. There could be as much well-meant efforts as possible, but if they have low acceptance among immigrants, they are totally worthless.

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